

## Book Reviews

### Out in Psychology: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer Perspectives

by V. Clarke and E. Peel (Eds.) (2007)

(Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley and Sons)

Reviewed by Hilary Lapsley

The discipline of psychology has long been interested in the topic of homosexuality. For the best part of a hundred years, until the removal of homosexuality from the DSM in the 1980s, psychological sciences largely portrayed non-heterosexuality as deviant and abnormal. Research focused on causes, developmental processes and cures. Other than within psychoanalysis, there was little interest in the parallel topic of how people became heterosexual. Heterosexuality was normative, and homosexuality was different, a “social problem” and therefore worthy of investigation. It has to be said, though, that this was an advance on religious intolerance, with homosexuality understood as immoral or sinful.

Clinical practice – with exceptions, of course – could be unhelpful and sometimes unsafe for non-heterosexual clients. In New Zealand, as elsewhere, we know that some gay men and lesbians – young people especially – spent time in psychiatric hospitals on account of their sexual orientation. Kingseat Hospital’s use of aversion therapy in the late ‘60s or early ‘70s is a bleak period in that history.

There were exceptions to the standard approach. Evelyn Hooker, an American psychologist, came to know communities of gay men in San Francisco in the 1940s, and gained the impression that they were just as “normal” as anyone else in terms of personality and “social adjustment”. Hooker set

out to conduct some quite elegant research studies which demonstrated that clinicians could not distinguish homosexual men from heterosexual men through psychological profiling. A wonderful documentary made by a fellow psychologist, “Changing Our Minds”, featured her life and work. It was nominated for an Oscar, and I had the good fortune to see it previewed at an APA conference during the 1990s ([www.wikipedia.com: “Evelyn Hooker”](http://www.wikipedia.com: “Evelyn Hooker”)).

With the rise of feminist and gay rights movements from the late 1960s onwards, psychological scientists came under increasing pressure to stop viewing gay men and lesbians as deviant. From that period on, research studies began to focus on differences between homosexual and heterosexual people, with many findings echoing those of Evelyn Hooker’s. Lesbian and gay psychologists began to come out, and often researched issues and problems that were of concern to their own communities, such as substance abuse and suicide that resulted from difficulties in self-acceptance and closeted lifestyles. In New Zealand lesbian and gay psychologists held seminars and meetings from time to time at national conferences from the 1970s on.

Victoria Clarke and Elizabeth Peel’s new collection, *Out in Psychology*, shows just how far we have come from those pioneering days. Now the focus of psychological research into non-heterosexualities is to use psychological

perspectives to understand lesbian and gay lives and the lives of others in the queer community. Not only lesbian and gay individuals are studied, but also our lives in communities, both our own and in the wider society. Another research strand has focused on homophobia, its “causes and cures” and how it impacts on us. It could fairly be said that research in this field now tends to be by us and for our benefit, rather than merely about us, as in the past.

Research approaches and methods have changed over time, and more recently, discursive approaches have become fashionable, leading to a focus on how sexual identities are constructed, culturally based and shift in the context of social discourses around sexuality. This approach lends itself to very useful understandings of identity formation and, as well, of homophobia. Through a plethora of approaches, research over the last 30 years has added enormously to psychological understandings of the lives of lesbian, gay and queer people, as amply demonstrated by the extensive bibliographies of the articles in this collection.

One concern, voiced in the collection, is that although there is now a general acceptance of “LGBTQ” perspectives within psychology, the work is not always widely known. It is very important for psychologists, particularly those who work directly with clients, to have a sound understanding of recent psychological knowledge, especially of the coming out process. This collection, with its diverse range of topics, would be helpful. Chapter topics include intersexed women, disclosing bisexuality, the experiences of gay men with intellectual disabilities, male to female transsexuals in the gender identity clinic context, civil partnerships, lesbians in sport, LGBTQ youth and heterosexism at work. The collection has quite a strong UK focus, but also includes US, Canadian and Australian contributions. New Zealand perspectives are included in

two chapters, one on lesbian health from Sara McBride-Stewart, now at Cardiff but drawing on her work at the University of Waikato, and on alcohol and gay men, from Jeffery Adams, Tim McCreanor and Virginia Braun from University of Auckland and Massey University.

Altogether, I found this book to be a very worthwhile collection and a useful addition to the psychologist's bookshelf.

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