Psychology of Sexualities Review

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Editorial – Using sexual identity labels to move beyond them
Roshan das Nair

THIS IS THE first issue of the *Psychology of Sexualities Review*. As mentioned in my previous Editorial, this change in name reflects the change made to the Section’s name, following a ballot of the Section’s membership. I trust that the papers in this issue are a testament to the Editorial Team’s promise to continue the legacy of the *Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review* in publishing high quality papers. In this Editorial I focus on the idea of using sexual identity labels, which have served us well and continue to do so, to move beyond them. I must clarify that by suggesting movement beyond these labels, I am in no way implying that we discard them, but permit a flexibility to incorporate other labelled identities and label-less identities to the fold. This plurality and inclusivity, I believe, forms the spirit of the *Psychology of Sexualities Review*.

When thinking about plurality and inclusivity related to sexuality, two landmark judicial judgments in the recent past come to mind, perhaps because of their personal relevance to me, both from my own subjectship and from those of some of my clients I see in therapy. The first, the Delhi High Court’s reading down of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a section which criminalises private consensual sex between adults of the same sex (reported in the papers as ‘India decriminalises gay sex’, Mitta & Singh, 2009); and the second, the UK Supreme Court ruling related to ‘gay asylum seekers’ (‘Gay asylum seekers’, 2010). There is no question about the importance, the worthiness, the triumph, and the desperate need for both these judgments. A close reading¹, however, examining the language used in the official judgments and the English language newspaper reporting of these, exposes a certain conservative economy of terms that both reports employ. This is particularly pertinent as both judgments are related to minorities from India, and ‘gay asylum seekers’ from Cameroon and Iran, countries where some sexual minorities² do not identity as ‘gay’ or even ‘homosexual’.

The collapsing of sexual identities (and associated labels) into seemingly ‘neutral’ terminology employing behavioural categories of ‘men who have sex with men’ (MSM) and ‘women who have sex with women’ (WSW) is also problematic. While such usage has almost become the mainstay of epidemiological and public health studies (since the 1990s), social constructionists have highlighted the limits of such terms, but have also critiqued the use of identity labels such as ‘gay’, instead arguing for a ‘more textured understandings of sexuality that do not assume alignments among identity, behaviour, and desire’ (Young & Meyer, 2005, p.1144). My argument is that just as terms such as MSM and WSW tend to obliterate self-determination regarding sexual identities, terms such as ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’, when applied indiscriminately or as global categories, can be as alienating; obfuscating text and subtext of sexual identities, desires, and practices. These terms then have the potential to become essentialist concepts.

One theme that runs through most of the papers in this issue of the *Review* is the diver-

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¹ It is beyond the scope of this Editorial to present a full close reading of these documents, however, I use these cases merely to illustrate a point.
² Even the term ‘sexual minorities’ is perhaps problematic here.
sity of sexual identities: how they are constructed, produced, deployed, measured, their relative importance to those who embody these identities, and how they map onto sexual and other behaviours.

Three papers in this issue connect directly with the focus of this Editorial. Toni Brennan and Peter Hegarty’s paper, ‘Man seeks Man’, examines the narrative and interpretative resources that ‘gay’ men employed in constructing their online sexual identities. There are certain points raised in this paper, which connect to Adam Jowett’s paper, ‘Just a regular guy’, where he explores the dilemma his participants faced in producing masculine and homosexual identities. Both papers connect to the notion and performance of ‘camp’ by men, and the possible ‘othering’ that such a performance may bring; largely though a cyber-interactional space in the case of the former paper, and through physical embodied spaces in the latter. Both papers comment on ‘doing masculinity’, with Adam’s participants claiming the space occupied by ‘regular’ guys, and some of Toni and Peter’s identifying as ‘straight acting’; and both suggesting some form of othering of camp men. Esther Rothblum taps into some of these ideas in her exploration of the gender/sexuality interconnectedness of femme and butch women. Her study, ‘The complexity of Butch and Femme’, examines the perceived importance of these labels, and how they map onto people’s (sexual) identities, sexual and other activities of daily living, and the connection between these labels and the ethnicity of her participants.

