

Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

Guest Editor
Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli
on behalf of the AGMC
Inc (Australian GLBTIQ
Multicultural Council
Incorporated)

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The Review is a peer-reviewed publication that is available online through the Australian Psychological Society website. Its remit is to encourage research that challenges the stereotypes and assumptions of pathology that have often inhaled to research on lesbians and gay men (amongst others). The aim of the Review is thus to facilitate discussion over the direction of lesbian and gay psychology in Australia, and to provide a forum within which academics, practitioners and lay people may publish.

The Review is open to a broad range of material, and especially welcomes research, commentary and reviews that critically evaluate the status quo in regards to lesbian and gay issues. The Review also seeks papers that redress the imbalance that has thus far focused on the issues facing white lesbians and gay men, to the exclusion of other sexual and racial groups. The Review encourages the elaboration of an expansive approach to psychological research on people of a diverse range of sexual and non-gender normative groups.

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Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review

Volume 4 Number 1

Special Issue: 'Living and Loving in Diversity': Interweaving Sexualities, Genders and Ethnicities

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FROM THE EDITOR

DAMIEN W. RIGGS

I am immensely pleased that this journal has the privilege of publishing this collection of writing. Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli and all involved with the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council (AGMC) and the production of this issue offer us some of the latest and most exciting research being undertaken within Australia upon the diverse experiences of members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer communities.

The publication of this issue, alongside papers published in previous issues of the Review, thus contributes significantly to our goal of broadening in many ways the scope of what thus far has been defined as 'lesbian and gay psychology'. These include:

- Opening out the field to a broad range of voices, including those working in both academia and in the community sector, in addition to religious leaders, activists, early career researchers and postgraduate students.
- Directing our attention away from the 'usual suspects' - white middle-class lesbians and gay men - and toward the members of GLBTIQ communities whose religious, ethnic, cultural or racial affiliations are not subsumable within dominant accounts of GLBTIQ lives (premised as they typically are upon the aforementioned 'usual suspects')
- Drawing upon a broad range of research methodologies, including personal narratives, theoretical analysis, analyses of interview data, and political commentary
- Highlighting how racism, ableism, religious discrimination, classism and gender normativity function *within* GLBTIQ communities

- Providing historical accounts of the development of GLBTIQ communities, thus adding to the growing body of archives that document the lives of GLBTIQ people
- Speaking of the 'I' in the acronym 'GLBTIQ', and the role that health practices play in policing the boundaries of both sexuality and gender
- And perhaps most importantly, signalling the internal conflicts and differences *within* marginalised groups, rather than attempting to present a forcibly homogenous view of diverse GLBTIQ communities.

I am thus excited and inspired by this issue of the Review, and hope that it will play a central role in the ongoing development of a uniquely Australian agenda for research on GLBTIQ communities that starts from the diversity within such communities, and which seeks to recognise how marginalisation occurs both from outside, and within, GLBTIQ communities.

In concluding my comments on this issue, I would encourage all readers to be mindful of the fact that ongoing attention to the diverse experiences of GLBTIQ people in Australia occurs in a context of Indigenous sovereignty (where sovereignty rights have never been ceded by First Nations people, and where non-indigenous people thus continue to live and work upon land that is illegally possessed), and that it is therefore vitally important that we all attend to the ongoing ways in which histories of colonisation shape our lives as Australians.



GUEST EDITORIAL: PRESENTING A SAMPLER OF HOW DIVERSITY IS LIVED AND LOVED

MARIA PALLOTTA-CHIAROLLI ON BEHALF OF THE AGMC INC (AUSTRALIAN GLBTIQ MULTICULTURAL COUNCIL INCORPORATED)

"But how will you do your research? Do Italian lesbians exist?" This was the response I received from an Anglo-feminist academic in 1991. I had just told her I was about to research the experiences of lesbians from Italian backgrounds for my Masters in Women's Studies.

They certainly did exist, my Italian lesbian friends reminded me as they critiqued my very heteronormative research into Italian-Australian women's lives and experiences. I hope I have come a long way since then (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2004).

Indeed, in the spirit of the groundbreaking collection of articles in *Multicultural Queer: Australian Narratives* edited by Peter Jackson and Gerard Sullivan in 1999, this journal issue is one more significant example of the increasing awareness, activism, research, and policy/programme development in Australia in relation to the multiple marginalities and intersectionalities when 'living the rainbow': interweaving gender diversity, cultural diversity and sexual diversity. The establishment of the AGMC (Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council Inc) and the many multicultural GLBTIQ social and support groups are a testimony to the need to engage with people's lived experiences of negotiating and interweaving multiple group allegiances, multiple community belongings and the subsequent borderdwelling (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005).

Being GLBTIQ and raised within an ethnic/religious group requires the negotiation and interweaving of varying and multiple regulations, expectations and social codes in

relation to gender, sexuality and ethnicity. These regulations, expectations and codes are coming from a person's predominantly heteronormative and gendernormative ethnic/religious families and communities; predominantly white middle class GLBTIQ communities; and predominantly heteronormative and gendernormative wider social, political, educational, media and health institutions and systems.

Savin-Williams (1998) presents three main developmental tasks of GLBTIQ young people from diverse ethnic/religious backgrounds that are not necessarily experienced by GLBTIQ young people from dominant Anglo-white backgrounds. First, the young person needs to cultivate both a sexual identity and an ethnic identity. Second, the young person must resolve or manage any conflicts that may arise in claiming allegiance to an ethnic/religious reference group and to a gay community; and third, the young person needs to negotiate any stigmas and discrimination encountered because of the interconnections of homophobia, racism, sexism and classism.

Many GLBTIQ young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds want to belong to and feel they have a place in their families and ethnic/religious communities. Their ethnic/religious community and family can nurture a cultural identification, offer a deep sense of ethnic heritage and spiritual values, and provide a sense of self within the context of a family that shares a youth's struggles and oppressions such as racism and classism (Greene, 1997; Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998).

The AGMC and the multicultural GLBTIQ groups provide mental, emotional, physical and spiritual spaces and places where the multiple selves and multiple lifeworlds can come together. Indeed, they can sometimes be a catalyst for finding intimate partners who share similar joys, challenges and understandings in regard to living and loving in diversity. Activities include conferences and participation in both GLBTIQ and ethnic community events and media. From discussion forums to dance-parties, they cater for the internal diversity of needs and interests within their specific multicultural groups (please see <http://www.agmc.org.au/multiculturaldirectory> for listings of groups).

Such a diversity of programmes and activism support findings that there are seven significant factors in the successful negotiation of people's various identities and communities. First, strong support networks and friendships with other GLBTIQ people of same and/or similar cultural and religious backgrounds are considered of great significance (Jackson & Sullivan, 1999). Likewise, having access to and participation in both the GLBTIQ and ethnic communities while transcending both to live with a code of their own is important (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1995). Third, GLBTIQ people want control over how, when and if to 'come out' to their ethnic families as well as receiving acceptance and support for those decisions from their GLBTIQ friends, ethnic friends and school friends (Greene, 1997). Fourth, media coverage of GLBTIQ individuals and role models from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and historical facts about sexual diversity within their own 'home' cultures needs to be made available in queer, ethnic community and mainstream papers, queer, ethnic and mainstream television, film and music (Drucker, 2000). Similarly, educational and health systems can address racism, sexism and homophobia equally, consistently and in interconnected ways via policy development, professional development programmes and pastoral care of clients, students and staff (Savin-Williams, 1998). Finally, GLBTIQ people from diverse ethnic/religious backgrounds

want queer community organisations and services, gay venues, papers and other media avenues to promote and implement policies and practices that cater for their diverse cultural backgrounds (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998).

Schools, GLBTIQ community services, ethnic community services and mainstream health services need to undertake research into their multicultural, multisexual populations (Fish, 2008; Yip, 2008), and make available more personal accounts of growing up 'multiculturally queer' as are available in anthologies (see for example Jackson & Sullivan, 1999; Lim-Hing, 1994; Ratti, 1993); and incorporate multisexuality into multicultural school, health promotion and community events.

Thus, this special journal issue is a sampler not only of the breadth and depth of papers and presentations given at the 2004 AGMC Conference, "Living and Loving in Diversity" (see <http://www.agmc.org.au/2004conference> to access the full proceedings), it is also a sampler of the various sectors such as health, religion, ethnicity, queer communities and education that need to incorporate multicultural, multisexual and multigendered perspectives. Likewise, it is a sampler of the diverse ways with which we need to engage with these issues: from the theoretical to the personal, from the professional to the political, from research methods to community activism. I wish to acknowledge the work of Dr Shanton Chang with whom I collaborated in the selection of these papers. I also wish to thank the presenters of these papers. They made the time to update and review their presentations for this journal.

It is an honour to have Cinzia Ambrosio, Founder and former President of the AGMC introduce us to the history of the AGMC, its achievements and outcomes so far, such as the holding the "Living and Loving in Diversity" Conference in 2004. Her paper sets out the theme of this journal 'sampler' as well as the title of the second conference held in 2006, "Empowering Ourselves, Empowering Our Communities".

Ambrosio's introduction is followed by Rosanne Bersten's theoretical exploration and interrogation of "edge identities" and "border skirmishes". From a discussion of the limitations and strategic use of identity politics for Jewish gays and lesbians, she proceeds to a celebration of "a kaleidoscope of hyperdifferentiation", particularly as articulated on the Internet where a "post-category melange" is apparent, even while using the language of labelling and identification to do so. Bersten concludes that it is necessary to develop a theory of subjectivity "where the categories can be exceeded without reprisal while still addressing disadvantage and oppression".

Margie Fischer's autobiographical essay as a Jewish lesbian parent provides a poignant and powerful example of Bersten's theoretical analysis of the importance of "a praxis of self" (the "doing") as well as the "being". Fischer explores the construction and "version" of her "self" through her family history, Jewish spirituality and rituals, feminism and her establishment of a women's theatre company, Vitalstax.

From the construction of the self to the construction of same-sex partnerships, Budiadi Sudarto discusses his narrative research with gay Asian/White male couples and the challenges that interethnic same-sex couples experience. He calls for further research that challenges the negative stereotypes "of inequality, power imbalance, and opportunistic Asians".

The next two papers interrogate the health sector. First, Tony Briffa presents the tensions and contestations between his Maltese parents and their cultural-religious beliefs, and the "expertise" of the Australian medical profession in relation to his being intersexed: "my parents ...told doctors that they believed God had made me the way I was for a reason, and it was up to God to decide what should happen from here, not doctors". Sadly, the medical profession was able to convince his parents that their surgical intervention was necessary. Briffa then takes up back to the origi-

nal version of the Hippocratic Oath, and to the history of people with intersex conditions- the children of Hermes and Aphrodite. His philosophical discussion contextualises and problematises Western "modern" medicine that prioritises "better technical outcomes rather than to consider other cultural solutions".

The second paper that engages with the health sector calls for research into lesbian health that does not "ask you to underline one piece of yourself, the part that is lesbian, putting aside those parts of you that are something else... my culture, my languages, my class background, my experience of being a daughter of immigrants...". Adele Murdolo provides a comprehensive overview of significant Australian research findings in a range of lesbian health issues. Simultaneously, she critiques the methods used in conducting this research as they may not be accessing or listening to culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse women who identify as lesbian.

The next two papers are from inspirational community leaders who have been at the forefront of supporting the AGMC and multicultural GLBTIQ groups within ethnic and religious organisations. Phong Nguyen, Chairperson of the Victorian Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, and Rabbi Jonathan Keren Black provide strong examples of their personal, political and spiritual passion for equity and justice for GLBTIQ people within their ethnic or religious communities and organisations.

In the next section, Shanton Chang and Demetry Apostle provide the Recommendations that arose from the plenary sessions of the 2004 Conference and were published. These recommendations provide a wide range of directions, strategies and understandings that can be used to inform future policy, programme and practice development within organisations and institutions.

Finally, Alyena Mohammadally reviews Irshad Manji's book, *The Trouble With Islam*, which explores "ijtihad", Islam's tradition of inde-

pendent thinking, in relation to GLBTIQ Muslims. Mohammadally also discusses why and how she established her groundbreaking and much needed group *Queer Muslims In Australia*, an online support group. This has become a vital resource and safe space for people struggling to reconcile their "spirituality and sexuality".

On behalf of the AGMC Inc, the multicultural GLBTIQ groups, and the writers of these papers, I hope this 'sampler' engages, educates and provides enjoyment. I also hope it challenges us to consider our policies, practices and ways of thinking about the lived experiences of 'living and loving in diversity'.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Damien Riggs for the invitation to edit this Special Edition, and everyone past and present at the AGMC who I have the privilege and honour of working with and whose friendships and passion inspire me. Thank you for entrusting me with this work. I am humbled by your courage, tenacity, and passionate engagement with life and love, activism and learning. It is also a gift to be sharing these journeys with people who truly understand and celebrate cultural, gender and sexual diversity rather than reduce them to sexual, gender and cultural dichotomies such as gay/lesbian and straight, male and female, black and white.

Author Note

Senior Lecturer in the School of Health and Social Development at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia, Maria writes and researches on social justice, diversity and equity issues in education and health. Her primary areas of interest are cultural diversity, gender diversity, sexual diversity and family diversity. Maria is also an External Faculty Member of Saybrook Graduate Centre, San Francisco, the Honorary Patron of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Victoria in Australia, and Founding Member of AGMC Inc (Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council), which is a member of FECCA (Federation of Ethnic Communities' Council of Australia).

Apart from academic chapters, research monographs and journal articles, her multicultural, multisexual publications include: *Someone You Know*, Australia's first AIDS biography; *Girls Talk: Young Women Speak Their Hearts And Minds*; *Tapestry*, a biographical narrative on five generations of her Italian family; *When Our Children Come Out: how to support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered young people*; and the following three books co-researched and written with Dr Wayne Martino: *Boys' Stuff: Boys Talking About What Matters*; *So What's A Boy? Issues of Masculinity and Schooling*; and *"Being Normal is the Only Thing To Be": Young People's Perspectives on Gender in Schools*. Maria's forthcoming books are the novel *Love You Two* (Random House, 2008) and the academic *Border Families, Border Sexualities in Schools* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2009)

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Dedication

**The AGMC Inc would like to dedicate this special issue to one very special woman
Rochelle Millar,
AGMC Inc. Founding Member and Treasurer,
& Jewish Lesbian Group member**



'EMPOWERING OURSELVES, EMPOWERING OUR COMMUNITIES': A HISTORY OF THE AGMC

CINZIA AMBROSIO

In Australia there are a number of culturally based Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) communities. In Victoria, the groups represent over 34 cultures and provide social support for Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds that identify as GLBTIQ. In 2002, the groups came together in a community-building and strengthening effort to promote greater understanding in a truly multicultural, diverse sense, making our voices audible and ourselves visible.

In October 2004, the groups held the Inaugural Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Conference (AGMC) "*Living and Loving in Diversity*" at the St Kilda Town Hall, Victoria, Australia. For the first time ever, worldwide, a highly successful conference was held with more than 200 participants attending daily. Conference themes dealt specifically with sexual orientation, gender identity and culturally diverse communities.

Some of the effects from the conference include the ongoing participation and support of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV). The most public gesture occurred when the then Chair of the ECCV, Mr. Phong Nguyen, led the AGMC together with a 150-plus contingent from the Multicultural Groups in the 2005 Pride March in Melbourne. This public stance by a peak Multicultural body was a formidable statement and encouraging for all who participated. Never before had a peak Multicultural body taken such a stand.

An historical article was published in the Victorian Multicultural Commission's Quarterly magazine 'Multicultural Victoria' in late 2005.

This was the first time ever that GLBTIQ issues had received some attention in a State Government Multicultural magazine that was not related to AIDS. Although quite conservative, the article was one of celebration of our sexual orientation, gender identity and cultural diversity.

Other outcomes have included:

- The first ever research study, funded by the Victoria government, conducted specifically on non-English speaking background GLBTQ issues
- The AGMC Inc granted full membership into the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, and by default the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA)
- Our Sydney siblings held a successful Racial Harmony Forum in September 2004 as a way to start the ball rolling in that part of the world.
- A GLBTIQ youth sub-committee on the Ethnic Communities Council of NSW was established
- A special Multicultural Week was held on Victorian GLBTIQ radio station JOY 94.9FM
- A second national conference, "Empowering Ourselves, Empowering Our Communities", was held on 13th to 15th October, 2006 at Northcote Town Hall.
- Overall an increased awareness of Multicultural GLBTIQ issues by non profit organisations and government bodies resulting in increased dialogue & understanding.

This special edition of the *Gay and Lesbian*

Issues and Psychology Review is another major achievement that has come about due to our activist 'activities'. The papers within this Journal, which were chosen by an editorial group, represent a wide range of views adding to the dearth of scientific literature on Multicultural GLBTIQ related studies. As with all publications the topics covered do not represent the experiences of so many other dichotomies, eg. those among us who are unable to (and do not want to) live a religious/spiritual & sexual orientation life, separatists and those amongst us who live their lives quite freely without discrimination.

One of the major limitations of our conference, and by default this journal issue, is the non-existent voices of our refugee sisters and brothers. The refugee experience is one of involuntary migration thereby bringing with it a somewhat different experience compared to the migrant groups who have *chosen* to make Australia home. It is understandable that as refugees they are only just dealing with the whole process of migration and at the same time trying to cope with the experiences they endured as refugees. Their arrival prioritises matters of 'survival' rather than the need to fight for a GLBTIQ voice within their own & other communities. In addition, many of Australia's recent refugees come from Muslim countries, where issues surrounding sexual orientation and gender identity, remain very much taboo topics. However, if Australia's past is a guide, Multicultural GLBTIQ refugees will also one day join in with other Multicultural GLBTIQ groups (we are starting to see this now) in celebrating their beautiful existence.

I would like to thank all involved with bringing this Journal together – the AGMC Inc, the authors of the individual papers, the reviewers and the Special Editors, Shanton Chang and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, of this fine edition. Additionally I would like to thank Damien Riggs who deemed this topic one deserving of the scientific space it has now been given. It is often stated (right or wrong) that for the legitimising of experiences/ thought/ data, the

work needs to be published & peer reviewed in a (or more) scientific journal. With this publication we are 'legitimising' some of our experiences. This journal issue also ensures an historical recount of Australian Multicultural GLBTIQ activities. It is also hoped that this publication not only provides some answers but more importantly, raises further questions and thereby increased research (hint, hint).

Un abbraccio,
Cinzia Ambrosio
Founder and Former President
AGMC Inc.

Author Note

Cinzia Ambrosio is a totally inappropriate being. Cinzia is a Social Researcher working in a rural context. Cinzia is passionate about her Italian heritage and was founder & is an active member of Arcilesbica Australia – the Italian Australian LBGTIQ women's group. Contact: Email: cin_amb@hotmail.com Address: PO Box 15, Girgarre. 3624, VICTORIA. Australia. Cellular: + 61 3 408 137 037

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MARGINALIA: LIVING ON THE EDGE

ROSANNE BERSTEN

Living as we did — on the edge — we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin (hooks cited in Trinh, 1990, p. 341).