The ‘complexities’ and ‘dilemmas’ raised in the previous papers are also expressed in Sakura Byrne’s paper ‘Stripped’, where she highlights the ‘tensions’ between experiencing subject and object positions in women working in exotic dancing industries. This study examines these tensions from a non-pathological and non-deviant perspective, and attempts to demonstrate how the dancers’ positions and tensions can be related to those that women in patriarchal society generally experience. Moving from the dancer-client interactional space to another intimate space, James Lea et al. investigate therapist self-disclosure (of their gay identity) to their clients. In ‘Gay Psychologists and Gay Clients’, James and his colleagues document the views and experiences of gay male clinical psychologists disclosing their sexuality to gay male clients. Inherent to this study are some of the tensions, dilemmas, and complexities discussed in the previous papers, when therapists consider whether or not to disclose their sexual identity, when, how and why to do this, and the potential impact such a disclosure will have on the client and the therapeutic relationship. Finally, in an attempt to quantify some of the constructs raised in the previous papers, Henrique Pereira et al. report on ‘Measuring sexual orientation of a Portuguese gay, lesbian and bisexual internet sample’. This paper deals with issues such as categorisation of sexual identity labels, and highlights the dynamic nature of sexuality and sexual identities.

I believe what all these papers do is to offer a more nuanced understanding of sexual identities that go beyond trite and simplistic notions. Large, all encompassing terms have the potential to homogenise sexuality thereby creating a critical mass or a (louder) unified voice, but in doing so also risk disenfranchising other minority positions and voices. Therefore, I trust you will enjoy reading these papers, and that they will engender discussion and debate in future issues.

Finally, my tenure as Editor of the Review has come to an end, and I am certain the incoming Editor, Dr Kristoff Bonello, will continue to steer the publication of the Review in a manner befitting the history of the Review while keeping abreast contemporary developments and dialogues in Psychology and Sexualities studies. I’d also like to take this opportunity to thank the British Psychological Society, the Section and the committee for all their help in seeing us through this transition from the Lesbian & Gay Psychology Review to the Psychology of Sexualities Review.
References
Man seeks Man: Gay men's profiles on a dating website as subject production
Toni Brennan & Peter Hegarty

In this study, informed by social constructionist approaches to self and identity and LGBTQ psychology, 300 profiles posted by gay men on the dating website www.gaydar.co.uk were analysed in terms of the narrative and interpretative resources used to construct an online gay identity. The analysis found evidence of a very active engagement with communication technology, with several profiles inviting the viewer to chat or send a message or photographs. Many profile owners professed to be ‘genuine’, distancing themselves from the alleged shallowness of the majority of other website members. A widely used discursive device for constructing the self and the type of person(s) sought was the expression ‘straight acting’, with an attendant rejection of camp and derogation of a ‘visibly gay’ style – a concerning finding that points to the policing of (self) presentation along exclusionary lines. While many profiles celebrated the site as a locus of new possibilities for sexual expression, website users mainly looking for a relationship constructed the website’s perceived emphasis on sex as commodification. As this was an exploratory study, future research could consider more websites, specialised (e.g. fetish) sites and emphasise their photographic/multimedia and interactive possibilities.

Recent times have seen an explosion of gay1 dating websites on which men post their profiles, often enriched by photographic material, and can interact through e-mail and/or voicemail messages and in chatrooms catering to many interests. Profiles posted on gay contact websites can be considered a state-of-the-art version of the ‘personals’ advertisements found in many publications, but their multimedia dimension places their possibilities at the crossroads of personal advertisements, technological transformation and gay aesthetics. These contexts will be discussed in order to situate the present study and to clarify the approach adopted.