I want to start with a radical departure: I want to say that identity itself is dangerous; that there is a pattern of identity formation that relates to minority community formation and that this pattern is problematic. I posit that there are visible and invisible identifiers of marginality; that there is a common experience of coming out/conversion/identification with a marginal community; that there is a crisis or splitting of marginal communities when it becomes apparent that the process of identification is imperfect (that is, that no group is ever homogenous or perfectly identical, and individuals cannot perform perfect identity, at which point the process commences anew at a more fragmented level); that there is an underlying theme of purity, contamination and the need for 'border policing'; and that the problem of 'community continuity', now being negotiated urgently in a number of spaces (for example the 'gay' community/ies, the Jewish community/ies, the Muslim community/ies, indigenous communities and in ethnic skirmishes worldwide) is inherently flawed.

I argue that these ongoing debates stem from a fear of integration and the loss of 'difference' and that there are complex connections around ghettos, identity maintenance and oppression. There are also questions about how to address real disadvantage without employing categories.

Coming Home: Micro-Communities

Edge identities exist in the spaces between the categories, where sexuality and ethnicity overlap, where ethnicity and ability overlap, where ability and sexuality overlap.

'Overlap' implies a clear-cut binary relationship where none exists: assumptions creep in, that our "edge identities" are not otherwise hybrid; they are. Or at least, they can be. Combine any one hybrid identity with another axis of marginality and it becomes even more complicated, a criss-crossing matrix of hyper-differentiated bodies: black gay bodies and Jewish lesbian bodies, certainly, but also Asian-American Deaf bodies and African-Italian transgendered bodies and everything in between.

Sinfield (1996) argues that where people of ethnic minorities inherit community, gay and lesbian people (his terms) "have to move away from [families]...and into, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community". If we are lucky? In his discussion of being 'at home', of assembling, Sinfield is only peripherally aware that those of us on the edge, inhabitants of bisexual, transgendered, deaf and otherwise other(ed) bodies are not invited into this new home.

Disabled people often find themselves on the margins, a common experience for bisexual people, and bisexual disabled people have argued that it is hard to achieve a sense of identity and community when there is no place that one belongs (Shakespeare et al, 1996, p. 158).

For us, acceptance into this 'minority commu-

nity' is not a question of luck and the feeling of arriving home doesn't last very long as we become aware that blonde blue-eyed hunks are the mediated image of idealism and we are still the shameful secret in the 'family' closet:

Most of us do not look, act, move, or communicate in what is considered to be a lesbian or gay way. We are outsiders in our own community, and no one hesitates to let us know that (Hearn, 1991, p. 34).

Lawrence Schimel described his dilemma that what would make him sexy to the queer community is exactly what would make him an outcast in the Jewish community: "I have in fact never looked more Gay. The only thing I am missing to be a perfect 90s clone is a tattoo, something tribal perhaps, on my left or right arm, but I'm a Jew and Jews don't do tattoos" (1997, p. 163). He, like so many others, feels that he is being asked to choose. These demands to prioritise should not be mistaken as the sole domain of the dominant medical or sociological discourses.

Nor is it merely a matter of time until a wider 'community' (with its associated media, cultural practices and politics as well as social spaces) develops. While culture intrinsic to edge-identity micro-communities is emergent, these cultural instances have not yet become cultural institutions: for example, the Jewish Gay film, *Trembling Before G-D* (Dubowski, US, 2001) has screened at Gay and Lesbian film festivals and Jewish film festivals, but there are not yet Gay and Lesbian Jewish film festivals. That's not to say such a festival is not on its way. In the US, there are already Gay and Lesbian synagogues and queer Jewish schools (Schneer & Aviv, 2002).

Nor should such developments be seen as positive. This further reterritorialisation reiterates the myth of essentialism and leads to further fragmentation down the track as this group in turn realises the premise of 'identity' was misleading.

Alone then, the edge identity has three options: abandon some part of our historical practice in favour of a constructed self that is more acceptable to a chosen interpretive community; learn to become a chameleon, shifting who we are depending on which group of people we socialise with; or attempt to reterritorialise a community based on an ever smaller identity base (the Black Gay Deaf Muslim club).

This question of 'community' is key. In the fragmented, uncertain world of capitalist post-modernity, the search for stability, for community, for that feeling of 'belonging' leads to reified national imaginings à la Anderson (1991). The desire for community is similar to the desire for love — the ecstasis of dissolution, relief from the eternal solitude of individuality.

It is this constant demand by fractured negotiated subjectivity that makes the reterritorialised micro-community appealing: surely the Young Gay Asian Men's group will let me be myself? For example, Kaushalya Bannerji writes:

I find a need to create social spaces in which aspects of my personality are not censored and silenced...This sense of not belonging in either culture seems to be a form of exile. Perhaps it is not the exile our parents experience but it is nonetheless a fundamental fear of not having a real sense of community or country (1993, pp. 62-63).

She goes on to talk about ways in which "holding onto my Indian lesbianism through a variety of methods" is a way of dealing with this feeling of exile.

The only problem is that 'Asian' and 'Indian', 'Gay' and 'Lesbian' and even 'Men' and 'Women' are artificial constructs in themselves, masking numerous national origins and ethnicities and a variety of sexual practices and gender identities. Nor does the existence of the micro-community preclude interactions with the rest of the world: negotiated encounters with exteriority are still likely and despite

separatist rhetoric, desirable.

Commonality, a having-in-common or even an acting-in-common, is not the issue here. The critique of community is not a critique of inter-subjective connectivity or the collectivities constituted through such connectivity. Rather, the critique explicitly concerns projected permanent connections called communities based on imagined fixed identities resulting from identical-but-aleatory characteristics. The problem is in some ways posed by Nancy (1991): if community is essentialised it loses its political power. It is reterritorialised. It loses the 'uncertain' — all its ambiguity, its intersubjectivity.

The emergence of a micro-community simultaneously threatens and delimits the ethnic and sexual communities in question. Schembri (2000) provides a detailed history of micro-community formations in Sydney (and to a lesser extent, Melbourne) in the last 30 years. According to Schembri, social groups for queers of Latin American, Greek, Maltese, Jewish, Arab, Irish, Indian and East Asian backgrounds were set up between 1992 and 1994 but "most of these tended to be short-lived". Other Australian micro-community groups include: Jewish queer groups Chutzpah (Sydney, 1970s), Jews and Gentiles Together (1990), Jews and Friends (1991, 1992), Sydney Aleph (1993–96), Aleph Melbourne (1997), Jewish Lesbian Group of Victoria (Melbourne, 1992), Dayenu (Melbourne, 1999–present); Indigenous queer group OutBlack (1994–present); Asian and South Asian groups Silk Road (1992), Asians and Friends (1990–1995?), Gulaba Masala (Pink Mix, Sydney, 1996, few months only), Sydney Asian Lesbians (1990–present); European groups including Greek and Gay (1995–present). These groups claim room in both queer space (for example, the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade) and ethnic cultural spaces (for example, in 2000 a group of Chinese 'gay and lesbian activists' took part in the Lunar New Year Parade in downtown Sydney).

Annie Goldflam, an academic who describes

herself as a 'Jewish lesbian', addresses the difficulties inherent in setting up a Jewish lesbian group in Perth. The group encountered "a daunting array of eligibility issues" (1999, p. 140). Who was in? Were bisexuals okay? Were they 'lesbian' enough? Was a transgendered person a woman? What about dykes with Jewish fathers but not Jewish mothers? Were they 'Jewish' enough? What about non-Jewish partners of lesbian Jews? And although she doesn't mention it in her list, what about women like me, born to two Jewish parents, but now effectively a practising pagan?

While Goldflam resents others' judgements of her as not being a 'dinkum' or 'genuine' Jew (and, intriguingly, compares it to fair-skinned urban Aboriginal people not being seen as 'dinkum Aborigines'), she nonetheless attributes the failure of the group not to the inherent "potential for a plethora of splinter groups" but to "internalised anti-semitism and lesbophobia" (1999, pp. 140-141). She doesn't seem to see that the establishment of the group automatically sets up a standard for what it means to be a 'dinkum' Jewish Lesbian.

The authors of early Gay/Lesbian Jewish anthology *Twice Blessed* (Balka & Rose, 1989), now acknowledge it was firmly rooted in the identity politics of the time. Since then, however, they have noted its limitations:

We understand that especially when you have a history of "otherness" and strong feelings of not belonging, it can be hard to venture back out once you have found a home that affirms all of who you are. Yet true liberation does not lie within a cocoon... (Balka & Rose, 2002, p. 20)

Particular Attractions

In my research of online communities, I have traced the narrative trajectory and discursive strategies that 'edge identities' employ to negotiate multiple partial subjectivities in the interstices of multiple marginalised communities. LiveJournal, MySpace and Facebook, not

to mention more immersive three-dimensional virtualities such as Second Life and Entropia, have demonstrated precisely how partial identity can be negotiated through the kinds of syncretic spaces formed by these interconnected interest-based mini-communities.

Take LiveJournal. Individuals can maintain their own journals or they can create or join 'community journals'. It is certainly not some democratic utopia. However the lack of any hierarchy or centrality, and the way in which autonomous communities and individual journals interact and intersect, with members able to belong to whatever communities will have them, communities able to 'friend' other communities and individuals able to add friends and list interests that then become links to others whose interests intersect makes this a fascinating space to study identity, friendship and community.

If television and film necessarily produce identities that are based on recognition, they will always involve some kind of fixity. The kinds of queer or ethnic audiences produced by television and film are necessarily domestic and/or isolated. However, the audience produced by LiveJournal is always already linked and enmeshed in a network of friendships if not communities. Therefore the kinds of identities produced in this space are necessarily particular, partial and deferred as there is always a link to the next connection, the next tendril. The multitude is to networked media what the mass was to old media (cf., Hardt & Negri, 2000).

The gamut of identifier expression can be found in online spaces and it is not surprising that some LiveJournal communities employ identity labels as shortcuts. Such community journals include *gayasian* (<http://www.livejournal.com/community/gayasian/>), ones aimed at lesbians with disabilities (<http://www.livejournal.com/community/lesbianswdisabl/>) or queer women of colour (<http://www.livejournal.com/community/leznbisofcolor/>). These could be perceived to be projections of real-life micro-communities.

Despite the prevalence of identifiers, not all of the individuals who post entries in these journals see themselves in identity terms. Many are attempting to navigate the spaces of their cultural practice through discussions in these community journals. 'keldaryth', who isn't sure whether he's gay, but is '95% certain', is using the community *queeraustralia* to discuss this. "I'm almost sure I'm queer — and definitely non anglo if you go by race. Culture's more complex, as I'd rate mine international with a western edge". However, asked about edge identity communities, he responded "Being more culturally western, I'm not particularly well suited to a gay asian community with asian culture and values".

In the Hapa Mafia community, 'angryasiangrrl' started a discussion about identity and heritage with "ehem, now that i have your attention, let's talk identity :) or at the very least, i'll talk about my identity issues". At the end of her description, she poses the question to others: "what are your issues/experiences with identity formation?"

She had previously announced herself in the community as a 'hapa lesbian' and explained that "i'm japanese from my mom's side and swedish/german/french from my dad's", so the absence of these terms from the following description is not significant. Her experience of identity formation to use her own term, however, is of being defined by others' external perceptions. She doesn't explicitly engage with practice in this initial approach:

i spent a lot of time trying to figure out where i fit in. it was oh so confusing going from being the only black haired kid in preschool in a sea of blondes in stockholm, to catholic elementary school in los angeles where all of my classmates were mexican americans. i went from being one type of 'other' to a whole other type of other. once i hit that school i became a 'white girl' because i was one of the few non-mexican kids. i guess growing up i always felt defined by how other people identified me. in college i spent a lot of time trying to get in touch with my asianness. took asian american studies classes and stuff of that nature. and by

the time i wrapped my brain around my ethnic identity, then sexual identity came into question. and that's a whole other story i suppose.

'nfgdragon' is another exemplar of the shifts and challenges around identity and practice. In his private journal's 'user info', he says:

Yeah, I'm 19, I go to SFSU. Some people think I'm cool, are you one of them? Umm, I kiss boys, yah, I'm a fag.

Note that the practice ('I kiss boys') comes before the grudging identifier ('yah, I'm a fag'). It's also significant that while a number of variations of 'gay' and 'punk' appear in his interests and bio, no mention of his ethnicity appears in either. A photo of him appears on the site; perhaps his ethnicity is supposed to be read from this. In his day-to-day journal, his ethnicity and sexuality are virtually never declared. Over a photo of his band, the words 'halfway between' appear on his home page. Ethnicity and sexuality may appear in practice, in the gender of a person he is attracted to, or in the cultural practice of dinners he takes with his family, but his identity is declared in a different way in the public space of a community. For example, in the community the_anti_azn, accessed 27/03/04, he uses an identity statement immediately followed by a clarifier: "I'm Japanese (well 5/8ths Japanese)".

Of course, LiveJournal is just one of a multitude of online spaces in which people interact, form connections for a certain period of time, and disperse. The flux and shift of these spaces and the play of surface involved evokes a Situationist response to cultural space. Maffesoli (1996) begins to understand these issues, circling as he does around questions of anarchic collective organisation and interest-based electronic groups. However, he sees them as possessing a tragic dimension and he longs for belonging, welcomes the rites of acceptance and rejection played out in super-compressed speed in the digital realm. For Maffesoli, diversity always occasions discomfort. Although he uses the analogy of be-

ing a 'regular' at a bar, he fails to observe that these are behaviours and not identities; that as the bar's patrons shift, so the behaviours of regulars shift, the dress codes, the in-jokes. It is the same online: there may be rituals of acceptance, but they are fluid. There may be discursive tricks to catch the outsider (for example, 'trolling', discussed in Tepper, 1997) but the outsider becomes the insider swiftly and plays the same tricks in turn.

There is an inherent paradox in attempting to celebrate the post-category melange of a community-in-difference: it requires categoric labels to describe the positive import of its success. Aguilar-San Juan (1998) argues that:

precisely at the moment in which we wish to speak, the problem of authenticity prevents us from doing so. We resist labelling; yet without a label, how can our views and perspectives be given a meaningful context? Ironically, we need to fix ourselves as a stable (read: knowable, nameable, solid) community in order to point a finger at the practices and ideas that deny us that stability from the start (p. 22).

While it's understandable to desire this return to stability and even perhaps to perceive it as necessary, its lie cannot be constructive.

Is it then unavoidable that a hyperdifferentiated collectivity has interchangeable signifiers? It is this that challenges the sensibilities of the fundamentalists who see it as blasphemy. Paradoxically, post-category, post-identity, post-oppression, some individuals could be left longing for discrimination and wondering what the next move is. "At least culturally speaking, oppression may have been the best thing that could have happened to gay culture. Without it, we're nothing" (Daniel Mendelsohn, quoted in Klein, 2000, p. 114). While that might be a bit strong, Schembri (2000) acknowledges that while most non-Asian queer social groups disappeared in Sydney by 1996, anti-Asian racism provided an ongoing stimulus to Asian organising.

It's also problematic to declare that the destruction of categories means the end of op-

pression, especially when acts can be policed as much as identities. Currently, certain acts are proscribed with the intention of discriminating against certain categories even when the acts are not exclusive to the people targeted (for example, sodomy laws to target male-male sex and loitering laws to target Indigenous peoples). However, resisting such laws should not solely be the responsibility of those targeted.

The absence of oppositionally-defined community does raise challenges for finding friendship in a multivalent world. It is likely that friends would be found within a similar interpretive community. The sorts of issues faced by a diffuse populace keen to meet others with similar practical experiences while not falling into categoric identity labelling is seen in this invitation to join the LiveJournal community transpoc (transgendered people of colour) posted in the LiveJournal community any_bodied_men (for female-to-male transgendered people wanting relationships with biological men):

We are a community for People of Color who are transgendered, transsexual, genderqueer, two-spirited, bigendered, multigendered, genderneutral, third-gendered, intersexed, partners of people who are TG/Q/IS, people struggling with their own gender identity/expressions, people undergoing surgery/hormone therapy, TG/Q/IS/POC activists, supportive allies, family members, friends, and educators. Trans_Poc is here for you as a discussion forum, a community, an information exchange center, an advice network, a support system, a family, and friends. We are a small and often dispersed community in 'real life', let's have a solid internet community.

The word 'queer', which in the early 90s was intended to replace the variety of identity-based names with an 'umbrella term' has now become one in a long list of labels interspersed with practices. Although 'people struggling with their own gender identity/expressions' and 'people undergoing surgery/hormone therapy' would sufficiently describe the people concerned, nonetheless, the other

labels are used as well. However, 'people of color' is apparently a label that needs no further exploration. The permeable boundaries of the 'community' are made clear: friends, family, partners and activists who are neither people of colour nor dealing with gender issues are welcome.

This is in contrast to other groups, such as any_bodied_men, which explicitly requests that its members be 'male-identified'. Here we have exactly the challenge of identity versus practice and where the issues become fraught with conflict. Subjectively, a person 'feels' that they are other than their physical body might indicate. This goes as much for the ethnically Indian woman who 'identifies' as white as it does for the biologically female person who 'identifies' as male. In the end, it is unsurprising that edge identities might want to act in the world without being hailed constantly as their ethnicity, gender or sexuality.

How do i practice being me?

What occurs when the focus shifts from what a person 'is' (gay, Jewish) to what a person 'does' (sleep with men, keep kosher)? As I argue (via Foucault) that identity is discursively constructed, a change in the way we speak about identity — from an essentialised self to a praxis of self — would be significant. How does this work outside of the virtual space of the Internet? Moves to discuss practice rather than identity were most visible as part of early campaigns to address, ironically, a real-world infection, HIV. Identity-based campaigns aimed at 'gay men' were not perceived as addressing men who participated in high-risk practices such as unprotected sex with other men but who perceived themselves as bisexual or even straight. Some of these men were married and had high personal investment in resisting the label 'gay' as an identity that applied to them. In response, HIV/AIDS organisations began to use the construction "men who sleep with men" in policy documents and created public materials describing practices rather than identities (AIDS Council of New South Wales, personal commu-

nication, 05/05/04).

While it is relatively easy to talk about practising a religion or a sexuality, it is less clear how one goes about practising an ethnicity or a disability. Does using the Chinese horoscope, believing that red is a lucky colour, and celebrating the Chinese New Year make someone Chinese?

Is it more important that the people 'reclaiming' their Aboriginal heritage are seeking out practices and rituals from Aboriginal traditions? The notion of 'uninterrupted' culture, passed from one person to another, suggests that practices, rather than just genetics, are important to notions of Aboriginality. Does such a practice 'make' someone Aboriginal?

It may well be, as Irigaray (1985) has argued, that without creating an entirely new symbolic from which to speak we cannot ever enunciate the issues we need to address.

Shared cultural practices are evident in borderless spaces such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, where 'straight' friends are invited to participate in floats and experience queer, where 'straight' women flirt with notions of same-sex love through televisual embraces and party experimentation, where 'straight' men become 'metrosexuals' through accessorising and shopping for the right furniture (Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, US, 2003). They are also apparent in spiritual spaces which increasingly borrow Tibetan prayer flags and yoga practices. To what extent are these simply appropriations and reterritorialisations?

At the Good Vibrations festival in Sydney, January 2004, legendary reggae performer Lee 'Scratch' Perry declared to the crowd, "You are all black here. There are no white people here". This conferral of blackness due to participation in 'black' musical practices instantiates the supplementarity of deferred identity (cf Derrida), as we are only black so long as we continue to practice blackness, or at least, we are left only with memories of

blackness and our tangential relationship with its trajectory through cultural production. What this means conversely for participation in cultural whiteness or for a black person's participation in Asian cultural practices is less clear.

Beyond categories

What is significant here is the resonance between the lived experiences of the intersection of multiple marginality: the intersection of black and gay experience, of Jewish and lesbian experience, the experience of deafness and transgender in the same body or living in a blind Asian-Aboriginal body. These intersections, this doubling and in some cases tripling or quadrupling of partial subjectivity, are articulated through similar aspects and cultural forms.

The threads of theory surrounding liminal subjectivity woven together reveal common patterns that may lead to practical suggestions for alternatives to identity wars. In effect, since liminal subjects employ similar strategies to negotiate within and between cultural interpretive communities, and since these strategies fail in the same ways and for the same reasons, it is preferable to develop a working theory of subjectivity where the categories can be exceeded without reprisal while still addressing disadvantage and oppression.

The politics and power of the collectivity can be seen in the subversive acts of the 'flash mob' (Rheingold, 2002) and the autonomous zones, festival culture and other fleeting collectivity formations that are examples of resistant politics in the face of capitalist post-modernity. Even the media developed in these zones is rhizomatic, decentralised and organised by 'spokescouncils' (see <http://www.indymedia.org>). For further discussion of media in the age of collectivities, see Meikle, 2002). These temporary connections in the deterritorialized zone are the flowerchildren of Debord's detournements grown up (cf Debord, 1956).

This is not to suggest that a shift from speaking of what we 'are' to what we 'do', from an essentialised self to a praxis of self, is sufficient to resolve international tensions. However, given the expanding 'multiple' nature of the world's population, such an investigation into the constructions of multiple and liminal subjectivities may indicate ways forward in an increasingly complex global society. Also, since identity is coded and overcoded at the discursive level (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983), the discursive intervention to recode subjectivity is one of the few tools of resistance available to marginalised individuals. It is this engagement on the political level, the daily tactical, critical and hegemonic interventions performed by edge identities that undermine global capital's ability to sell us back to ourselves as recognisable niche markets and categoric identities.

It's not easy to live day to day in a fluid, post-category space. The anxiety and uncertainty of modern identity crises does tend to accompany the attempt at first, and it is disorienting. But so long as we think that the only people who need to work on identity are those who are already in-between, we're in trouble:

becoming-Jewish necessarily affects the non-Jew as much as the Jew. Becoming-woman necessarily affects men as much as women. In a way, the subject in a becoming is always "man" but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 292).

The struggle inside the micro-community and the minority community is between the radicals who want to engage in a becoming-minoritarian in order to escape and the others who see this as a dissolution of self, a collapse into the abyss of undifferentiation. One problem here is a dialectic between a political project which has at its roots a subaltern desire for a resistant response to global capital that it saw potentially arising from hybrid consciousness in and of itself and an individualist approach that sought comfort and solace for the marginalised within a sociological framework.

For those whose goals are assimilation, acceptance and an assured place in the hallowed institutions of the military and marriage, the oppositional strategies of the border subject are counter-productive. The clashes within gay culture over these issues are indicative of the dismay. The policing of the border of community is a (re)enactment of the policing of the border of self.

What must be understood is that becoming-minoritarian "is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power (puissance), an active micropolitics" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 292). In a movement away from identity thinking, some individuals pursue a kind of 'semiotic break' (Guha, 1983) which ruptures hegemonic discourse and allows for political engagement with resistant consciousness and strategic alliances.

It's the longing to be inside which makes you an outsider (Ayres, 1999). The radicals are no longer interested in assimilation or even integration into the majority. They want to overthrow it, putting in its place a rhizomatic network of autonomous collectivities. Liminal subjects may move through a variety of strategies to negotiate comfort spaces while oppressive systems continue to demand conformity, but the strategic alliances of Internet spaces and radical networks of resistance open up potential escape routes that may eventually render these unnecessary, moving beyond the limits and into a kaleidoscope of hyperdifferentiation.

I want to end on a non-academic note and readdress a personal revelation I had while writing my Masters thesis that a rewritten Jewish practice is only possible ironically with an immersion and understanding of traditional Jewish practice which excludes so many of us who feel unwanted or unnecessary as women and queer. Those of us who rejected the religion early now find ourselves tracing a culture, wanting to relearn Hebrew and other liturgies in an effort to subvert what we learn. I am jealous now of those who speak the languages well enough to enact intervention in

its spaces while I remain excluded and speechless. By leaving the Jewish community we failed to transform it. By leaving the Gay & Lesbian community we failed to transform it. These resonances I now find moving between and within alternative Queer, alternative Jewish and the various intersections of these, allow for liens between these spaces, allow for these spaces to expand, to transform until they are seamless. Not merged seamlessly, not to say at all that they are now somehow identical but rather that it should be impossible to determine at which point one has ended and another begins.

In so many ways, this is not an idle inquiry. The 'global village' cannot deliver on its promises if its residents are hell-bent on witch-hunts, border skirmishes and ethnic cleansing. New ways of negotiating difference and transformation are imperative for harmonious societal survival.

Author Note

Rosanne Bersten is a journalist, editor and activist based in Melbourne, Australia. She loves widely and is, like Einstein, a citizen of the world. No borders, no nations. Diversity is unity. Love is boundless.

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'I'M MY OWN VERSION OF JEWISH'

MARGIE FISCHER

I was born in Sydney. My parents were Austrian Jews who escaped the Holocaust to Shanghai, China, in 1939. All members of my Mum's family were killed in concentration camps. My parents, my Dad's parents and his two brothers lived in Shanghai from 1939 to 1949 when the Chinese revolution happened and they came to Australia as refugees. My father considered staying in China as he was sympathetic to the revolution, but they came to Australia.

I grew up living with my grandparents, my parents and my brother. I spoke Austrian and Yiddish at home. I heard stories of injustice, survival stories, the Holocaust, standing up for one's beliefs and rights from a very young age.

My parents passionately loved Australia where they finally felt safe. Australia was also tough on them. Early on my father worked in a timber mill in Tasmania and other workers put shit on his sandwiches. He was a "reffo". My parents were Progressive Jews, that's very different from Orthodox. They were outsiders. My Dad was very politically aware and left wing. When I was 13 I went to a Jewish youth club. They said when Israel was created there was nobody else there. I objected and spoke about the Balfour Declaration and Palestinians and never went back to that group. I didn't want to be Jewish. Outwardly I wanted to be Australian, to assimilate, to blend in.

I stayed political and realised I didn't want to blend in, I was different, and I became a performer. I travelled all over Australia in a circus: I was a feminist clown. There were no

role models. I always worked with a lot of Indigenous people and performed for Indigenous people with whom I shared a history of people trying to exterminate us.

After a while I became a Lesbian. My parents loved me anyway. They'd begun to wonder about me years earlier. I was not being the nice Jewish girl they expected, but that's because of who they were anyway.

I ended up in Adelaide at 32 and began Vitalstatistix, which is still going 21 years later. Vitalstatistix is a National Women's Theatre Company. I met a Jewish Lesbian who told me she loved my Jewish humour. I didn't realise that's what it was. I began to get into being Jewish. It was much harder than being a Lesbian although I always knew I was a Jew, I just hadn't talked about it. I read a book called "Nice Jewish Girls" (Beck, 1989). I was riveted. It explained so much about who I was and how I felt. I went and saw a Progressive Rabbi in Sydney and asked him what he thought of Lesbians and Gay men. The Council of Progressive Rabbis of Australia and New Zealand had just been talking about it and he said he thought it was "okay".

I started a Jewish Lesbian group in Adelaide that's still going. I think it's the longest running one in the world. As with everything I do, I got right into it. In the group we explored our Jewishness, our Lesbianism and feminism. We talked about our backgrounds, we celebrated festivals. Now many of us have children. We've shared births, deaths, ups and downs of relationships, split ups and life as family. I began to go to synagogue after I had a mental illness, depression, and a thera-

pist suggested I go there. I liked it. I was out. They were fine. I did a project for them. They asked me to write a play about Jewish divorce laws. I did.

So what's being a Jewish Lesbian like in my work? Eight years ago I was one of the founders of the Feast Festival which is Adelaide's Lesbian and Gay Cultural Festival. I was the Artistic Director for six years. I worked with Gay men closely for the first time. I was fascinated by them. I still am. I did, however, experience anti-Semitism and misogyny. I must say that in the realms of powerful Queers who run businesses and organisations, men are in the absolute majority and often still don't notice women, are afraid of women, and sometimes don't even like women. I can deal with this and of course there are plenty of very nice gay men, and also, they can be converted. And so it's interesting because sometimes I have to make an effort, like it's easy to get sidetracked into paying more attention to gay men, and also, most of these men are Anglo-Celtic.

Okay, on to Jewish confusion. In Adelaide there are fewer than 2,000 Jews. Often people I meet haven't met any Jews. There are lots of preconceptions and misconceptions. If I am a Jew that doesn't mean I am Israeli. It doesn't mean that I necessarily support what's happening in Israel. The whole question of what's going on in Israel and how it's reported is problematic. I grew up knowing that Israel was founded on major problems and it was going to be extremely hard to solve them. There is a huge peace movement in Israel. Many Jewish women are working with Palestinians. There are fundamentalist Jews and there are ultra-conservatives just like there are everywhere. In my Jewish group it's hard to discuss Israel. It's painful, and we don't all agree.

Parenthood. I'm a parent. I have a 4½ year old daughter Ruth. My partner Roxxy is her birthmother. She was an IVF success story from an anonymous donor because that's the way things are still done in fertility clinics in

New South Wales. I wanted Jewish sperm. There was very little Jewish sperm in Sydney but I got it. So there is actually none at the moment and that's partly because they are trying to change the laws so that it can't be anonymous anymore so men aren't donating much sperm. Anyway, technically, Ruth is Jewish so I had to go and talk to the Rabbis again because even though I don't consider myself a mother, I am female so she has got a Jewish mother and biologically she is half Jewish because of the sperm. So that was very interesting for the Rabbis to talk about.

How am I Jewish now? I'm 52 so my experience may be different to young Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Jews. I celebrate Jewish festivals and for the past 3 years I've had Shabbat on Friday nights. This is a thing that people do on Friday nights and what I love is that you enter cosmic time and so working hard, and worrying about money and achievements and struggle, don't have to happen for 24 hours. You can see why I really like it: I cook a nice meal, have cosmic time, and I take Ruth to synagogue. She likes it there.

By the time I was born, there was Progressive Judaism. It means that I didn't have to have the same struggles that Orthodox Jewish people have. And then there's another thing called Jewish Renewal which is another progression along so I think there is more freedom if you are not Orthodox. I have a problem with that word, God, but I shouldn't have. I should be able to say it but I'd rather say the Divine or something like that.

With some of the Jewish Lesbians in the Jewish Lesbian group, I started to explore Jewish spirituality. There was so much to explore, it continues to be exciting. The Jewish Lesbian group invents and reclaims Jewish rituals. I talk to Ruth about Jewish things. When I started to be more religious my parents got really worried. They just couldn't believe after all this time I was going to be Jewish, and that worried them. By the time my mother died a year ago, my father and my brother

had already died, and I'd already begun to appreciate Jewish death rituals, but I appreciate them even more now. Yes, with the death stuff I really did appreciate how within the Progressive Jewish movement I could organise my mother's death totally how I wanted it, and I could have my daughter and my partner there. It was great. So the death of my parents has extended my Jewishness in profound ways and now I have just had the experience of sorting through what was left of their lives and communicating with my parents in other ways. I'm writing about my experience of sorting out my parents' possessions, and house, and the stories that are in objects from their past.

I'm a big fan of Jewish death rituals but when you get into your own cultural rituals then you can do what you want with them. I just change things when I want to and luckily I can find Rabbis who will go along with me, but there are some things that remain strict. For example, I just found out one of my friend's mother's dying and they want to have her cremated but they wanted the Jewish burial society of volunteers to wash the body and say prayers and then wrap her body in a shroud and then the body gets buried in a pine wood box with rope handles. But you can't use the burial society doing the ritual if you are going to have a cremation. I didn't know that before, and that's because that whole ritual is about getting someone ready to be buried. So you can't have all the bits you want necessarily but you can talk to people. It's a big, big fascinating thing.

My Jewishness and background permeates all I do. Last year I organised a National Queer Spirituality conference. It was Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer, and then it was Pagan, Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, and it involved straight people as well. At the Queer Spirituality Conference, we had more than 300 people and about 40 interstate speakers. The yearning for Queer people to explore a world beyond material reality is really strong.

I am currently working on a project for Feast which is a series of six Queer community fashion parades involving 250 community models in a large diversity of ages, sizes and sexualities. I've also been working with an amazing group of older Jewish women who are in their 70s and 80s who are having their 75th anniversary of the National Council of Jewish Women in Adelaide. I just can't stop being diverse.

My parents were extremely Jewish. What is Jewish is a very interesting question but I don't feel like I'm more Jewish than they were. I feel like I'm my own version of Jewish and that's influenced by what happened to me as their Jewishness was influenced by what happened to them. So I just think it's based on where I've been and where they came from.

Author Note

I am a freelance arts worker. My cultural background is Jewish Austrian, my parents were Austrian Jews who escaped the Holocaust to Shanghai, China then arriving in Sydney as refugees in 1949.

I grew up in Sydney and was a member of Pipi Storm a ground breaking community circus/ performing arts company in the 1970's. I moved to Adelaide SA in 1983.

I am a cofounder of Vitalstatistix National Women's Theatre Company which is going strong and 22 years young! This company is based in Pt Adelaide, producing theatre by women and CCD projects for a popular audience.

I have written, performed and produced many productions and projects with Vitals.

I am also co founder of the Festival and currently the Chair person of the Feast Festival Board. Feast is Adelaide's Annual Queer Cultural Festival. It was founded in 1996.

My latest work includes coordinating The Cracked Pot a skill development performance

project involving 15 queer disabled Adelaide performers working with a team of professional arts workers to produce an award winning, critically acclaimed performance which has recently completed a season at Feast 2007.

I am currently working on a new performance work exploring the death of my parents.

I live with my longtime partner, Roxxy Bent, and our daughter Ruth Fischer-Bent.

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'WITHOUT LOVE, THERE WON'T BE US': A NARRATIVE OF A GAM-GWM COUPLE

BUDIADI SUDARTO

Introduction

To date, academic exploration into the lived experiences of gay Asian male (GAM) – gay White male (GWM) couples is relatively rare. A lengthy study on same-sex couples conducted by Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan (2001), whilst exploring different issues in same-sex partnerships, fell short in analysing how race and ethnicity influence same-sex couples in Western countries. As suggested by Weeks et al. (2001, p. 117), racial inequality colours the dynamic that operates in same-sex coupling; however, this argument is under explored in their findings.

Writers on Asian – White desires often focus on relationship inequality between younger GAM and older GWM. Writers such as Fung (1996), Ayres (1999) and Jackson (2000) have argued that the common portrayal of gay Asian males' sexuality as passive in Western media taints the social positioning of these men in the gay community. Arguably, the Western gay community is dominated by the image of muscular, White men, and those who fall outside this ideology are deemed as less desirable (Drummond, 2005a; Jackson, 2000). Whiteness represents masculinity, and in a community that emphasises this superficial masculinity as the ultimate form of desire (Lahti, 1997), ethnic minorities are not only under-represented in the gay media, but Asian men in particular are emasculated (Han, 2006; Drummond, 2005b).

Bleys (1995) offers an explanation for the emasculation of Asian men in Western countries. Colonialist ideology that operated during Western imperialism in Asia created a dis-

course wherein Asian female sexuality is perceived as passive and thus highly desired, and Asian male sexuality as either asexual or effeminate, reinforcing the ideology of Western male dominance over Asian males. Han (2006) states that this ideology continues in contemporary settings, with gay Asian males portrayed in one dimension (ie, passive, effeminate, and submissive). Park Hagland (1996) states that this representation only serves the desire of White men to sexually and emotionally 'dominate' Asian men, eliminating Asian males' sexual desire and preference. Kumashiro (1999) states that many gay Asian men are aware that the stereotypes of demure Asian men do not represent their sexuality; however, some feel powerless due to the strong White ideology that still operates in Western gay communities.

Poon (2002) argues that due to this discourse, gay Asian men are prone to domestic abuse in Asian-White relationships. Using a heterosexual domestic violence framework, Poon concludes that lack of social capital accentuated by language and cultural barriers make Asian men vulnerable and overly reliant on their White partners. What is missing from Poon's analysis is the influence of class and how it affects the dynamic that operates in GAM/GWM relationships. Furthermore, Poon (2002) did not provide qualitative nor quantitative evidence to support his arguments. As a result, little is known about whether Asian men are suffering from power imbalance and relationship inequality in Asian/White relationship. This only adds to the fact that little is known about the dynamics that exists in such relationships.

Given the discourse around gay Asian males' sexuality in Western gay communities, the popular assumption that Asian men seek White partners who are more dominant, thrives in the gay community. Indeed, some rice queens purposely seek Asian men who fit the stereotype (Sanitioso, 1999), creating a social situation whereby some Asian men feel that they must follow certain traits (eg, effeminate, passive) to attract White partners (Han, 2006). Yet, there is little academic literature that fully discusses the dynamic that operates in Asian/White gay coupling. As a result, the discourse of rice queen/potato queen (Asian men who seek White men) remains largely under investigated in academia. The stereotypes of inequality, power imbalance, and opportunistic Asians appear to dominate contemporary understandings of Asian/White relationship. These discourses go against a more egalitarian ideology that operates in many intraethnic (or same ethnic) same-sex relationships (Giddens, 1992; Weeks et al, 2001), even though inequality does exist in such couplings (eg Burke & Follingstad, 1999). Theoretical frameworks on interethnic coupling often focus on the differences in cultural capital of each partner instead of focusing on sameness. Structural theory operates on the basis of racial hierarchy whereby ethnic groups seek White partners to increase their social status in a White dominated society (Hwang, Saenz & Aguirre, 1997). Another theory is racial motivation theory which argues that interethnic relationships occur due to attraction for certain races, where physicality plays a major role in establishing a relationship (Harris & Kalvleisch, 2000).

Previous findings however often contradict these two theories. Some researchers on interethnic couplings find that racial differences play a minor role in the relationship; emotional attachment and relationship homogamy are more important than racial attributes (Owen, 2002; Penny & Khoo, 1996). In Owen's (2002) study, interracial heterosexual couples based their relationships on sameness instead of differences, and this sameness can be that of socioeconomic status, personal attributes, and

education level. Similar findings were discussed by Kalmijn (1998) and Lewis, Yancey and Bletzer (1997), who argue that non racial factors play a major role in the continuation of interracial marriage, especially in the face of racial discrimination and social prejudices against interracial unions. Indeed, all authors argue that relationships based purely on racial factors would not succeed as the novelty of being in an interracial relationship does not last forever. Without a strong emotional bond and attachment, the relationship will not last, irrespective of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences.

Due to a very minimum number of research conducted on interethnic gay couples, little is known about how same-sex Asian/White couples perceive their relationship in Western societies. Negative stereotyping of Asian/White couples only creates a binary between unequal, Asian/White couples and egalitarian, White/White couples. This only further alienates Asian/White couples from the gay community; not only do they have to face racism, but they also have to deal with negative stereotyping about their relationships. Given that society itself is still a bit cautious on the issue of same-sex marriage and acceptance of gay couples (e.g., Pinello, 2006), Asian/White gay couples face many challenges in their relationships, a topic that I will investigate in this paper.