A certain type of sensibility, that of the aesthete à la Wilde, was the first to be identified as associated with gay men, in line with the aesthetic of ‘camp’. Sontag (1964) described camp as ‘one way of seeing the world as an aesthetic phenomenon… The way of Camp is not in terms of the degree of beauty, but in terms of the degree of artifice’ (p.516). Two associations spring to mind: Oscar Wilde’s aphorisms and ‘drag’; the latter may be seen as the ultimate in artifice according to a dichotomous view of sex that equals homosexuality with a failed gender identity. As Levine (1998) observed in his ethnographic study of clone culture conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s, ‘swish’ (exaggerated ‘feminine’ demeanour and elocution, use of feminine pronouns, etc.) and drag were predominant repertoires prior to Stonewall, and may well have contained some internalised homophobia and misogyny, but caution should be exercised against taking a very simplistic view of a complex phenomenon. ‘Neither butch nor swish styles are innate in gay physiology, neither is genetically encoded, nor is one style carried in a special centre of the brain. These styles represent the construction of a gay male identity from the artefacts and materials that gay men find in their culture. We may create our own identities, to paraphrase Marx, but we do not do it just as we please, but rather we do it from the materials we find around us’ (p.56).

1 It would be more appropriate to specify ‘for men who have sex with men’ (MSM), in fact a number of men who post their profiles on such sites would not identify as ‘gay’ or ‘bisexual’.
The ‘hypermasculine’

2 presentational style of the clone that emerged during the 1970s referenced working class men in look and in traditional views of masculinity – the muscular, strong, silent type, cruising for phallocentric, recreational sex with no strings attached (Levine, 1998). It can be argued that the posing and the stylised ‘hypermasculinity’ of clones on the one hand and swish and drag on the other are both performative. As one participant in Levine’s (1998) study observed: ‘I look at clone drag as play clothes... I come home from work, change into clone ‘drag’, and go out and play on the circuit’ (p.59).

Butler (1990) reappraises in a positive light the performative aspects of roles such as drag, butch and femme often criticised in post-modern and feminist circles for perpetuating stereotypes of femininity or for mocking a particular ‘natural original’. As, according to Butler, there is no ‘original’ (other than what is discursively produced) and sex, as well as gender, is socially constructed, there is no mockery or stereotyping but rather the exposé of a construction.

The unproblematic acceptance of many stereotypical assumptions about the meaning of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ permeated Laner and Kamel’s (1977) first psychological study of (printed) personal advertisements by gay men. Following the blueprint of a design used with heterosexual personal ads, the researchers content analysed 359 ads placed by gay men to test (or, rather, ‘confirm’) the hypotheses that homosexual people are sex-atypical in personality and behaviour and that they seek sex-typical partners.

Recently, Bailey et al. (1997), within the framework of research on interpersonal attraction, conducted two studies in which they analysed over 3500 personal advertisements appeared in Chicago gay and lesbian publications and reached similar conclusions. They used Bem’s (1974) Sex Role Inventory for rating the descriptors of the person placing the ad and the descriptors of their desired partner, disregarding Bem’s (1993) own reflexive account of its historically bounded premises and circularity. In a follow-up study with heterosexual personal ads reported in the same paper, Bailey et al. (1997) observed that very few people described themselves as or were seeking masculine or feminine partners, ‘presumably because it is safe for them to assume that potential mates are sufficiently sex-typical’ (p.966), failing to recognise the societal practices underlying the findings.

The gap between ‘researchers’ and ‘researched’ was enormous in these studies, as evidenced in the contrast with ‘authentic’ materials originated in the gay world for a gay readership. For example, Preston and Brandt’s (1984) Classified Affairs, subtitled ‘a gay man’s guide to the personal ads’, used ads from over 20 mainly (but not exclusively) gay publications from the US and Canada, and interviews with men who had placed or had responded to such ads, to draw up a very entertaining and practical ‘insider’s’ guide free of elitist/academic aspirations and all the more informative for it. Preston and Brandt present a rich gamut of subjectivities; there are men looking for romance, while others in the same page demand ‘sex not bullshit’ (p.25) – and then there are recurrent types/iconic personae for the gay imagination, such as the sailor: ‘Attn: gay captains, yachtsmen. Horny, hairy, expert sailor likes to play at sea, looking for a ship’ (p.55).