The Narrative

In the following, I explore the lived experiences of one gay Asian male (GAM) – gay White male (GWM) couple in Australian society. This narrative is compiled from 4 different interviews conducted in Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney, where participants' words are used as much as possible. A semi structured interview method was applied, covering four main topics: love and intimacy, domestic arrangement, social reactions, and the gay community. Couples were recruited from e-mailing lists and snowball sampling technique. A narrative method was chosen because it provides an in-depth story into partici-

pants' lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Sam's Story

I met Sam in a gay owned café in inner city Melbourne. Sam was an attractive 41 year old Chinese Singaporean, and he's been living in Melbourne for the past 7 years. He came to Melbourne to obtain a Master's degree, gained permanent residency, and was working at a financial institution at the time of the interview. He greeted me with a big smile and a warm handshake. Below are some excerpts from the interview:

Andrew and I met at a dinner party about 3.5 years ago. We were introduced to each other by a mutual friend of ours. There were about 20 people at the party, so it was a bit difficult to strike up a conversation with him. When I first saw Andrew, I thought he was very attractive. But it wasn't until later that night that we finally got to speak to each other.

I was quite surprised that we had so many things in common. We were two strangers at a party, and I didn't know many people there, so it was quite surprising that we found some common interests. I thought to myself that this guy is not only sexy, but also smart, and passionate about certain issues. So I gave him my number, and asked him to call me to catch up.

It took him a few days before he rang me. I was about to give up. But then, he left a message on my answering machine. We met for dinner, and we got to talk to each other more then. I wasn't expecting a relationship, and it wasn't until a few more dates after our first date that we even had sex. It was quite funny actually, because we were very cautious around each other, and it took a while to feel comfortable. I don't know why, maybe because I wanted to build friendship first.

The more I got to know him, the more I liked him. Yes, the physical attraction was there, but it was more than that. He was funny, kind,

caring, and passionate about life. He has that little spark in his eyes when he talks about certain issues, and I found that very cute. I guess the more I got to know his personality, the more I found him attractive. The physical slowly faded away.

We were dating for 6 months before we started discussing the possibility of moving in together. My lease was about to expire, and he was looking to move to a new place. So we decided to share a house together.

It wasn't an easy process. I'm used to being on my own. Even back in Singapore, I lived in my own apartment. So it took some adjustment having him around. I mean, I like having him around, and I like spending time with him. But we still have to adjust to each other's presence.

What are some issues? Well, I don't think there's a particular issue, but there are certain things that we do quite differently. For example, I like to cook. I like to use spices in my cooking. Andrew is not like that. He's used to bland cooking, you know, steak and mash. So when he cooked, I didn't eat as much, and he noticed that. I like my spices, and I like spicy food. So slowly I started to take over the cooking, and he doesn't seem to mind that.

He's very peculiar about his laundry. He has his own way of doing the laundry. And to be quite honest, I don't like doing it. I remember he got a bit upset one day because I mixed whites and colours together. He said that's not the proper way of washing clothes. So now, he won't let me touch the laundry. And I'm happy with that arrangement.

Besides those two, we very much share household stuff together. There never was a proper discussion on whose job it is to do what. We never sat down and had a house meeting. Both of us are very tidy, so we clean up after each other's mess. We do our groceries together, and I actually like doing that with him. It's nice to have someone around when you're doing your chores.

In general, I don't think there's a big cultural difference between us. Even when I lived in Singapore, I've been influenced by a lot of different cultures, because Singapore is a melting pot. And I've been influenced by Australian culture ever since I moved here. So I don't think culture plays a major factor in our relationship. Andrew quite understands where I came from. He knows I like my spicy food, and he knows that I'm not too political, because the political climate is different in Singapore than it is in Australia.

The only thing that I can think of is how we express ourselves. I think, in general, Asian culture is less upfront and more subtle in the way we express our opinions. I always consider his feelings before I say something. Andrew is different; he can be quite abrupt at times. He can be very blunt and straightforward. It took me a while to understand that just because he's being straightforward, that does not mean that he's angry with me, or disapproves of me, or that he doesn't care about my feelings. It's just the way he expresses his opinions.

So in a way, you can say that's how culture influences our relationship, communication, because we have different ways of communicating. But it's better now, because we've learned to communicate to each other on sensitive issues. He is less blunt, and I'm more straightforward. I guess you learn to give and take in a relationship.

But we've never really fought or had any major argument. In general, we can talk to each other quite freely. We can discuss different issues, and we can talk for hours about random things. And that's what I like about him, because I feel that I can connect with him in many different ways.

I'm aware that, sometimes, Andrew can get annoyed when I hang out with my friends. That's because we tend to switch between English and Mandarin quite frequently. For me, sometimes it is easier to communicate in my own language, because that's the lan-

guage that I grew up with, and my friends know what I'm talking about. I guess, for him, he can't contribute to the conversation when we speak in Mandarin, so he gets frustrated. And I usually switch to English straight away, but when it's only me and my friends, we like to speak in Mandarin. I can understand where he's coming from though, because there are certain Australian slang that I don't understand, and sometimes I have to ask Andrew about it. So when he's around, I always try to speak in English, especially if we hang out with other people who can't understand Mandarin.

My friends are quite accepting of Andrew. As for my family, they know, but it's never really spoken about, especially with my parents. I told my brother and sister about Andrew, and they are ok with it. But I never really told my parents that I'm gay, or that Andrew is my partner. We visited them several times, back in Singapore, and they accepted him as part of the family. And whenever I speak to them over the phone, they always ask how things are with Andrew. So I guess there never really was a 'coming out' to my parents, but they accept us regardless.

In general, we love each other deeply, and I would like to spend the rest of my life with him. Like I said before, he's kind, caring, and generous, and all those things are more important to me than anything else. Without all those qualities, I don't think I would be in a long term relationship with him.

Andrew's Story

It was not until a few weeks after I interviewed Sam that I had a chance to meet up with Andrew. We both happened to be in Sydney at the same time, and we arranged for a time to meet at my hotel lobby. Andrew is an attractive 38 year old gay White man. He is 4th generation Australian of British ancestry. Working in a private sector, he greeted me with the same warmth as his partner Sam gave me. I asked him a few questions about their relationship without giving away anything

that Sam told me in the previous interview. Below are some excerpts from that interview.

How we met is a bit of a long story. I was invited to a dinner party by my ex partner. I didn't really want to go, but he insisted. We were together for 7 years, but we remained good friends after we broke up. So I went to the party with him, and I was introduced to different people. When I was introduced to Sam, I couldn't take my eyes off him. He was very attractive. But because of the seating arrangement, I didn't have a proper conversation with him until later that night. I was a bit nervous, there's something about him that's so appealing and sexy, but he was so relaxed and easy going. We chatted for a bit, and we exchanged phone numbers.

At that time, I was about to go on a business trip, so I didn't call him straight away. I wasn't even sure whether I should call him or not, but I decided to ring him, and it was a nice feeling because he remembered who I was. So we met up for a dinner date, and the rest is history.

What was my first impression of him? I thought he was extremely good looking. But as we spent more time together, and I found out more about him, my feelings started to grow. We shared common interests, and I felt easy around him. I can be myself around him. And that's one thing that I like the most about Sam. Sam is very easy going. He's a people oriented person, and it doesn't take long for people to warm to him.

I remember I took him to a work function for the first time. I was more nervous than he was. I was afraid that he would feel left out, because he didn't know anyone there. But he told me not to worry about him, and sure enough, he was making conversations with so many different people. I didn't even know some of the people that he met there. After that, I realised that he's the kind of person that I would like to be with. He's caring, sincere, genuine, and kind to others.

I don't think we ever had any major argument. Both of us can be very headstrong at times, and that could create an issue. I usually let things calm down, especially when he's being extremely stubborn, before I make any attempts to talk things through with him. An example is when we decided to move in together. He was very sure of what he wanted. He's used to apartment living in Singapore, while I grew up in the suburbs of Melbourne, so I'm used to having big space and room to move. It took us a while before we could find a place that we both like, mainly because he was very headstrong with what he wanted. But, in the end, both of us had to adjust, and we settled in our current place that both of us liked. But, that's normal, isn't it? I mean, all couples must negotiate in one way or another.

I don't think it's cultural though, I think it's just his personality. I can't really think of any major cultural differences between us. Food is probably it. I'm used to Australian cooking, while he likes his spices and green vegetables and all that. So I let him do the cooking. I'm very strict with how I do my laundry, so I wash our clothes. For everything else, I don't think there are any major differences. There are small practical things, like taking off your shoes before entering the house, but that's not a major issue. Oh, and doing the dishes! We do dishes differently in Australia. He likes to have the tap running all the time. For us, that's wasting water. He understands it now, but before, he sometimes complained about how I did the dishes.

In general, I don't think there's a negotiation of cultures in our relationship. Both of us have to adjust with living together, and I like living with him. We can do things together, like watching DVDs, or go out to see a movie. It's a very typical domestic life. Some issues, like organising our finances, we talk through more seriously, while with others, like cleaning the house, we're very much open and easy going.

Neither of us are involved in the gay scene, but we've been to a few gay events, and we never encountered any problems or negative

reactions from people. We have a few friends who always go out to big dance parties and all that, but that's not us. We are in a monogamous relationship, and it's something that we talked about. Most of our friends are in open relationships, but that's not our way. And he's perfectly fine with being monogamous, so there's no issue there.

Our friendship network is made up of half of my friends, and half of his friends. I never really had any problems with my friends accepting Sam. I can only think of one person who got a bit strange after knowing that Sam and I are together. But that says a lot about that person, and not about us. All my close friends accepted him, and he always got invited to parties and work functions and all that. We are not always together; I still catch up with my friends without him, and he does the same. And I'm not a jealous lover; I trust him and I let him go out and have fun with his friends.

As for my family, my mother loves Sam. She would like to adopt him if she could. As for my siblings, one sister is quite homophobic, so I don't really have much to do with her. I won't let her dictate my relationship with Sam. I have to admit, my other siblings, even my mum, were a bit concerned at first. I think they just wanted me to be happy, and they knew that I wasn't really happy in my last relationship. But after they met Sam, they all fell in love with him, so they never expressed any concerns since. Now Sam is welcomed to our family functions, and he celebrates Christmas with us.

Actually, one of my sisters, she was a bit racist at first. I guess she didn't know many Asian people before she met Sam, so she said something really negative. I told her off when she made that comment, and this was before she met Sam. But after she met Sam, she realised that she's wrong, so she apologised to me about it. I never told Sam about this, because I don't want to ruin their good relationship. They got along really well, and I think knowing Sam has taught my sister something

about Asian people.

In general, I have a wonderful relationship with Sam. He's caring, affectionate, and loving. I never felt so much love before from any of my previous partners. I know I can trust him, and I feel loved by him.

Sam and Andrew: Their Story

It took another month before Sam, Andrew, and I had a chance to catch up with each other again. We met in Melbourne City Library, and we sat down at the café inside. We caught up with each other first, asking how each other's life is going, and they asked about my research project. After the coffee arrived, I interviewed them about their experiences as an interethnic couple in Australia. I did not disclose any information from the individual interviews, and I wasn't sure if they told each other about what they said to me during that process. Here are some excerpts from what they said to me:

Andrew: I don't think both of us expected this to happen, that we are going to be in a long term relationship.

Sam: No, we just took our chances. It was a bit awkward when we first met, because you were with your ex boyfriend.

Andrew: Yes, but we got together at the end (smiling at each other).

Sam: At first, I wasn't sure what I wanted from him. I didn't want to jump straight into a relationship. I wanted to know him first.

Andrew: That's right, we had several dates before you stayed over at my place, so we...

Sam: Unlike some of our friends, who had sex first and know the guy later.

Andrew: I guess we are a bit different, and maybe because of our age as well. Sam doesn't look it but he's actually older than me...

Sam: I'm your Asian sugar daddy! (laughs)

Andrew: (Laughs) That's right, and I'm a young meat to you. Maybe things would have been different if we were younger and still liked to party and all that.

Sam: I think that's why we are not the 'norm'. I'm Asian and older. He's White and younger.

It's different from the stereotypical Asian-White relationship, where the White one is older...

Andrew: Some of our friends are in that kind of relationship, and sometimes I observe their interactions, and the White guy, the White guy...

Sam: That's right, some of our friends, they are your typical stereotypical relationship. The White one is more dominant, and the Asian one is more passive. I don't like that.

Andrew: I know that for me, personally, I like to create equality in my relationship, regardless if he's Asian or White. That's why I was unhappy with my previous partner, because there's no equality, and he's White.

Sam: For me, I had flings with Asians before, and I had White boyfriends before Andrew. It really depends on the personality of your partner. I know that, for me, I won't let my partner tell me what to do, or to dominate me.

Andrew: That's right, because you can be very headstrong, and sometimes you think that you're always right.

Sam: But I'm always right! (chuckles). I'm much more sensible than you are (looking at Andrew). I like things to be organised.

Andrew: Which, I think, is a good thing. He helped me out, organised my finances, my career, and tidied up all the loose ends.

Sam: See, I'm always right (smiling to Andrew).

Andrew: Both of us can be very headstrong, and I have learned a way to communicate with him. Usually I let things cool down before discussing it again.

Sam: I don't think it's cultural though, it's just our personalities. We both have different personalities.

Andrew: Like, when comparing ourselves to other interracial couples, I wonder if they are the same, because when we meet them, the White is usually more dominant.

Sam: I can only think of one couple, but we're not close friends. The Asian is a bit passive. But maybe that's just his personality. I spoke to him before, in Mandarin, and he was quite open and talkative. He talked about his relationship, their holiday together, property that they bought, and so on. So I don't know if he

is totally passive.

Andrew: It's just my observation. When I look at other couples where the White is older and the Asian is younger...

Sam: Yes, but you don't know what's going on in their relationship. And maybe they are happy with that arrangement. Some men like younger men, some like older men. If they are happy, so, what's the issue?

Andrew: As long as they are happy I suppose, and I'm sure it's working for them, otherwise they won't be in a relationship.

Sam: I think that's the problem with stereotypes, people make assumptions about what your relationship is like...

Andrew: And I suppose, unless you know couples who are not stereotypical, then you won't change your perception. I still don't know why the stereotype exists.

Sam: Maybe because they only look on the outside and not what's going on in the inside.

Andrew: And it's in the media as well. If we look at some pictures from the gay scene, usually there's an older White man with a younger Asian man. That can influence your perception. So I think, we break all the 'norms' (laughs). I'm younger than Sam, both of us are working, he's not dependent on me...

Sam: I don't think we ever encountered any negative reactions. I think most people that we know are quite accepting.

Andrew: I think the issue is not because we are an Asian-White couple, because there are plenty of mixed couples in Melbourne. I think the issue is because we are a gay male couple.

Sam: It's like, when we walk down the street, people look at us funny because we're two men holding hands. If we'd been a straight couple, I'm sure they wouldn't have an issue with it, even with the whole Asian-White relationship.

Andrew: In country towns where there are not many Asians, maybe people would judge us based on our race. But in cities like Melbourne, people judge us because we are gay.

Sam: That's why sometimes we have to be a bit cautious, not to hold hands in public in areas where we think we won't be safe, like the

outer suburbs or somewhere like that. It's about...

Andrew: That what upsets me the most though, that we can't do that; we can't be affectionate in public all the time. I think that's prejudice. Because we're gay, we have to hide our feelings, while others can be affectionate to each other.

Sam: It's slowly changing, but it will take more time before they can fully accept us as a gay couple...

Andrew: They should start seeing us as the same...

Sam: For me, it doesn't really matter what they think. I think it's about loving each other, and knowing that your partner loves you the same, and have friends and family who accept you and your partner...

Andrew: I mean, we have our differences, but we want to be together. We like to be together. I don't think we are any different from other couples, mixed or not, straight or gay. For me, I see our future as being together, and I can't see myself being with anybody else.

Sam: We love each other deeply, and I think that's the basis of our relationship. Without love, there won't be "us".

Discussion

The narrative above provides an insight into the lived experience of Asian/White gay couples in predominantly White gay communities. Unlike the dominant myth that often emphasises power imbalances in Asian/White relationships (e.g., Poon, 2000), the couple above constructed a more egalitarian approach, and this follows the ideology of "pure relationship" (Giddens, 1992). As stated by Giddens (1992), a "pure relationship" enable couples to construct a greater sense of equality in comparison to the notion of romantic love, which tends to promote inequality due to expected traditional gender roles between men and women. Giddens (1992) proposes the idea that "pure relationship" applies to both heterosexual and homosexual couples, and is most commonly practiced by same-sex couples due to the absence of strict traditional gender

roles. As expressed by the above participants, this notion of egalitarianism is practiced and maintained in their relationship.

Whilst both parties reported a sense of relationship equity, it appears that they did not steer away from the concept of romantic love altogether. They expressed a deep level of emotional attachment, and expressed their desire to be together for the long haul. In addition, whilst some researchers have argued that the gay community is more accepting of open relationships, and many gay couples practiced open relationships (eg. Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983, Weeks et al, 2001), monogamy is still preferred by Sam and Andrew. As stated by Andrew, monogamy is something that they discussed instead of something that exists automatically. This follows Adam's (2001) argument that same sex couples have greater freedom than heterosexual couples to 'invent' various types of relationship structure. This is because there is no strict gender and relationship structure in same-sex partnership. Monogamy is seen an option rather than an obligation.

From the narrative above, it appears that their stories both confirm and challenge Giddens' (1992) statement on "pure relationship". For Sam and Andrew, the ability to negotiate, construct, and reconstruct the structure of their relationship indicates the presence of "pure relationship". However, the notion of romance and romantic love are not completely discarded by this couple. This finding indicates a fusion of romantic love and pure relationship in the context of an Asian/White gay relationship, where egalitarianism and romance complement each other instead of exist separately, an indication of how intimacy operates in a post-modern world (read Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1994 for more analysis on heterosexual gender norms and relationship equality).

Sam and Andrew's stories also question social theories behind interethnic desire, particularly structural theory (Lewis et al, 1997) and racial motivation theory (Harris & Kalvleisch, 2000).

Their emphasis on non racial characteristics that glued them together challenges racial motivation theory, which states that racial features and characteristics are prime reasons for interethnic relationships (Harris & Kalvleisch, 2000). As expressed by Sam, whilst he found Andrew to be physically attractive when he first saw him, it was soon replaced by emotional traits and characteristics, and he found more commonalities with Andrew despite their ethnic differences. A sense of relationship homogamy therefore still exists in interethnic coupling. For Sam and Andrew, similar world views and core values bound them together. Whilst differences do exist and they constantly negotiate these disparities, I contend that this is no more different or similar from intraethnic couples. As stated by Penny & Khoo (1996), no relationship is without differences.

What is apparent from the above narrative is the importance of non-racial factors in interethnic relationships: race should be seen as a non-primary factor (Lewis et al, 1997). I contend that perceiving interethnic desire from this perspective would legitimise interethnic pairing as equal to intraethnic coupling. By looking beyond the racial divide, and acknowledging a strong level of commitment that interethnic pairings have, social prejudice against interethnic desire would start to be challenged. As expressed by Andrew, "we want to be together. We like to be together. I don't think we are any different from other couples, mixed or not, straight or gay". This strong statement is an evidence of how important romance and emotional attachment are regardless of racial and ethnic differences.

Unlike the argument put forward by structural theorists, who suggest that interethnic desire exists due to racial hierarchy (Hwang et al, 1997), there is no indication that this exists in Sam and Andrew's relationship. From the narrative above, both Sam and Andrew regard each other as equal, and the exchange between social status and ethnicity was not a factor in their relationship. Structural theory seems to imply an economic transaction between interethnic couples, a rather negative

view that undermines the social position of ethnic minorities. Asian spouses are seen as gold diggers, while White partners are seen as having an Asian fetish (Sung, 1990). This prejudice only serves to undermine Asian/White unions, reinforcing the social norm of intraethnic pairing as the ultimate form of relationship. By overlooking emotional reasons, I contend that interracial unions would always be seen as economically and racially motivated and therefore less intimate from intraracial relationships.

Whilst Sam and Andrew did not consider their relationship to be stereotypical, they did however assume other Asian/White couples to follow the stereotype of older, dominant Whites and younger, subservient Asians. A similar finding is reported by Chow (2000), who found heterosexual Asian/White couples to pass judgement and assumption about relationship inequality of other couples. Furthermore, Chow (2000) argues that perceiving Asian spouses as unequal to their White partners only reinforces social belief of Asian inferiority and White dominance.

These findings indicate how ingrained the stereotype is, and to a degree, how it is internalised by some Asian/White couples. On one hand, Sam and Andrew's emphasis on relationship equity challenges the notion that Asian/White relationships are based on economic transaction, power imbalance, and unresolved ethnic differences. On the other hand, by creating a separation between them and 'stereotypical' couples, they followed the dominant discourse regarding Asian/White partnerships. It creates a duality between 'good' Asian/White couples from 'undesirable' Asian/White relationships.

Despite negative stereotypes and ethnic differences, Sam and Andrew are able to sustain a relationship, and they both expressed relationship satisfaction complemented by mutual affection towards each other. As indicated by other studies on heterosexual interracial couples, such as Owen (2002) and Killian (2001), strong commitment overrides the difficulties

that these couples face in White-centric Western societies. As stated by Sam and Andrew, it is love that bound them together, and they do not see themselves as any different to other couples. Their statements on love prove that Asian/White gay couples are able to form lasting, loving, and equal relationships. Indeed, love is a key element in a relationship, regardless of race, sexuality, and class differences. As stated by Sam, "without love, there won't be us".

Conclusion and Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, one must be careful to not overlook domestic abuse and power imbalance that do exist in Asian/White gay relationships. This is an area that requires more analysis, a topic that is yet to be fully developed by academics. Furthermore, the couple above came from a similar socioeconomic background (ie, middle class, tertiary educated). The effect of class, generational differences, and income disparity cannot be ignored, and it is an area that is underdeveloped within queer studies. The challenge, therefore, is to further investigate diversity that exists within Asian/White desire in the context of both Western countries as well as Asian nations.

One apparent finding is the presence of romantic love in conjunction with the ideology of pure relationship and egalitarianism. By emphasising love and relationship equality, the couple above challenge negative stereotypes of power imbalance and inequality. What is also clear in their story is how negative prejudice shaped their understanding of their own desire, as well as their view on other Asian/White couples. As stated by Han (2007), stereotype is not visible but it is everywhere. What this means is, whilst it is largely unknown whether relationship inequality operates widely in gay Asian/White desire, it is nevertheless ingrained in the gay community and presented as something 'real'. As a result, Asian/White desire is seen as less legitimate and equal than intraethnic desire. Intraethnic desire therefore is still the preferred form of

relationship for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples.

The question that needs to be asked is not why interethnic relationships exist, but why they are still perceived as undesirable even in this post-modern and post-colonial time. This social anxiety could indicate that racist attitude remains strong in Western societies. Objection to interethnic pairing, especially Asian/White coupling, is another form of racism. Whilst this rejection may not be expressed verbally, negative stereotypes that continue to exist prove that Asians are still not seen as equal to Whites, and therefore not suitable as potential spouses. In saying that, it must be noted that racist attitudes and disapproval of Asian/White desire exists in both ethnic communities and White majority. The next step is to investigate how ethnic groups perceive interethnic same-sex desire, and how interethnic gay couples position themselves in ethnic communities.

Challenging negative stereotypes can be done by focusing on non-racial elements, and acknowledging that interethnic couples are no different from intraethnic pairings, where both strive for equality, emotional satisfaction, and lasting relationship. The focus on ethnic and cultural differences only creates a binary that undermines the strength and commitment of interethnic relationships. Whilst ethnic and cultural differences cannot be ignored, it should be seen as a positive aspect instead of a hindrance and a burden. This will create a welcoming and supportive environment for interethnic couples, which will benefit them in creating and sustaining a loving and committed relationship. The challenge for society therefore is to eliminate racism and to embrace interethnic pairing as an integral part of our social existence.

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THE HIPPOCRATIC OATH, WESTERN MEDICINE, AND THE CHILDREN OF HERMES AND APHRODITE

TONY BRIFFA

Multiculturalism defines Australia and what we think of as the Australian way of life. Our beliefs, values, aspirations and sense of community are all personally influenced by our own feelings of isolation or inclusion, our own feelings of being *apart from* or *a part of* the wider community in which we live. Australian values are really, with two notable exceptions, an average of the many values that generations before us brought with them to Australia when they travelled here.

Students of philosophy or ethics will tell you that truly ethical behaviour is an average of behaviours measured across all of society, not the subjectively measured personal moral standards of a few who hold themselves out as examples of proper behaviour. The wider the diversity of the population and therefore the variation of measured behaviours, the more meaningful the average and ethical standards of that society.

By this measure, Australia should in theory be a world-leading nation, one that sets an example for others to follow. In practice we often fall short.

There are two exceptions to the rule that our Australian average of behaviour is built from our diverse cultural background. The first exception is the traditional owners of Australia, as we have not yet really begun to recognise and embrace their culture to the point where it has an impact on our overall sense of community and of community standards. This is sad for the isolation this must inevitably lead to for our traditional peoples and sad for the loss to the community of an important piece of the puzzle that binds us together as a single people with diverse and unique back-

grounds.

Sad also then that the second group in our society that has not had the opportunity it might otherwise have had to positively impact on our values is the GLBTIQ community. The same tragic consequences of this have been our own sense of isolation and the lost opportunity for societal behaviour to more closely reflect the ethical ideal.

In my own case the impact of multiculturalism upon behaviours accepted by society, and the consequences of failing to recognise and embrace this, has had a profound effect for another reason. As some of you will know, professional ethics that determine medical treatments in some instances are also influenced by wider societal beliefs and behaviours, often leading to doctors taking on a role that is as much societal constructionist as it is healer.

I am proud of my Maltese heritage. Both of my parents chose Australia as their new home during the 1950s and 1960s. They met and married here in Australia and settled down in Altona, somewhere that has been home to me my entire life. Like many traditional families of European background, they chose to share their new-found home of safety and acceptance by having children of their own. I have two sisters and three brothers all with their own children now, your typically small Maltese family!

Depending on when it was you asked my parents about their children, they would tell you they had three girls and three boys or, more lately, two girls and four boys. When I was born one of twins at the local Altona hospital,

the attending physician wasn't sure if I was a boy or a girl.

I would later learn that I was born with Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome, or PAIS, one of what are now referred to by the medical profession as intersex conditions, conditions that result in the birth of children with reproductive anatomy or sex chromosomes that are neither exclusively male or female. The initial attending physician stated that she thought I was a boy, but that I would have to be taken to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne for a specialist opinion.

At that stage of their lives, English was very much a second language for my parents, and so they understood very little of what they were being told and even less of what it all meant, they dutifully delivered me to the specialists at the Royal Children's Hospital for a second opinion. The opinion they received was that I should be surgically altered to make my genitals look like those of a girl, and that I should thereafter be raised as a girl.

Although at this point there were considerable cultural differences and a lack of medical understanding to be overcome, my parents had heard all they needed to realise that none of this sounded right to them and told doctors that they believed God had made me the way I was for a reason, and it was up to God to decide what should happen from here, not doctors. They took me home, untouched, trusting that their own cultural and religious beliefs and innate knowledge of what is best for their child would be all they needed to guide me through life.

As things turned out they would have been right too, that the initial feeling of the delivering doctor that I was a boy was right, had it not been for the fact that the specialists at the Royal Children's were not going to leave things as they were. They turned up at my parents' house later that night, arguing that God worked through doctors by giving them the knowledge to do what is right in cases like mine. Unfortunately, medical interpretations

of the wishes of God can be wrong. Keep this thought as we will return to it and my story in a while.

The history of ethics is very much entwined with that of religion. It must be so as to deny that religion had any place in moulding our current social framework would be very naïve. If we talk of the influence of religion, we are not talking solely of Christianity, but of the many religions that have contributed to our modern understanding of ethics and society.

Those of you who have studied the history of modern ethics will realise the very important role the early Greek philosophers played in the development of modern conceptual understandings of ethics. In turn, many of their philosophical points of view were influenced by the part Greek Gods played in the social cultures of the time.

At this point, it will be helpful to turn to the Hippocratic Oath, the oath taken by a doctor that binds them to observe the code of behaviour and practice observed by Hippocrates, a Greek physician often called the father of modern medicine. The Oath is commonly cited in brief as "First do no harm", but it is actually more involved than that.

The original version of the oath translated from Greek starts:

I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panacea and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfil according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant.

Apollo was, amongst other things, god of healing power. Apollo is in good company when swearing this before all the Greek Gods as amongst them is Hermes, god of science and Aphrodite, Goddess of beauty and love.

The modern version most often used now is not made oath before the Greek Gods as witnesses. In its simplified form, however, the Hippocratic Oath warns of the evils of over-

treatment and therapeutic neglect and contains a reminder that a doctor is still a member of society with all the obligations and responsibilities this entails.

Returning to my story and the comments doctors made to my parents about their doing God's work, nowhere in either version of the Hippocratic oath is this written. In fact we find in the modern version of the oath, "Above all, I must not play at God".

Interesting also, that the original word for the term intersex was hermaphrodite, coming from the Greek Hermaphroditus. Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite all before whom the Hippocratic Oath is sworn.

Fable has it that the Nymph Salmacis was so enamoured of Hermaphroditus that she wished "the twain might become one flesh". Her wish was granted by the gods and the two became one. Fable also has it that all persons who bathed in the fountain Salmacis in Caria became hermaphrodites.

People with intersex conditions have been recorded in mythology, religious texts and more recently in medical and scientific record. Angels are said to be not exclusively of either sex. Some Shaman, healers of the Mayan and other early advanced civilisations, were said to be chosen from those born neither male nor female because of the special healing power they were believed to possess.

How is it then that people who have long existed, been accepted, even revered in some cultures, are seen as something less than worthy by so-called educated western doctors? How is it that these same doctors can swear an oath before God, the beloved child of whom they are content to medically modify with surgery because it suits them to do so now that medical science is capable?

My parents were right when they believed they had a boy, a boy for whom the Gods had a special place. Their religious beliefs and cultural instincts that led them to believe my

path in life should be something for God to decide were clearly the better choice for me, but regrettably not the path my life was to follow.

The medical profession was able to convince my parents that the correct path to take was to remove any part of my anatomy that might offend when raising a child as a girl. They convinced my parents that they knew better than to trust I would find my way in life without their intervention, something that my parents and I regret to this day.

Many now adult children and their parents for whom these decisions have been made also regret the outcome of similar decisions as their lives became a series of seemingly endless surgeries, medical check-ups, and roles as medical curiosities to both photograph and put on display for medical students. I am sure this was not what the Gods had in mind for the child of Hermes and Aphrodite.

Culture is so much more than being of non-english speaking background, so much more than being a person indigenous to a particular place or region, so much more than skin colour, sex, sexual identity, sexual orientation, or even genetics as a whole. Culture is a rich mix of our collective experiences that has the potential to create a society of balance, acceptance and value.

As we have heard, part of the Hippocratic Oath is a reminder to the medical profession that they are still a part of society. For the medical profession to be truly a part of society, they need to embrace the cultural differences that makes up society as a whole, that decides what is truly ethical behaviour, and apply this to the professional ethics that guides them as physicians.

The importance of administering only that medical aid needed for the health and well being of their patients, seems to be getting lost in the modern age of advances of medical technology and technique. Doctors seem to be stepping over that fine line where thera-

peutic value is less important than development of technical skills, the very line the Hippocratic Oath warns should not be crossed.

In looking to increasing technical skill as an answer for social considerations, it seems doctors have designs of "playing at god" rather than trust that these children of Hermes and Aphrodite are of God's design. Again, the Hippocratic Oath warns against this.

A medical professional I know once rationalised the objections against medical intervention on people with intersex conditions by stating they believed it was people with intersex conditions who had poor surgical outcomes that were dissatisfied. They believed that better surgical outcomes would reduce the number of complaints about medical intervention.

This demonstrates, very regrettably in my view, that medical professionals are being encouraged to turn to better technical outcomes rather than to consider other cultural solutions that exist elsewhere in the world. It seems it is perfectly reasonable for those cultures to turn to western medicine for solutions, but not the reverse.

It is not just the medical profession that needs to look outside narrowly defined cultural expectations to ensure society is allowed to prosper for the realisation of all hopes and for the cultures of all to be included. People who make and enforce laws, and people who use those laws to achieve outcomes, need to make sure that they also look outside their own cultural beliefs.

Society is made up of many cultural backgrounds and attempts to subsume these for the sake of expedience or advantage against the wishes and at the expense of these groups, is just another form of minority oppression. Likewise, we need to ensure we respect the differing experiences of other groups, and ensure we speak taking these views into account rather than on their behalf or using their experiences as our own.

I mentioned earlier that I am proud of my Maltese heritage, I am also proud of my intersex heritage. As a heritage that has a very long history, I believe having an intersex condition is nothing to be ashamed of despite the fact that some would have had my parents and I believe it, as they still to this day try to convince others.

People with intersex conditions have only relatively recently found our own voice and work to ensure that the social and medical needs of those with the conditions have a voice that is understood in its own right. It is often the cultural examples of other societies rather than western understanding of intersex conditions that is the key to achieving the best way to approach treatment and so it would have been in my case.

Part of introducing these other cultural concepts into western society is accepting that there are people born who in some way bridge the so-called divide between male and female. Many other groups in the GLBTIQ community would benefit from wider understanding of this concept.

I think this is a much more valuable role for the children of Hermes and Aphrodite than the one the western medical profession currently has in mind for us.

Author Note

Tony Briffa is the current sixth term President of the AIS Support Group Australia; the leading advocacy group for people with intersex conditions in Australia. He has previously held other positions on the support group's committee, including that of Secretary. Tony represents the intersex community on Government and other advisory committees and was instrumental in various legislative changes in Australia including anti-discrimination legislation providing protection for those with intersex conditions.

Tony has wide experience as an advocate for individuals and families affected by intersex

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'LIVING IN HARMONY WITH YOUR CONTRADICTIONS': LESBIAN HEALTH IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

ADELE MURDOLO

Audre Lorde was a writer and poet, a lesbian and the daughter of Caribbean immigrants, living in the United States. She died in 1992 after a long struggle living with breast cancer. Lorde left many legacies, among which is a recognition of how important it is not to negate any part of ourselves – she strongly advocated that for those of us who recognise our multiple and overlapping, intersecting identities, it was crucial for our survival and wellbeing to keep these all alive, and as she put it, keep them “out of jail”. In a 1981 interview, Lorde stated:

There's always someone asking you to underline one piece of yourself – whether it's *Black, woman, mother, dyke, teacher*, etc. – because that's the piece that they need to key in to. They want to dismiss everything else. But once you do that, then you've lost because then you become acquired or bought by that particular essence of yourself, and you've denied yourself all of the energy that it takes to keep all those others in jail. Only by learning to live in harmony with your contradictions can you keep it all afloat (Lorde cited in Hammond, 1981).

Lorde resisted being labelled according to a one-dimensional, limited understanding of her identity and life. She was a lesbian, but not just a lesbian. She was a Black immigrant woman, but never just that.

In this paper I want to explore how in the Australian context, Lorde's comments might be relevant to us – and how, in our multicultural, multilingual, and queer lives, we might resist thinking of ourselves as just one thing or the other. In particular, I want to apply this thinking to lesbian health and wellbeing, focusing on the ways that as lesbians from im-

migrant backgrounds, we are defined through research and knowledge about lesbian health.

It's important to note first that there is not a great deal of research conducted on lesbian health in Australia. The studies that have been done are generally done on a relatively small scale and using a minimum of resources. However, there is enough research done, drawing also on studies conducted in the United States, Canada and England, to allow us to start making some conclusions about lesbian health status (Meads et. al., 2007; O'Hanlan, 1995; Solarz, 1999). This is a positive move.

Thanks to the hard work that has been done so far, we are now becoming more knowledgeable about the health-care needs of lesbians and same sex attracted women, as distinct from those of heterosexual women. We know more about the health effects of homophobia and heterosexism, and we now have data about specific health issues in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, parenting, mental health, and drug use, just to name a few (see for example the range of articles cited in Leonard, 2002).

In relation to health care, research has shown that there is an unacceptable level of homophobia and heterosexism in the health care system, and that this has had an impact on lesbian health. In the mid 1990s for example, Kate O'Hanlan wrote about the pervasive anti-gay and lesbian attitudes that were dominant among health care professionals in the United States and showed the effects that this had on lesbian health status. O'Hanlan (1995) argued that due to homophobia and lack of under-

standing and knowledge about lesbian issues, health professionals were prone to misdiagnosis and mistreatment. She showed up serious biases and prejudices held by health professionals at this time, along with a significant level of homophobia and institutionalised discrimination that was levelled at gay and lesbian health professionals and trainees. Moreover, she noted that these negative attitudes were picked up by patients, who in these circumstances were often reluctant to disclose their sexual identity.

In the Australian context too, Ruth McNair (2003a; 2003b) has pointed out that lesbians' experiences of discrimination and homophobia, both in and outside of the health care system, have impacted on our health care behaviour. For example, lesbians avoid routine health care and screening, or tend not to disclose their sexual identity, even though research has shown that they would prefer to do so. As a result, non-heterosexual women tend to access health screening services less often, delay treatment and are less likely to have a regular GP. For example, McNair (2003a) has shown that while lesbians have similar rates to non-lesbians of cervical dysplasia, or human papilloma virus, they are less likely to have pap smears.

In the area of ageing, Jo Harrison (2001) has shown that aged care facilities view sexual identity as a 'private matter' and therefore do not generally ensure that health care is adapted to be appropriate to lesbians using these services. Such invisibility in the system results in inappropriate care.

With regard to sexual health, McNair (2003a; 2005) has pointed out that despite common stereotypes, lesbians are at risk for sexually transmissible infections at a similar rate as non-lesbians, and that the rate increases as the number of sexual partners increases. These findings are corroborated in a 2005 United States study (Koh et al, 2005). In an interesting study on sexual health, Hillier (2005; 2006) has alerted us to the complex relationship between the sexual identity of

young women who are same sex attracted, including lesbians, and their sexual attraction and behaviour, which has significant implications for their sexual health. Specifically, this research indicates that same sex attracted women are more likely to experience heterosexual sex and are at higher risk for sexually transmissible infections (see also Richters et. al, 2005).