More recently, Thorne and Coupland (1998) observed – citing Giddens (1991) – that personal advertisements are ‘acts of commodification’ (p.234) in that they are moulded on the ‘small-ads’ template to sell second-hand consumer goods, with its associated reductionist language of abbreviations to be decoded by the reader. Thorne and Coupland (1998) argue that, although this template is the same for heterosexual

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2 ‘Hypermasculine’ – literally ‘in inverted commas’ – to underline that the term constructs ‘(hyper)masculinity’ in line with the hegemonic conceptualisation of traditional heterosexual masculinity as the normative standard.
‘personals’, it is particularly dangerous for the lesbian and gay community because it imposes a restricted palette that borders on a repertoire of stereotypical labels for constructing the self-project upon identities that traditionally have been constructed by stereotyping discourses. They examined 100 dating advertisement texts placed in the UK by gay men, as well as 100 ads placed by lesbian women, and found that gay adverts were in general more codified, requiring enculturation into gay scripts, and with a considerable array of acronyms and inventive metaphors referring to erotic proclivities. They found a celebration of the male body and emphasis on physical characteristics – both own and of the target. Two adverts reproduced in the paper present (or, rather, construct) two iconic scenarios/metaphors of gay popular culture: male bonding in military/uniform/fitness contexts and The Wizard of Oz.

It would be interesting to investigate how this construction through iconic types, images and scenarios continues in a new medium – dating websites – and is thrown into focus by the presence of a visual dimension – for example, the photographic part of a profile. In addition, it can be argued that the development of new communication media entails new implications for social interaction and for the construction of the self-project. Stone (1995) calls communication technology – from the radio to the telephone, to the internet – a ‘prosthesis’ in the original Greek sense of the word, ‘extension’, but also hints at something more than the merely ‘additive’ as conveyed by the word ‘extension’, something transformative/constitutive of identity, with its own (psychological) ‘reality’ and consequences in the ‘real’ world. Of all computer mediated relationships (CMRs), cybersex stands to become the barometer of change and transformation effected by the computer age in that it regards a human activity – sex – for which the physical presence of another person, until recently – before phone sex lines became available – was considered a sine qua non condition.

For social constructionist approaches to identity, the ‘self’, like any form of ‘reality’ does not precede the language (and the social practices therein implied) that instantiate it into being (Harre, 1986; Davies & Harre, 1990; Burr, 1995). It is rather a continuous ‘social project of ongoing negotiations within a complex web of relationships and practices, always emergent in the process of construction’ (Gough & McFadden, 2001, p.89) and situated within the practices that constitute the cultural affordance (Gibson, 1966) of a particular place and time.

With these premises, the present study sought to explore the function that the discursive resources drawn upon to instantiate the construction of ‘online gay identities’ may perform, while also taking into account the materiality of a dating website as a set of technological affordances for the production and transformation of the self.

Method

Materials and sampling procedure
The materials for this study were 300 profiles posted by men on a large (UK-based) general interest gay contact website – www.gaydar.co.uk – accessed with a guest membership between the 5 June and the 3 July 2005. Ten UK cities (Belfast, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Cardiff, London and Brighton) were chosen for sampling. Unless a specific sorting order was pre-selected (e.g. a particular age range, or only profiles of individuals online at the time of the search), all available profiles for a particular city were

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3 A free guest membership offers the opportunity to try the service. There are restrictions as to number of profiles viewed per day, chatroom use, search options and other features.

4 Limitations were recognised in the mapping of geographical space onto a medium existing outside of it, in the possible arbitrariness of the locations chosen, as well as a ‘metrocentric bias’ when sampling from major cities.
Profiles that did not include photographic material were excluded – so that the sampling continued into the following page(s) until the number of profiles downloaded for that area reached 30.

For ethical and legal issues, an attempt was made to forward each profile to an e-mail address (using the ‘mail a friend’ option) to verify that the owner had no objection to the profile being viewed externally, which placed the profiles ‘in the open’, so-to-speak, i.e. accessible to individuals not bound by the terms and conditions of use agreed by (guest) members. No ‘restricted access’ profiles were found.