The lesbian baby boom in Australia has sparked some very interesting research on parenting. The Lesbian and Gay Families Project for example (see McNair et. al, 2002) has shown that lesbian families are often formed following long and well-considered decision-making processes that take into account a whole range of issues including those relating to the wellbeing of the child, low risk insemination, and legal concerns. Lesbians planning families anticipated a range of associated difficulties such as low level of family and professional support. On the other hand, lesbians who were already parenting, and who disclosed their sexual identity to health professionals, reported good professional support and relatively little discrimination. More recent research (McNair et. el., 2008) has shown that lesbian parents make careful and strategic choices about whether to disclose their sexuality to health practitioners, with a focus on ensuring the best outcome for their children's health. The decision to disclose was contextual and located on a continuum of decision-making.

The area of mental health is an important one for lesbians, given our experiences of discrimination and homophobia. As McNair (2003a) has noted, there is a relatively higher rate of mental illness among lesbian and bisexual women in Australia, with the levels of reported depression, anxiety disorders and suicide ideation two to three times higher than among women in the general population. As O'Hanlan (1995) has shown too in the US context, LGBT people are twice as likely to experience stress-related health problems. It has been noted that use of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs is higher among lesbians than among women in

the general population, and has been associated with experiences of homophobic discrimination (Hillier et. al., 2003; Richters et. al, 2005).

I have presented a very brief outline of current research findings, just so that I could draw a sketch of lesbian health – how we understand it, what we understand the most salient issues to be and how, according to this research, we should go about improving the situation. In this regard, researchers have advocated strategies such as better education on sexuality issues for health practitioners, an increase in health promotion on preventative health issues targeted specifically for lesbians, some with specific strategies targeting women who are geographically isolated, and the development of government and other policies that reduce discrimination and homophobia (Edwards, 2005; Jones et al, 2002; McNair, 2003a; 2003b, 2008).

All of this is positive and I would fully support these initiatives. But there is something missing here that draws me back to Audre Lorde's comments. This research and these strategies that focus on lesbians as lesbians ask you to underline one piece of yourself, the part that is lesbian, putting aside those parts of you that are something else. For me, the "something else" is my culture, my languages, my class background, my experience of being a daughter of immigrants, my experiences of race discrimination and racism – in other words my multi-faceted identities and experiences that all intersect with my experiences of being lesbian and my identity that is lesbian too, and that makes up who I am. I can't separate one off from the other.

Research on lesbian health in the Australian context, and in fact almost all of the research I have cited, has tended to be conducted in large part with anglo-Australian or US, English-speaking, middle-class, highly educated women. Methodologically, it has mostly been conducted through written surveys requiring a high level of English literacy, and some requiring a good knowledge of the internet and

email as it has been administered on-line. While it has been important research and has come up with some very interesting findings, it has excluded a great many number of lesbians from immigrant, refugee and/or working class communities who may not have completed a tertiary education.

This has interesting effects. One is that in the process of rendering 'lesbian health' visible, this research simultaneously renders lesbians from immigrant and refugee and/or working class communities invisible. A good example of this was demonstrated at a lesbian health forum I attended in 2004, which showcased recent research conducted in Australia. One of the points of discussion toward the end of the forum centred on the fact that the research subjects in all of the research presented at the forum was conducted among highly educated women. The researchers and audience members were asking themselves why this was the case. I was surprised to hear that one of the theories muted, and which remained unquestioned, was that lesbians therefore must be better educated than women in the general community. A member of the audience suggested that perhaps university created better conditions for lesbians to 'come out', and that's why there are more university educated lesbians.

In this discussion, as in the research, lesbians who do not have a university education are rendered almost invisible. Does this mean that if we, the researchers, don't see them, that they don't exist? Wouldn't it be more constructive to ask ourselves what it is about our research methodology that makes it possible for educated women to respond - to have their voices heard and thus register themselves as agents in lesbian health and wellbeing thinking? Conversely, what is it about our research that writes out the agency and subjectivity of lesbians who are working class, not English speaking, and who do not happen to have a university education?

A second effect of excluding non-dominant lesbians from the research is that it constructs

lesbians as having a compartmentalised identity. When those of us who acknowledge our other identities of culture, language and class read this research, we can only find in it the part of ourselves that is lesbian. There is no sign of the part of us that is also proud to be migrant, non-anglo and multilingual. We can't know about the effects of racism in the health system, about racialised violence or race discrimination in the workplace, or how these intersect with homophobic violence and discrimination. This research is about lesbians only. The other parts, as Audre Lorde has observed, are jailed.

There are some notable recent exceptions to the tendency to exclude research subjects from immigrant and refugee communities. The findings of the 2005 *Writing themselves in* report is based on written surveys administered to young people, 21% of whom were from 'CALD' backgrounds. Accordingly, some of the issues that arose from the survey responses reflected their 'multiple layers of identity' (Hillier, 2005). However, the written English-language survey methodology does disengage subjects who do not have English literacy skills which is reflected by low numbers of respondents who were born overseas in non-English speaking countries (between 7 and 10%).

Another notable exception is the most recent research conducted about lesbian parents' negotiation within the health system (McNair, 2008), which includes in-depth interviews with a group of research subjects that was economically, geographically and culturally diverse. The in-depth interviewing methodology used has the benefit of both engaging subjects who are not comfortable with written English, as well as the potential for conducting interviews in languages other than English if that is a preference of the subject. However, the article itself does not articulate the complexities of these diverse subjects' experiences within the health system as lesbians with multiple identities. Again, the research is about lesbians only.

Conducting research in an area as marginalised as lesbian health is a difficult, challenging and often unrewarded task. Researchers are working within limited resources and do not have the luxury of engaging diverse and hitherto disengaged research subjects, or of conducting multilingual interviews and then analysing them in diverse cultural contexts. It is understandable that some of the invisibility I have discussed above stems from the vexed issues arising from resource limitation. However, this is not the whole story.

Some progress can be made by reviewing our theoretical and methodological approaches to the conduct and analysis of research, which can help us first, ask different questions that will be more likely to draw out research subjects' experiences of racism, race discrimination and cultural diversity for example, and second, analyse the answers we receive in a way that more readily recognises these issues as relevant to lesbian experiences.

In addition, there is some potential for overcoming resource limitations by forming constructive, ethical and mutually beneficial partnerships between researchers and the communities that are being researched. Through such collaborations, limited resources cannot be increased in the short term, but they can be utilised more effectively by sharing the different skills, networks and knowledge that each partner brings to the project. Such partnerships can build the capacity of both researchers and researched communities to collaboratively explore the complex, diverse and potentially transforming knowledge that is needed to improve the health of our whole community.

Author Note

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ing reproductive and sexual health, Australian feminism, violence against women, issues for women in immigration detention and media representations of second-generation immigrant women.

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'PLEASE EXPLAIN': IS IT THAT HARD TO LINK HOMOPHOBIA AND RACISM?

PHONG NGUYEN

First of all, I would like to pay tribute to the first people of the land, and I also would like to pay tribute as a social worker to the Vietnamese community as well as other communities. And I would like to pay tribute to all the young people who have committed suicide because of who they were. Unfortunately in some cases the only time they could say who they were was through a note after they had died, to say that they were gay or lesbian: the only way they could show their truth, their identity, was through death.

When I was asked to reflect on the links between racism and homophobia in Australian history, culture and politics, for some unknown reason the image of Pauline Hanson and her famous question "Please Explain" came to my mind. To me Pauline Hanson's words, "Please Explain", reminds me of xenophobic people. Based on the unknown, they are fearful and hateful towards certain people. Perhaps one of the biggest sins of racism is the failure to open up, to be objective, and to accept the differences and diversity in people.

I would like to share with you a personal experience of racism that I had more than 20 years ago as a university student. Being a refugee from Vietnam, I was very proud of the fact that I made it to the University of Melbourne. Like many other tertiary students I looked for a part-time job to support myself whilst studying. I went to a pub in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy. In hindsight, it was a big mistake since I did not know the area was well-known for its issue with migrants in the Ministry of Housing and the Aboriginal alcoholics. I walked naively into a pub and asked a huge man behind the bar very politely, "Sir, I am a

university student and I'm looking for part-time job. Can you help me?" He just looked at me and said, "No yellow monkeys here thank you". I was so stunned by the reply that all I could say was, "Thank you sir", and left.

Not until that night as I lay in bed did the impact of the event really hit me. I asked myself what did I do to deserve such a rebuke or comment. Was it a crime to ask for a job? I did not beg him for alms, I asked for a job didn't I? What was so wrong with that? Didn't I say to him I was a university student? Why didn't he respect me for that? How could a person be so rude and cruel to another person who did nothing wrong to him. The questions kept rolling on and on in my head until I wished to scream. Then it dawned on me that it had nothing to do with what I did but with who I was.

Homophobia is just another form of racism in my view since it manifests exactly the same way as racism. It may hurt even more because you can be from the same race, the same country, the same culture, the same language and the same religion with the person who hates and discriminates against you. You are discriminated against just because you are different in sexual preference, no matter what great or good work you have done or who you have been for other people. You are painted as worthless, diseased, dangerous, immoral and worse than other human beings. This is worse when people who claim to be the men and women of God condemn and ostracise you. As an ex-Jesuit who trained to become a priest, I have been horrified by the treatment and comments of religious leaders

in our community toward homosexual people. It is fundamentally a contradiction to profess God is for all mankind and then turn around and call homosexual people as people of evil. If God is the source of all living things and all that come from him are good, then by creating people with different sexual preferences this must be part of his goodness, plan and providence. To deny and to ostracise sexually diverse people is to deny and ostracise God himself.

As the Head of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, I'm proud to support the cultural diversity within our ethnic and mainstream Australian communities. For us, each and every culture on Earth does reflect the humanity that God has created and sexual diversity has always existed. Sexual diversity exists in every human society regardless whether it is Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim and we must all accept and respect that reality of our humanity. Unlike our Australian brothers and sisters, our multicultural gay and lesbian brethren suffer and face many obstacles, discrimination and even persecution in their home countries and communities for who they are. Australia has become a safe haven and free world for many of them thanks to our more liberal view and acceptance of sexual diversity. However, even in Australia, many of them continue to suffer in silence in their own ethnic communities due to cultural or religious intolerance of homosexuality. As I said before, homophobia can be even worse than racism when you are being discriminated against by your own people. For me and for the Ethnic Communities Council, cultural diversity must genuinely mean inclusivity and it must include people from sexually diverse cultures. That is why I'm here today as the Ethnic Community Council of Victoria Chairperson, to recognise and to embrace my multicultural gay, lesbian, and queer brothers and sisters as equals and with genuine respect.

As we reflect on Australia today, we must not let ourselves forget the fact that compared to many other countries in the world, gay and

lesbian people have achieved much in terms of tolerance, acceptance, legislative recognition and freedom of expression thanks to the persistent sufferings and sacrifices our gay and lesbian forebears have done even though there is still a long way to go and a lot more work to be done yet. Sexual discrimination is still strong and very much alive in this country as it was 200 years ago. People such as George Pell, John Howard, Peter Costello, Pauline Hanson and Philip Jenson are the concrete and constant reminders of how much more needs to be done until sexual discrimination is completely wiped out from our Australian society.

In conclusion, I leave you with one particular quote from the Dalai Lama: "If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping with a mosquito". May all of us feel empowered by such a remark and never give up on the human race that you are equally given by God, and if you don't believe in God, at least by being born a human being.

Author Note

Mr. Phong Nguyen, Chairperson of the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria, Vice-President of the Vietnamese Community in Australia and the President of the Vietnamese Community in Victoria, arrived in Australia as a young refugee from Vietnam in 1979. Shortly after his arrival, Phong joined the Jesuits and became the first Vietnamese Jesuit in Australia in 1982. He left the Order in 1986 "to continue his vocation of service as a lay person" as he put it. Since then, Phong has been leading an active and a passionate life dedicated to fair, just, humane and multicultural Australian society.

Graduated from the University of Melbourne with a B.A, Grad. Dip in Linguistics and a M.A in Applied Linguistics, Phong ended up working as a welfare worker and a director of a welfare centre for more than 20 years up until now. His fearless critics on government's bad policies and his passionate advocacy for the disadvantaged people and for a multicultural

Australia have earned him the respect and support from all quarters including that of the government.

Mr. Phong Nguyen is the current advisor to the State Government of Victoria in many important areas such as: health services, drugs, gambling, interfaith, multiculturalism and social policies.

Phong has been awarded with the Centenary Medal of Australia in 2001, City of Greater Dandenong Media and People Choice's Citizen of the Year in 2000 and the First Australia's Ethnic Youth of the Year in 1986. Most recently, he has been appointed the Australia Day Ambassador in 2007 by the Australia Day Council in Victoria.

Phong is a cricket tragic and a former umpire of the game. He grows and teaches other people about the arts of growing bonsai in his spare times. Phong is married to Karen and has two beautiful sons Damien Amadeus and Vivald Sabastian, both of whom he hopes will fulfil his unfulfilled dream of becoming a real cricketer and a classical pianist. Fortunately, both boys love their cricket and hate practising their piano!!!



'BELIEVE WHAT YOU WILL, BUT THIS IS THE WAY IT IS': RELIGIONS AND THE SPIRITUALITY OF GLBTIQ PEOPLE

RABBI JONATHAN KEREN BLACK

Dedicated to Andy Hintz

A crystal has many facets. Imagine, if you will, that there is some complex thing or being inside it – perhaps a beautiful butterfly. Perhaps, indeed, it is the truth!

Each facet is equal in size and shape, yet no one view can see it all, and the view through one facet is either subtly or vastly different from every other one. Through one facet the butterfly's wings are so thin as to be almost invisible, from another, what you can see seems black – but from the facets above it, the wings seem to fill the crystal and be imbued with iridescent rainbows of colour.

Each facet might be considered a religious, or indeed, a world view. Of course each religion has a variety of facets, or views, from rigid fundamentalist to open and liberal, adjacent to each other. Some believe they have the only view of the truth – others recognise that they have a partial view, but many others also do.

To understand the 'truth' better, whether it be a butterfly, climate change or human sexuality, we need to seek more views, a greater understanding, listening and sharing and learning, reading, hearing, empathising from as wide a variety of other viewpoints as we can to the one we start out with. Unless religions understand the complexity of truth, we shake in dread of what they can do. But when they interpret it as I have tried to, amazing things can happen. Religion can be transformative - a guide and support and stimulus to life and spirituality, to love and respect that is different to our own, instead of measuring everything by one standard and

chastising all who fall short – or different.

It comes as no surprise to you that there are those in all traditions who state, categorically, that queers are an abomination to God. My feeling is that those who claim to know God's will, especially when it leads to ostracising and denigrating others, are themselves a bit of an abomination!

Progressive Judaism

I have to explain that I do not represent the entirety of Judaism. I am a progressive Jew and a progressive Rabbi. There are many within the Jewish community who would deny my legitimacy as a Rabbi, and more who would be horrified that I am speaking here, and especially because of the permissive message I want to bring.

Progressive Judaism is a subset of Jews - it would probably be more helpful to describe them as Liberal although looking at the political scene here in Australia perhaps not! Maybe then modern Jews trying to live a Jewish life in a modern world. You may think that this is an anachronism or a contradiction but it is not at all. Judaism is a 4,000 year old tradition which has gone through continual change and evolution as humanity has learned and developed and indeed Jews have often been at the forefront of that development.

Although a progressive Rabbi, I would even have to be careful in claiming that I represent progressive Judaism since Progressive Judaism is based on the individual making educated choices for themselves and therefore there are at least as many expressions of progressive

Judaism as progressive Jews. In fact this can be said of Judaism altogether and you may have heard the phrase: "2 Jews, 3 opinions!"

Statistics of Judaism Today

There are less than 20,000,000 Jews worldwide today including 5,000,000 in Israel. I believe that not more than 10% are truly Orthodox, so you might find 2,000,000 Jews who subscribe to orthodox beliefs and 18,000,000 who do not. Australia's Jewish population is about 100,000. That means that not more than 10%, 10,000, are really orthodox inclined, the rest, say 90,000 here, are likely to be more open-minded and consider themselves a part of wider society. They will be concerned less with ritual prayer and keeping kosher and hopefully more with justice and social issues. All Jews would agree that values such as a just society are key goals of Judaism but there would be much argument both about what that just society would look like and how to get there.

Evolving Judaism

There's no question that Judaism changes and evolves continuously. The insights and prayers and practices of the patriarchs and matriarchs of ancient times would be entirely different to the prayers and rituals of Jews today. To quote from the Affirmations of Liberal Judaism (2006): 'Judaism has never stood still. It has always moved forward, sometimes slowly, sometimes faster. Its history is one of continuity and change. We affirm the dynamic development character of our Jewish religious tradition'. Judaism has been described as a slow revolution, an image I like and recognise. The world is certainly not good enough as it is and our task is to change it for the better, to work towards perfection - though of course we will never get there! So just picture a huge bus in the desert sands, the sands of time. On the bus travels Judaism, the Jews of our times filling the inside or somewhere nearby. Behind it is a rope onto which cling some traditionalists and rabbis holding it back, declaring that it

has never moved, it is not moving and it will never move, and out in front stretches another rope with activists and other rabbis heaving and pulling and insisting that it can move, it will move, it always has moved and indeed it has no point if it is stuck forever. Pulling from the front is where I would place many of our progressive Jews and rabbis and that is where I like to see myself. It's not an easy task to keep the bus moving, but we cannot give up and we are reassured by the evidence that it is moving forward and always has done so even if not as fast as some of us would like.

So on the question of sexual orientation and Judaism even within our progressive stream, you will find some, hopefully not too many, who will still retain elements of overt prejudice. You will find more who will say I've nothing against homosexuals but how can they be rabbis, and I'll say more about these later. Those people are sitting on the bus. What I hope to present is the mainstream thinking of the progressive rabbinate today. To quote from Australian-born Rabbi Rodney Mariner (1997), the convenor of the Reform Jewish Court in Britain in an article published in Australia: "the issue of the Jewish homosexual is indeed a suitable case for treatment - it is not however the homosexuals who need the treatment but those heterosexuals who are still unable to confront the primitive nature of their own homophobic prejudices and thereby begin to overcome them" (1997, 55).

I want to confirm that from a liberal Jewish viewpoint, all people are created equal, male, female, transgender, queer, straight, bi - all in the image of God - whatever that means - and all human beings are entitled to have their spirituality recognised, fed, nurtured, just as they are entitled to other freedoms, which are as essential as food and drink and shelter. Our spiritual self is part of who we are as human beings.

First Jewish Gay Congregation

In 1976 the first gay congregation was admit-

ted to a synagogue movement anywhere in the world and you won't be surprised to learn that it was in San Francisco. In that same year a study group was established by the Jewish Reform Movement in Britain leading to a publication in 1982 of a small but groundbreaking booklet written by a GP and counselor, Dr Wendy Greengross, called *Jewish and Homosexual*. The introduction of this book starts off by stating that 'Jewish tradition prohibits homosexual relations. That is a basic statement which cannot be denied'. Well since that time I have heard attempts to deny it but let me remind you what it says in Leviticus, in Hebrew as in translation; "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a female, it is an abhorrence". The warnings are strong and threaten not just the individuals but the society, promising that all the people will be cast out of their land. The prohibition is repeated a couple of chapters later, this time with the punishments spelt out - they shall both be put to death.