The profiles were seen only by the authors of this paper. Every step was taken to preserve anonymity of the website members as well as to comply with copyright laws: original screen names were not used or commented upon in the analysis; verbatim quotes and descriptions of photos were kept to the minimum needed to illustrate emerging themes, and were credited to fictitious screen names.

**Analytic approach**

Profiles were subjected to a form of discursive analysis informed by Potter and Wetherell's (1987) work. In line with social constructionist epistemology, it was posited that ‘reality’ is constructed (rather than reflected) in discourse, and furthermore that the only form of investigation possible is to trace how such constructions are negotiated and what functions they perform (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Burr, 1995).

Although the emphasis of the analysis was on the textual part (in the narrow sense of ‘written text’) of the profiles, the study was informed by an understanding of the totality of the profile as ‘discourse’, text, a site of (re)production of meaning. At a macro-level, the very existence of gay dating websites and their format are cultural and technological affordances that constitute ‘discourses’, in line with Curt’s (1994) and Parker’s (1999) broader definitions of ‘text/textuality’, and this theoretical stance, as well as an ethnographic endeavour towards these affordances, were also reflected in the analysis and in the project as a whole.

Analysis focused on the part of the profile in which website members were given carte blanche to describe (construct?) themselves (‘About’) – and on the section in which they produced a description (construction?) of what they were seeking (‘Looking for’). Profiles were read several times to identify emerging themes, rhetorical devices and interpretative repertoires (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). These elements can also be said to characterise visual materials (for example, certain iconic images in gay popular culture) – which are, therefore, equally amenable to a ‘reading’ and, to this end, can be coded, analysed and interpreted, as was attempted in the present study.

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5 Profile owners often try to incorporate in their screen names some information about their preferences. Therefore, it may be the case that, in alphabetical listings, some letters are represented far more or far less than others, but inspection of ‘keywords’ and ‘fetishies’ listed by the site revealed an approximately even spread in this respect.


7 If any of the fictitious screen names assigned to cited profiles resemble or indeed coincide with existing ones, it is a matter of coincidence, not intention.

8 It is difficult to define ‘discourse’ and there are different interpretations of the term. We prefer Burr’s (1995) conceptualisation as ‘a systematic, coherent set of images, metaphors and so on that construct an object in a particular way’ (p.184).
to such a (limited) extent as to situate and complement the analysis of written texts.

**Evaluating the analysis**

The analysis presented here reflects a historically and geographically located perspective and, in particular, our ‘speaking positions’ (Burman, 1994) as academics committed to a social constructionist agenda and interested in gay culture.\(^9\) However, it is our hope and contention to have approached the study with openness and constructed a persuasive analysis – itself a text amenable to scrutiny – while recognising that any other analyst, through the lens of their speaking positions, would have presented different accounts. Ideally, for transparency, access to profile printouts should be given – not as mere appendices but as potential loci for (re)negotiation of the researchers’ account; however, this is not possible due to ethical and legal reasons. A possible strategy would be to invite the reader to retrace our steps and gain access to the website, conduct an analysis with comparable materials and see if their account – as seen through the lens of their subject position – resonates with that proposed in this paper.

**Analysis**

Profiles posted on www.gaydar.co.uk revealed that, while website users constructed their online gay identity around a relatively limited range of core themes, at the same time they used a strikingly rich discursive palette of qualifications and other rhetorical devices to elaborate on these themes. However, the materiality of the website was a *sine qua non*, a condition of existence for such constructions often referenced/interwoven in the production of gay (online) identity – and, therefore, it is the starting point of the analysis.

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9 We are aware that in certain quarters this may be deemed too vague to count as ‘staking a position’ or ‘doing reflexivity’, but there is a danger of reifying (by listing) categories of which we may contest the apparently self-evident ‘out-there-ness’ (Potter, 1996), as well as the danger to reduce reflexivity to a mere box-ticking exercise (see Parker, 2007).

10 We are indebted to Parker (1992) and also to Foucault’s (1972, p.28) ‘conditions of existence’.

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of uncertainty as to what materials to draw upon.