It seems perfectly clear, and I can't see much mileage in arguing that that is not what the text is saying, but before discarding the whole thing, ripping up the entire Bible, let me just say that the chapter that comes between these two verses contains some of the most powerful and ethically elevating commandments of the Torah, and it's considered to be the pinnacle and core: "When you harvest your fields you must leave some for the poor and for the stranger. Do not deal deceitfully or falsely with each other. Do not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind. Favour neither the poor nor the rich. Judge your neighbour fairly, and love your neighbour as you love yourself". Just a selection of ideas to be proud of.

Selective Reading of the Text

So how do I deal with this mixture? I am going to pick and choose. Many people, many Jews, cannot understand how I can do that, so let me briefly explain. Traditionally most Jews have assumed that the Torah should be read literally; they have accepted what it says,

that it was dictated by God to Moses at the top of Mt Sinai. Therefore, it is 'God's word in every respect so it must be true in every respect'. So, they say, you can't just arbitrarily pick some bits and reject others (though in fact the Rabbis have always found ways of doing just that, whilst maintaining the position that it was indeed 'true and unchangeable!'). This is where progressive Judaism, a result of the enlightenment and wider education and understanding of the world, sciences, psychology, takes a significantly different approach, hinted at already, it should be said, by some of the greatest medieval commentators, like Maimonides and Ibn Ezra.

Torah, we argue, was not dictated by God. It was written by humans inspired indeed by the question: 'what does God require of us, and how should we live', but ultimately set into their own world views and times and needs and prejudices of some 2,500-4,000 years ago, and not surprisingly in many respects quite different to our own. Since their context is so different and itself stretched over many generations and situations, it would indeed be more astonishing if it held no internal contradictions and no statements that we today found problematic. So for us, Torah does hold many core truths, whether planted or inspired through some process by some being beyond our understanding which we call 'God', or whether discovered through insight and thousands of generations of human experience but all our own work, or some combination of the two. Insistence on provision for all the disadvantaged in society or equal access to the law for all are shining examples of the core and universal values of Judaism.

But equally Torah contains many statements that have not stood the test of time, like the instruction to kill a rebellious son. We can understand the threat value this may have had, but we can't accept that it came from God. Rather we emphasize that all people are created in the image of God. In the very first creation story, we're reminded that male and female were created by God at the same moment and thus equal (Genesis 1:27), and it's

also worth noting that in Jewish tradition, every child is born perfect. We have no concept of original sin. So to state it again clearly, I do not accept that God wrote the entire Torah. To my understanding it was written by people, my ancestors, and indeed the ancestors of at least Christianity and Islam as well, trying to address the question of how can we create a better world. Some of it is elevated, insightful, valuable and worth preserving and indeed applying more 'religiously' (if I may use the term). Some is certainly worthy of study as it gives us an insight and understanding of those times and concerns but it must be utterly rejected as any framework for society or life. We must use our education, insight and understanding to decide which is which, at least for our own times, recognising that our own decisions may in time be questioned and reversed by those who come after us.

Homosexuality and Lesbianism

At this point let me say that Torah is only concerned with male homosexual acts. For example one of the well-known stories of Genesis tells of the men of Sodom who rise in riot when they are prevented from having sex with some men who are visiting (Genesis 19:5), and this is the origin of the term 'sodomy'. Lesbianism is only treated later and more lightly by the Talmud as a 'mere obscenity', with a prohibition derived from an instruction 'not to be like the Egyptians or the Canaanites'. Explaining this to mean that Israelites shouldn't practice lesbianism is at least clearly suggesting its widespread experience at least in those two cultures, and probably acknowledging it amongst the Israelite women as well.

What was the Real Problem with Homosexuality?

So why were the authors so strongly against male homosexuality. Put simply I suggest they had charge of a small tribe that they wanted to develop as rapidly as possible into a

large tribe. They had plans to conquer the land of Canaan. Let's visualise the situation. The Canaanites were an agricultural society, a subsistence economy. They planted the land, harvested and survived. The land could only support a certain number of them so they achieved a balanced population with the adults working the fields to support themselves, their children and their elders. One simple and effective way of preventing too many children upsetting this balance was to engage in sex during menstruation, so Torah specifically prohibits this method of contraception. Eventually the Israelite regulations developed to prohibit sex also in the 7 days after the period finishes - the intended effect is that the couples should jump enthusiastically upon each other at precisely the point in her cycle when the wife is most fertile. Since other releases such as masturbation and homosexuality were also prohibited, this was a highly successful strategy! The Israelites did succeed in conquering Canaan and those who observe the laws still today have a remarkable fertility record with many ultra-orthodox families producing 10 or more children!

'Even if you are that way, don't do it!'

There's been a line taken within traditional Jewish teaching that 'Israelites do not engage in sodomy or bestiality'. Most traditional teachings that do acknowledge that there may be one or two Jewish men with homosexual inclinations will simply instruct them that they must not engage in the prohibited act but should nevertheless marry and procreate 'as God commanded'. So the need to enlarge the Jewish population is, I believe, the main reason for the emphasis on heterosexual monogamous couples and coupling.

Struggling against Generations of Prejudice

We now have over 3,000 years of tradition to contend with. As Wendy Greengross points out, Jewish grandparents talk ceaselessly

about their grandchildren until those without descendants could scream, and unmarried young men and women are infuriated by the well-meant 'Please God by you' wishes bestowed upon them at family weddings and engagements. At life cycle events such as circumcision and barmitzvah, the traditional blessing includes the wish for a Jewish marriage. What was an emphasis on heterosexuality has become a prejudice against any other expressions of sexual identity. This works against the concept of equality that we would emphasize based on the statement that all are created in the image of God as I stated earlier. But quoting again from the article by Rodney Mariner; "while Judaism is predicated on a heterosexual family unit, to those who can set aside their prejudices it's clear that a homosexual relationship has the same capacity for stability, growth and the affirmation of God and God's creation as a heterosexual relationship"(1997, p 49).

So how then are we working today to change this damaging and deeply ingrained prejudice? We are talking about the issues in rabbinic and in movement meetings and within congregations. The little Wendy Greengross booklet that I've mentioned was one of the first to state clearly that Jews should accept and welcome homosexuality and homosexuals into the community. Today, there are gay Jewish communities and groups including a gay men's group in Melbourne and one for lesbians, and groups in Sydney. We are trying to ensure that our congregations are more welcoming to people regardless of their orientation, either as individuals or as couples or as a group.

An American Visitor and Resources

It is not always so easy. I was in email contact when I worked in Britain, with an American transgendered person. She flew to our area on business several times a year and was looking for a community to come along to. When a large powerful deep-voiced woman appeared one evening, the 10 or so regulars at the service were evidently quite uncomfort-

able. After the service I introduced her by name and said how pleased I was that she was visiting us. She took the opportunity to talk briefly about her gay community in America and people were polite but I can't say they were really very friendly. She did come back another time on a later visit and we stayed in touch, but she told me she felt unwelcome and had subsequently gone to London's gay congregation. I was sad about that but not surprised. I don't know that we could have handled it any better.

An orthodox colleague of mine here in Melbourne has a son. He is gay. Sadly, this has to remain a great secret. By contrast, I have just learned about an American couple called Agnes and Rabbi Erwin Herman. They had a son, Jeff. I guess that Jeff was gay. In his memory, his parents established a virtual resource centre, open to anyone around the globe. But it is not hovering in some virtual void. It is part of an Institute at the Hebrew Union College which trains progressive Rabbis and Jewish Educators across America and in Israel. The name of the Institute is 'The Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation'. The Institute, it says on its web homepage, (<http://www.huc.edu/ijso>) is 'driven by Jewish religious values and the spiritual quest for holiness... these values call us to achieve complete inclusion, integration and equal standing of LGBT people in our congregations and communities.' As it says, we see 'traditional perspectives on homosexuality to be products of bygone sensibilities and attitudes that have been superseded by more knowledge and understanding of human sexuality and gender. The movement accepts gay and lesbian Jews as fully participating members in its congregations, ordains gay men and lesbians as rabbis and cantors, supports civil rights and civil marriage for gays and lesbians, and affirms the value of same gender relationships.'

I was delighted to find there a blessing for transitioning genders, written to elevate the hormone therapy treatment from a purely physical level, recognising 'the holiness present in moments of transitioning that transform Jewish lives and affirm the place of these

moments within Jewish sacred tradition.'

Do we need Separate Gay Congregations?

Perhaps there is a need for separate congregations in some situations. I suppose that whether they help or hinder familiarisation and understanding and integration of those who don't initially feel comfortable into the wider community depends on whether they do outreach, joint programming and interaction or whether they keep to themselves, and of course to how well received they are and how much response they get.

Training Gay Rabbis

Perhaps the most significant way we're trying to reach a new balance is that from 1982 in London and somewhat earlier in the States, we've been accepting openly gay candidates to train to be rabbis, both male and female (and as of 2007, the Conservative Movement has also agreed to do so). For years before this we had professing homosexuals in the rabbinate, most notably in Britain such as my teacher Rabbi Lionel Blue, perhaps Britain's favourite rabbi, author and broadcaster.

In Britain we also had a particular tragedy as there was a very bright and delightful student rabbi from Germany, Andy Hintz, may his memory be for a blessing, a great hope for the regeneration of that tiny, struggling post-Holocaust community. During 2003 he was attacked after leaving a gay bar and brutally murdered, and his killer turned out to be an anti-gay psychopath who in 2004 was sentenced to life imprisonment. It was a terrible reminder of the irrational hatred and danger that people face daily and perhaps the legacy of the Biblical teaching against homosexuality that we have looked at. We pray that such an event should never happen again and that we should see many more rabbis, teachers and leaders working to teach tolerance, understanding and appreciation of difference and diversity across humanity.

Lesbian Rabbis have it Harder!

Ironically, given the stronger prejudice and prohibitions against male homosexuality in Judaism, the gay men have had a somewhat easier time than the women. This is because rabbis have of course traditionally been men. It would be nice to think that congregations ignore both the sex and the sexual orientation of applicants but clearly this is not true in all cases. It's in this situation that the "I have no problem with homosexuals but how can we have a homosexual rabbi" influences the choice of the committee. If the ideal that the selection panel has is the traditional male married rabbi then a woman already has a point against her and so does a homosexual man, but of course a woman who is also a lesbian gets another point as well, a 'double whammy'. For the few gay congregations of course it's likely to operate in reverse however. I'm not aware of any that employ a straight rabbi!

Congregation Bet Simcha, House of Celebration, is the gay community in London, the only one in Europe as far as I know, and it was set up by a group led by a lesbian rabbi, Sheila Shulman. I have another lesbian colleague who comes from South Africa but despite there being a desperate shortage of rabbis there, she's unable to get a job and is finding difficulty getting a post anywhere. She has a female partner. I also have a male colleague, an interesting case because he grew up in an Australian orthodox family and became an orthodox rabbi but eventually came out, and, as part of his journey, he also joined the progressive movement. He has a male partner and recently missed out on a major position. I have no inside knowledge but I imagine that his sexuality and his partner were part of the reason for the decision.

Gay Jewish Commitment Ceremonies

Judaism is a religion rich in symbolism and ritual. A heterosexual Jewish couple hold their

marriage ceremony under the Huppah, the marriage canopy representing the home that they are establishing together. They pledge to each other with rings and sign a contract. They drink wine to celebrate and break a glass to recall the fragility of relationships and of life. In America and in Britain some progressive rabbis will agree to perform a similar ceremony for a gay Jewish couple who want to formalise their relationship in the eyes of their friends and family and before God. Indeed I attended a very moving Brit Ahava, Covenant of Love ceremony, where one of my rabbinic colleagues formalised her relationship to her partner.

When I first wrote this, it read 'Australia is not yet quite at this point however, but as civil recognition of relationships becomes more commonplace and if there is seen to be a demand, then progressive Jewish communities would have increasing difficulty in denying it.' I am delighted to report that, in 2007, the Rabbis and Laity of the Union for Progressive Judaism in Australia, New Zealand and Asia accepted the inequity of denying such a ceremony, and have therefore introduced the possibility of a 'Commitment Ceremony' (though pointing out that, in Jewish tradition, a 'marriage' can only happen between a man and a woman) by any Rabbi who wishes to do so, and the first such ceremony has recently taken place.

Separating Religion and Sexuality

What has sexual orientation got to do with religion anyway? Of course we need to state that non-consensual sex can be severely damaging to individuals, whether children or adults, therefore society has a role and a responsibility to protect people and lay down expectations, laws and punishment. When biblical Judaism was developing there were not different institutions of policy, education, hygiene, medicine, law, government and religions that we would recognise today. All were encompassed by the tradition and so all are represented in the teachings of the Torah. To that extent I believe that sexual behaviour

was a legitimate area for religious involvement in the past, and perhaps also to some extent sexual orientation, if only for the sorts of reasons of increasing the tribe that I have outlined.

Dangers of the 'Religious Right'

It seems to me that we now live in a very much more complex and compartmentalised world. Clearly the realm of religious influence and authority is vastly more limited, indeed for the majority of people in Australia religion probably has very little significance at all. Pronouncements about sin and perversion may bring back some who seek more structure and certainty in their lives and who believe that some people truly can speak in the name of God, especially when it makes them feel good and superior to others.

I wrote a column in 2003 where I said we must welcome those who are homosexual as much as those who are heterosexual. I received a horrible and aggressive letter from someone who is obviously a fundamentalist Christian telling me that as a teacher of Torah I ought to be saying that homosexuality is death and eternal damnation. There was no point in responding but I filed the letter, and now it's useful at last!

Sadly the fundamentalists will always be with us but fire and brimstone religion will not attract the majority of people unless they feel hopeless when, as Marx observed, it becomes the opiate of the masses. I believe of course that a religious framework in life has great value but it has to review the areas where it is wrong and/or irrelevant, and one of those areas is obviously sexual orientation. We are what we are or in religious terms, we are what God has made us. Let us celebrate and be proud.

Believe what you will, but this is the way it is – all people have spiritual needs for love, acceptance and support from their community at least from time to time – and parts of liberal religious traditions are at least theologically

ready to welcome, accept and support you as full and equal human beings.

Author Note

Jonathan grew up in a committed progressive Jewish family and always wanted to be a Rabbi. He went to a large orthodox Jewish day school, because it was the only choice in Jewish day schools, and had excellent engineering facilities! He studied at Brunel University and Open University, UK; and Pardes Yeshiva, Jerusalem. He was ordained from the Leo Baeck College, London, 1988 and moved to Australia and took up his current position in January 2003. Jonathan has also become heavily involved in environmental work, constructing an underground home in London and running a car on compressed natural gas, charged up every night from the mains. Here in Australia he has built a 'Seven Star Energy- and Water-Efficient showhome', and established JECO, the Jewish Ecological Coalition. Jonathan was also instrumental in establishing the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia, a thriving organisation which runs residential conferences, schools programs and other events. In June 2007, Jonathan spoke at an interfaith seminar in Canberra with the Dalai Lama on 'Paths to Peace', and November 2007, Jonathan received the "Premier's Award for Community Harmony' on behalf of the Jewish Christian Muslim Association of Australia from Victorian Premier John Brumby. He has a wonderful congregation of about 300 households, a part of the Union for Progressive Judaism.

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Institute for Judaism and Sexual Orientation (<http://www.huc.edu/ijso/>)
Leo Baeck Centre (Rabbi Keren-Black's community) (www.lbc.org.au)
Liberal Judaism (UK) (www.liberaljudaism.org)
Mariner, Rabbi R. (1997). The Jewish homosexual and the halakic tradition - a suitable case for treatment in *A Portion of Praise*. St. Kilda, Melbourne: The Progressive Jewish Cultural Fund.

Resources

R e f o r m J u d a i s m (U K)
(www.reformjudaism.org.uk) and (USA)
(www.urj.org)
Torah
Union for Progressive Judaism (Australia, New Zealand and Asia) (<http://www.upj.org.au/>)
World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews : (http://www.glbtejews.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=134)



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2004 AGMC CONFERENCE

SHANTON CHANG & DEMETRY APOSTLE

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) people in Australian society face unique challenges and issues in their everyday lives, based purely on their inherent sexuality and identity, and the lack of legal and social equality. Members of the GLBTIQ community live as part of a minority group of Australians. Therefore GLBTIQ people who in addition come from culturally diverse backgrounds could be described as being people who live as a further minority within a minority group.

The barriers that many culturally and linguistically diverse GLBTIQ people face are significant. They are often shunned by their own families and communities; only then to discover that racism and intolerance is often as rampant within the gay and lesbian community as it is within the broader community. Unfortunately there are very few avenues of support and understanding for people living these experiences. However, in Australia over the past decade or so, a number of culturally based GLBTIQ groups have formed of their own accord. In Victoria alone there are now at least 20 groups representing over 34 cultures. These groups have traditionally formed to provide social support to GLBTIQ people living with the often unique issues of coming from a diverse cultural background. These groups provide an important ongoing support and developmental role within the gay and lesbian community.

This is the published recommendations from the "Living and Loving in Diversity" Conference held in October 2004. The recommendations arose from the papers presented and the plenary sessions of the Conference, particu-

larly the Final Plenary facilitated by Shanton Chang, and therefore represent the collective experience of the Conference participants within the wider community. The recommendations were then compiled and prepared by Shanton Chang for distribution and publication on the AGHMC website, and have been prepared for this journal by Demetry Apostle.

As you will see, the recommendations are understandably generic in parts. Further explorations with established and emerging multicultural GLBTIQ communities and allies along with the wider communities, government bodies, and the GLBTIQ lobbies are needed to further explore the issues and concepts discussed below.

Recommendations — General

- There is a need for a more in depth understanding of identities within the GLBTIQ community. In particular, to understand the intersections between issues of race, culture, religion, class, disabilities, spirituality, age, sexualities and genders.
- There is a need for BOTH the GLBTIQ and Ethnic communities to address issues on internalised homophobia AND racism and the intersection therein.
- There is a need to challenge the association of particular cultures and religions with inherent homophobia.

Intersectional discrimination is not a new concept. It represents the international human rights system as enshrined by the United Nations and has a long tradition of recognising one form of discrimination over another. Al-

though aspects of our identities, such as our gender, our ethnicity, our race, our sexuality, are indivisible, historically, the human rights system has formally recognised discrimination on the basis of only one factor, rather than a combination of several factors¹.

For members of the GLBTIQ community, it means that the way they experience life in Australia is affected by their sexuality, *and* other factors including race, gender, class, ethnicity, ability, age, language, religious beliefs, and political beliefs. As each of these factors commonly leads to discrimination in our society, persons who identify as GLBTIQ may experience a different style of discrimination due to one or more of these aspects of their identity both within the GLBTIQ community and in "mainstream" communities.

Discrimination on any one of these grounds can violate a person's human rights, but very often it is a combination of these factors that contribute to a human rights violation².

The conference highlighted that for many within communities, discrimination and lack of understanding by service providers may arise from the lack of information about particular ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but also the way in which sexualities may be expressed within those backgrounds. There is also a need to challenge fundamentalist/outspoken religions that promote inherent homophobia.

- The need to work on the sense of separation and isolation that still exists within our communities. "Are there others like me?"
- Educators, the media and GLBTIQ community leaders have to take care not to use images that reinforce racial generalisations and stereotypes.