Producing one’s profile is social action both in the social constructionist sense (as discourse) and in the ‘traditional’ sense, because it simultaneously produces (or takes into account) an intended/expected audience. There was awareness of the commodification involved – ‘Not going to try and sell myself like some new amazing product’ (darby), and also the impact of one’s individual profile was seen as reduced by the audience/context, for example, due to the perceived great number of profiles stating similar (and unsubstantiated) things: ‘tall, dark... yeah yeah... I’m sure you’ve heard it all before’ (onedave). Whilst severe limitations were seen in such descriptions – ‘like anybody actually reads this shit. I don’t!’ (matt25), the use of the interactive technology available to website members was seen as providing a way to overcome these constraints: ‘rather than me sounding like a twat describing myself how about you message/chat me and see what you think!’ (onedave).

Tracks, texts, messages, pics: The rise of the competent users of the cyberpalette.

As seen above, some users felt constrained by a conceptualisation of a website profile as just an up-to-date but still relatively static version of the old personal advertisement and embraced the extension – or ‘prosthesis’ (Stone, 1995) – afforded by communication technology. The profile was often constructed by the owner as a springboard or as the crossroads of several ways of communicating and the viewer was invited to chat or send a message.

Many users engaged with an important feature called ‘tracks’, a setting in one’s profile that allows the owners of the profiles viewed to know that that particular user has seen (‘cruised’? – in offline language) their profiles. This setting can be enabled or disabled from one’s profile – and the chosen setting can be overridden temporarily to make an exception by clicking on an icon on the profiles visited. To leave a track is to express interest with minimal exposure/investment. If the other person decides to make contact, fine, otherwise there is no rejection, or awkward situation. Although non-verbal, this feature can be considered a rhetorical device – whereby the ‘interested’ self needs the collaboration of a counterpart proficient in the subtext to emerge over an equally possible alternative construction (the tracks were simply the default setting while someone was ‘surfing’ profiles). It is not surprising to find that ‘leaving a track’ was often mentioned when positioning oneself as shy or attributing shyness to the viewer: ‘sometimes I’m a bit of a shy guy so if you see that I leave a track is more than possible that I did like you...’ (che-rub), ‘message me I’m a nice guy [...] if you’re shy leave a track’ (riverdance). Photographs were/are an important component of profiles and, in the sense of ‘photos of the profile owner’, taken for granted by most users: ‘have a photo with your profile. We all have the use of a camera one way or another’ (steve). ‘Why do so many guys not have a picture on Gaydar?’ wondered felixblue, while sultrysmoulder warned ‘if you dont have a pic, DONT BOTHER TO MSG ME I WON’T REPLY’ and reebok’s ‘Looking for’ space screamed, ‘FIRST OF ALL PLEASE HAVE A PIC OF YOURSELF’. Many users whose photographic material depicted someone else (e.g. a model) or a cartoon, or object, or whose face did not appear in their photos, specified

11 felixblue was not the only one to wonder! As stated in the Method section, only profiles with photographic material were sampled in this study – but the ratio of photo profiles to non-photo profiles in the sampled pages was noted. Brighton had the largest number of photo profiles while Cardiff and Belfast had the fewest. It would be simplistic, although tempting, to conclude that users are more comfortable with posting photographic material if living somewhere with a large gay ‘scene’ and gay visibility (assuming the attendant technology to be equally available in all locations). Photographic material does not necessarily mean (recognisable) photos of the profile owner.
It is possible to block all communication from the owner of a given profile by clicking on an icon on the relevant profile. However, this applies only to communication effected through the website features (message, voicemail, chat) and, of course, will not cover other details (e.g. mobile number, e-mail address) that might have been provided in the text of the profile or otherwise exchanged if some interaction has already taken place.