There is recognition by conference participants that for many young people, there is a lack of role models, thereby increasing their sense of isolation. This is particularly true amongst young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

where there is even less access to GLBTIQ mentors or role models in the media who are from their own backgrounds. This is important particularly in ethnic communities that revere and respect people who are in such prominent positions.

Additionally, images that are used by the media and educators may not assist if they only serve to reinforce existing stereotypes that are invalid, negative and held rigidly.

Further, health educators are generally guided by social marketing researchers in deciding what images may or may not be used. Social marketing is a complex area, provides a framework for health promotion and education campaigns. Therefore, more research has to be done in the area to better understand the issues set out by these recommendations.

Recommendations - Government Bodies

Governments need to be proactive, in particular with hate crimes, and also re-examine their profiling activities that are racially based.

- There is a need for considerations to be given to the possibility of intersectional discrimination when setting up compliance standards; focus is required on multilingual, individual complaint processes in terms of access to services.
 - A relationship of trust has to be established between government bodies, service providers and the multicultural community.
1. "The formal equality discourse in the human rights field tends to isolate racism from sexism and other forms of discrimination," Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Intersectionality of Race and Gender in the Asia-Pacific, paper prepared for the Asia Regional Preparatory Meeting, February 2001.
 2. "Everyday Intersections of Gender and

Race Discrimination: What do we mean by 'Intersectional Discrimination'?, Women's Rights Action Network Australia (WRANA), 2003.

The above recommendations refer to the way government bodies (e.g. Police, Customs, Human Services etc.) may profile various ethnic communities. The conference calls for more considered and sophisticated understanding by these bodies of the communities they seek to serve.

Additionally, government bodies need to consider the accessibility of their services and processes (including reporting and complaints) by individuals from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, especially in light of the challenges that may arise due to intersections of identities.

There is a need to understand issues beyond the language barriers that may exist. The format in which the services are delivered may not be culturally appropriate. These are crucial considerations for establishing trust between the multicultural community and service providers. Service providers and government bodies can achieve this by engaging more closely with the ethnic communities and the multicultural GLBTIQ community. In addition, it is important that service providers and government bodies ensure that they themselves, within their constituencies/boards, mirror the communities they seek to serve.

- Commission ethnographic research on the relationship between migration and sexuality.
- Commission research to enhance understanding about the non-consensual surgical practices on newborn babies with respect to gender assignment.

An increase in research knowledge is crucial so as to enrich our understanding of the needs of the GLBTIQ community. Such ethnographic research should endeavour to engage the Multicultural GLBTIQ communities through the entire process (pre-during & post). The

engaging process must involve the full participation of these communities in areas under study.

Research into both areas highlighted is needed because of the marked lack of understanding within the wider communities about the issues involved. Yet, the lack of information in these areas has huge impacts on the lives of particular members of the GLBTIQ communities. This is especially so when decisions are made without adequate research and information about implications, impacts and lifestyle choices.

Policy Recommendations — Community Practitioners

- Push for increased funding for groups educating CALD communities about issues of sexualities. It is important that the groups who will/are educating are mirrors of those communities that they say they represent.
- Education may need to focus on behaviours and identities of individuals within communities.
- Diversity management competency of social workers needs to be increased.
- A Working Party on Diversity Competencies should be formed which includes practitioners, researchers and members of the multicultural GLBTIQ community.

There is a need for GLBTIQ service providers to reach out to CALD communities more widely and to engage in more depth about the issues that they are struggling with.

A network needs to be started to discuss the types of diversity and cultural competencies needed when working as service providers. There is an urgent need to provide infrastructure to support initiatives such as these within the GLBTIQ community. This network should have a mix of both academia and grass roots community groups - not just academia.

Recommendations – The GLBTIQ Lobby

- The lobby has to continue to challenge racism within the GLBTIQ community and beyond, in the mainstream. This can only happen through engagement with the multicultural GLBTIQ community. This includes coming to forums such as those held by the AGMC to understand the intersections better. This means that lobby groups and AIDS Councils MUST work beyond sending tokenistic gestures “You’re multicultural, you can do it. The rest of us have more important things to do.” The fact that an organisation can allot the Multicultural aspect to only one of its members indicates the failing of these organisations to understand and to mirror the communities they seek to serve. This can lead to disengagement from many parts of the ethnic communities within the GLBTIQ community.
- The continued need to monitor and oppose the religious fundamental right’s propagation of hate.
- That GLBTIQ events such as Mardi Gras and Midsumma need to be culturally aware and responsive. There should be no imposition of colonial perspectives on what is queer and how queer one must be. An urgent need for the GLBTIQ community to understand what prevents ethnic members from entering the “mainstream” gay scene.
- A concerted effort needs to be made for parents/ relatives who have children who are GLBTIQ. Organisations such as PFLAG need to be proactive so that their outreach service is culturally appropriate.
- Education campaigns for the wider community – educational institutions, community councils and local councils.
- Academic and Research Networks to discuss research into sexualities and identities. There is a need to make such research accessible to communities.

The conference calls on GLBTIQ organisations that take public and leadership roles to sign a covenant that states:

- their total support in nurturing the diversity within the GLBTIQ community
- that they abhor discrimination in any form
- what they would do within their core structures to address these issues

The conference calls on the GLBTIQ organisations to avoid tokenistic gestures without actual and informed engagement with the multicultural community. For example, access and outreach does not mean just translating information. Whilst translations are a small step forward they are certainly not enough in reaching out to the multicultural community because the tone of the message, the cultural context of the message, and the symbolic meanings of the message may not be easily translated across cultures.

Recommendations – Ethnic Communities, Councils and Multicultural Organisations

- The need for education campaigns in multicultural organisations around sexuality.
- Ethnic Communities Councils/ Multicultural Organisations should work against discrimination against age, disability, and sexual orientation. Sexualities should be included in Constitutions/ Terms of Reference/ legal documents/ Mission Statements as an unacceptable basis for discrimination in all Ethnic Communities Councils/ Multicultural Organisations.
- Commission ethnographic research on the relationship between migration and sexuality.
- The need to work with ethnic media and to promote multicultural GLBTIQ activities

AGMC Inc and multicultural GLBTIQ groups

acknowledge that it is still very difficult to come out within ethnic communities. There is an urgent need for Ethnic Communities Councils to acknowledge this difficulty as well and to put in place processes which can assist members of their communities

It is crucial that peak multicultural leaders create an environment whereby diverse individuals and communities who identify as GLBTIQ are treated with the same respect that is given to other members of their communities. Leaders within these organisations should not have to feel intimidated by other conservative board members when they demonstrate real leadership in GLBTIQ Multicultural issues.

Funding to GLBTIQ multicultural/ ethnic communities needs to be substantial. In the past there has been limited funding. Whilst recognising the competitive nature of the funding grants, organisations that are responsible for giving out grants need to understand that these issues have not been resourced enough and are important.

Grants should be given on the basis of what they are trying to achieve in bringing about greater understanding and acceptance for its members, regardless of the issue. Federal/ State & Local Government Multicultural Representatives need to demonstrate true respect and harmony for all diversity 'types'!

Author Notes

Dr Shanton Chang is a Senior Lecturer in Change Management and Information Systems at The University of Melbourne. His research areas include young people's online, information security, intercultural interaction and cross-cultural differences in management. He also initiated, produced and presented "Orange Ribbon", JOY 94.9 FM's multicultural program for seven years.

Demetry joined the AGMC shortly after migrating with his partner to Australia from the United States four years ago. He is a Relation-

ship Counsellor and Coordinator of LGBTI Programs for a community based organization in Melbourne. Additionally, he is completing is Ph.D. in Psychology; focusing on the effects of internalized homonegativity in same-sex relationships.



BOOK REVIEW AND RESOURCES

ALYENA MOHUMMADALLY

Manji, I. (2004). The trouble with Islam. Sydney: Random House.

Irshad Manji states; "the trouble with Islam is that lives are small and lies are big". Her book is set out as an open letter for the reader, an invitation to join Manji on a quest to find "*ijtihad*" which she emphasizes is Islam's own tradition of independent thinking. A rollercoaster of assertions and ideological declarations, the book is a brave and bold attempt to challenge fundamentalist conceptions of Islam.

The title is provocative, and yet when I met the author in 2004, she informed me that in hindsight she would have made a slight title change, *The Trouble With Islam Today*, as she is not merely criticizing Islam, but questioning interpretation and practice today.

Manji invites readers to view her website www.muslim-refusenik.com which she declares has "source notes, references, critical essays and a forum for online debate". I also found that the book is available with the updated title and, in an extraordinary and brilliant effort to reach as many people as possible, there are free editions available online in Urdu, Persian, Malay and Arabic for where the book is banned.

So who is Irshad Manji? Her book introduces her as an East African lesbian Muslim who migrated to Canada and was raised by orthodox Muslim parents. She grew up identifying with the freedoms of being Canadian and is quick to point out this privilege in her book. Indeed, *The Trouble With Islam*, asks some incredibly fiery questions such as:

"How can we be sure that homosexuals deserve ostracism- or death- when the Koran states that everything God made is "excellent"?"

At times she gives "answers" to the very questions she poses, and at other times seems to not know where to go with the issue she has raised. I found I had to put the book down at certain points just to get a break from her hectic style of writing.

In 2004, Manji was in Australia to promote her book and I had an opportunity to meet her and discuss her book at an event co-organised by the AGMC and Melbourne queer bookshop, "Hares & Hyenas". Her small stature belied the passion and fervour of her book, and she maintained a friendly banter while being open to discussion and debate.

She is a brave woman – a fiery activist, openly lesbian and ready for '*ijtihad*' in a time when it is hard to speak out for change or reformation when fundamentalists view it as an attack rather than dialogue. Personally I think we need many "Manji's" in the world to challenge the status quo and get people thinking about the issues at hand. However, as far as her book goes, I did not find any real attempt at a plausible solution to the issues that are occurring in fanatical Islam. At one point, her proposal that Israel is one of the model states to learn from and follow is obviously controversial and there would be many readers, Muslims or otherwise, who would not automatically agree with this suggestion. There is a strong push in *The Trouble With Islam* to learn from the Jewish experience and while there might be some similarities, I do not think that it is possible to draw such conclu-

sions when the issues that have arisen and evolved are ultimately different because of history, lived experience, politico-cultural-religious boundaries and so on. I would have liked to have read a solution that did not merely ape what has, according to Manji, worked for one religion or/and ethnicity.

Further to this, *The Trouble With Islam* has a strong Canadian-U.S-centric flavour and therefore it is not as easily adapted to the socio-political climate in Australia. Australia has its own political makeup and I would state that any problems here are and have been of a different nature. Having said that, I must add that there are good points in the book that provide a global perspective on the Muslim diaspora. Her detailed account of Pakistan's misery since independence and how it probably would not have happened if the founder's words had actually been followed is telling, accurate and historically true. In his first speech, Muhammad Ali Jinnah said:

"You are free. You are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques, or to any other place of worship in the state of Pakistan... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens of one state".

Manji has done her homework in history and the book covers many such facts and as well as some fictions.

Ultimately if the reader is prepared for a lengthy first person, casual but ultimately sombre book, I recommend it.

What about Islam in Australia? The Muslim experience is not universal. The Muslim diaspora is influenced by culture, language, race, geography and to attempt to discuss a homogenous experience/ entity is bound to create further tensions. In Australia, Lebanese, Afghani, Turkish, Pakistani, Indian and recently African Muslims are amongst some of the major Muslim groups that exist in a supposedly secular state where religion is not meant to matter. Post September 11, like the rest of the world, Australia was not immune to

the rise of Islamophobia and the backlash that people who were Muslim or "looked like" Muslims suffered. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published a report in 2004 titled *Isma* (Arabic for 'listen') which was an incredible paper on the amount of abuse Muslim or/and people of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin experienced- see http://www.hreoc.gov.au/racial_discrimination/isma/index.html

What about queer Muslims in Australia? In terms of support for Muslims who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ), there has never been a public face or major movement on a national scale in Australia and this can be explained in a few ways. First, as noted, Muslims are of many different cultures in Australia, so sometimes culture and religion do not intersect and therefore common ground is limited. For example, an Arab Muslim may not have as much in common with a Bengali Muslim. Another reason is sheer numbers. Australia has only 21million people and Islam is not one of the top three religions on the 2006 census (Phillips, 2007).

As someone who struggled with reconciling my spirituality and sexuality, I decided that if there wasn't much out there for people like me who, well, *existed*, then I would create a resource. In 2004 I created *Queer Muslims in Australia*, an online safe space where discussion, debate and support is conducted in cyberspace. Currently we have around 50 members who are on the list for different reasons but to ensure we restrict the group to members' needs, we ask everyone to answer three questions when they join:

"Salaams,

My name is ----- and I am a moderator of this group-and before I sign u up -due to the very nature of this group- may I please ask you a couple of questions?

1. How did u find out about this group?

2. Why do you want to join?

3. What do you hope to get out of the group?

Thanks, ----

ps: Please note, this group is for Queer Muslims in Australia...."

The yahoogroup link is:

[Http://groups.yahoo.com/group/queermuslims](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/queermuslims)

I conclude with what visitors to the site will read:

QMs (Queer Muslims in Australia) is a yahoogroup based in Australia for and by Muslims who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Questioning, Queer or/and Qurious (LGBTIQ) and wish to engage in a safe space online.

We welcome and accept all Muslims and encourage involvement and participation as per the individual.

Our vision is of a progressive and supportive forum that allows for and celebrates our diversity.

WITH EDUCATION THERE COMES LIBERATION...

Author Note

Alyena Mohummadally works in anti-discrimination law and has a demonstrated history in LGBTIQ politics. She volunteers on community radio and guest lectures at schools and universities on the intersection of sexual orientation, gender and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Aly facilitates an online safe space- "Queer Muslims in Australia" and she sits on the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Intersex Health and Wellbeing, the Law Institute of Victoria's Disability Law Committee and in her spare time loves a game of squash!

References and Resources

Sharma, P. (2007). *A Jihad For Love*. Halal Films.

Fourteen centuries after the revelation of the holy Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Islam today is the world's second largest and fastest growing religion. Muslim gay filmmaker Parvez Sharma travels the many worlds of this dynamic faith discovering the stories of its most unlikely storytellers: lesbian and gay Muslims.

<http://www.ajihadforlove.com/home.html>

Manji, I. (2008). *For Muslim Reform and Moral Courage* <http://www.irshadmanji.com/>

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CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Special Issue *Gay and Lesbian Issues and Psychology Review*

Mental Health and LGBT Communities

Guest Editors: Lynne Hillier, Jane Edwards and Damien W. Riggs

One of the legacies of the well-known histories associated with the misuse of psychology within LGBT communities is a hesitancy in discussing the mental health of such communities. Such hesitancy is understandable not only in regards to the historical treatment of LGBT people by mental health professionals, but also in relation to ongoing attempts at pathologising same-sex attraction (e.g., in the instance of 'reparative therapies'). Nonetheless, there continues to be a pressing need to examine how issues of mental health shape the lives of members of LGBT communities. This involves examining not only how the mental health professions can support LGBT people experiencing poor mental health, but also how LGBT and heterosexual people/practitioners/communities may celebrate individual LGBT people's/ communities' experiences of positive mental health.

We seek full-length empirical and theoretical papers (5000 words max) and shorter commentary pieces (2000 words max) that address the following (and related) themes and questions:

- *Research on the supportive role that LGBT communities play in promoting positive mental health
- *Research on the ways in which communities may support individuals in accessing services to address poor mental health
- *Accounts of mental health outcomes amongst LGBT people marginalised within LGBT communities around issues of race, class, ethnicity and religion
- *Examples of successful community and individual interventions relating to LGBT people
- *Research exploring how social norms continue to detrimentally affect LGBT communities and people
- *Suggestions for ways to move forward in research on mental health and LGBT people
- *Means of promoting mental health practice with and by LGBT people
- *Clinical accounts of mental health practice as it is applied to and by LGBT people
- *Accounts of mental health/well being amongst Indigenous LGBT communities

The deadline for submissions (maximum 6000 words) is **June 1st 2008** for publication in August 2008. Informal enquires and submissions should be sent to:

Dr Damien W. Riggs

Editor, GLIP Review

damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au

Submission guidelines at: http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/glip/glip_review

Preparation, submission and publication guidelines

Types of articles that we typically consider:

A)

Empirical articles (6000 word max)
Theoretical pieces
Commentary on LGBTI issues and psychology

Research in brief: Reviews of a favourite or troublesome article/book chapter that you have read and would like to comment on

B)

Conference reports/conference abstracts
Practitioner's reports/field notes
Political/media style reports of relevant issues

Book reviews (please contact the Editor for a list of books available & review guidelines)
Promotional material for LGBT relevant issues

The Review also welcomes proposals for special issues and guest Editors.

Each submission in section A should be prepared for blind peer-review if the author wishes. If not, submissions will still be reviewed, but the identity of the author may be known to the reviewer. Submissions for blind review should contain a title page that has all of the author(s) information, along with the title of the submission, a short author note (50 words or less), a word count and up to 5 key words. The remainder of the submission should not identify the author in any way, and should start on a new page with the submission title followed by an abstract and then the body of the text. Authors who do not require blind review should submit papers as per the above instructions, the difference being that the body text may start directly after the key words.

Each submission in section B should contain the author(s) information, title of submission (if relevant), a short author note (50 words or less) and a word count, but need not be prepared for blind review.

All submissions must adhere to the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition), and contributors are encouraged to contact the Editor should they have any concerns with this format as it relates to their submission. Spelling should be Australian (e.g., 'ise') rather than American ('ize'), and submissions should be accompanied with a letter stating any conflicts of interest in regards to publication or competing interests. Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. References should be listed alphabetically by author at the end of the paper. For example:

Journal Articles: Riggs, D.W. (2004). The politics of scientific knowledge: Constructions of sexuality and ethics in the conversion therapy literature. *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review*, 5, 16-24.

Books: Kitzinger, C. (1987). *The social construction of lesbianism*. London: Sage.

Edited Books: Coyle, A. & Kitzinger, C. (Eds.) (2002). *Lesbian & gay psychology*. Oxford: BPS Blackwell.

Book Chapters: MacBride-Stewart, S. (2004). Dental dams: A parody of straight expectations in the promotion of 'safer' lesbian sex. In D.W. Riggs & G.A. Walker (Eds.), *Out in the antipodes: Australian and New Zealand perspectives on gay and lesbian issue in psychology* (pp.393-416). Perth: Brightfire Press.

References within the text should be listed in alphabetical order separated by a semi-colon, page numbers following year. For example:

(Clarke, 2001; Peel, 2001; Riggs & Walker, 2004)
(Clarke, 2002a; b) (MacBride-Stewart, 2004, p. 398)

Authors should avoid the use of *sexist*, *racist* and *heterosexist language*. Authors should follow the guidelines for the use of non-sexist language provided by the American Psychological Society.

Papers should be submitted in Word format: title bold 14 points all caps left aligned, author 12 points all caps left aligned, abstract 10 points italics justified, article text 10 points justified, footnotes 9 points justified.

All submissions should be sent to the Editor, either via email (preferred): damien.riggs@adelaide.edu.au, or via post: School of Psychology, The University of Adelaide, South Australia, 5005.

D e a d l i n e s