Many profiles had explicit photographs – very often with no or little text, mainly detailing one’s preferred sexual practices. No fewer than 24 main photos were ‘dick pics’ – photos of (presumably) the profile owner’s genitals – and this number does not include photos in which genitals were visible but not the focus of a portrait in the nude – or photos obviously taken from different sources, or equally explicit photos focusing on other body parts. fitforever, whose photograph shows him from the neck down, naked, sitting in a pose that flaunts an erection emphasised by a ring worn on the base of his penis – defiantly states, ‘if your opening line is, ‘how old are you?’ or ‘do you have a face pic?’ – don’t bother contacting me.’

While the great number of dick pics, in line with a wealth of anecdotal evidence and with previous research (Bolton, 1995; Thorne & Coupland, 1998) confirm the importance of the penis in gay subculture, the study also identified a competing discourse – at least as regards online images – that could be called a discourse of ‘saturation’: some profiles included a statement along the lines of ‘dick pics do nothing for me sorry, I know what they look like!!!’ (caringlad33) or even warned, ‘just be aware that contacting me with just a picture of your dangling bits is an almost definite way to get yourself blocked!’ (energysupreme). It could be argued that sexual images, once a rare ‘thrill’, have, in Walter Benjamin’s (1936) terms, lost their ‘aura’ due to their easy availability and (re)production in the privacy of one’s own home; they have reached ‘saturation’ and become irritating.

Honest, genuine guy... that doesn’t leave many on here.

As noted above, the production of the self in a profile also instantiates the viewer as target and as part of a wider pool of viewers. Many profile owners positioned themselves as the exception to (negative) characteristics and behaviours they imputed to other website users. ‘It would be great to find a partner in larking about and maybe love [oops: lost 55 per cent of readers LOL]’ (oscar2000). The speaker positions himself as an individual in contrast with a ‘mass’ reduced to a percentage, that, allegedly, at the mention of ‘love’, would lose interest – a generalisation that the upper case LOL (laughing out loud) is possibly meant to mitigate and/or tinge with irony. The speaker would like to find someone who, for example, would remember having partied (sensibly) the previous night – and goes on to say, ‘no immatures, no inadequates, no ‘experimenters’, no cheaters and no egotists. I feel better for that LOL. Not many on Gaydar probably, so forgive me if I don’t hang around’ – again generalising – but there is some reflexivity as regards the outburst (‘I feel better for it’) as well as LOL to defuse it. In the same vein, nirvana400 takes a cynical view of other website users, contrasting a ‘genuine’ minority of which he implicitly claims membership with the amorphous majority of timewasters allegedly to be found on the site: ‘dont really have a type... as long as you are genuine and not a timewaster guess that dont leave many left on here then look forward to hearing from the few genuine ones on here cheers.’

‘Genuine’ in the sense of ‘honest’, ‘committed’, can have moral/ethical overtones – at the very least it hints at a psychological contract, but, at the same time, it references a ‘commercial’ context (as in ‘genuine goods’) and the regulation of the description of goods and services to ‘reflect’ what is offered – thereby highlighting the locatedness of dating website use within consumer culture. This is also in evidence in

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12 It is possible to block all communication from the owner of a given profile by clicking on an icon on the relevant profile. However, this applies only to communication effected through the website features (message, voicemail, chat) and, of course, will not cover other details (e.g. mobile number, e-mail address) that might have been provided in the text of the profile or otherwise exchanged if some interaction has already taken place.
other ‘I’m different from the rest’ accounts such as ‘photos show EXACTLY how I look. Rare on here!’ (furryandtoned) – constructing other users as cheating, as trying to misrepresent themselves, and implicating the medium – the website as affordance – in this misrepresentation. The tension between the profile as self-enhancing performance, and an allegedly different and ‘real’ self was widely felt, for example, ‘[Looking for] honesty and the ability not to lie on your profile as you eventually trip yourself up and get caught out’ (littlebear27).

In contrast with the defensive and sometimes cynical positioning evidenced above, some members reported very good experiences in terms of enhanced social life as a result of using the website. One took considerable space in his profile to thank other website users for the support received after a major health-related setback – ‘its great to know that when times are not so good there are people out there who will pick u up and lend a helping hand and a listening ear..thats what the gay life is meant to be about’ (glamourkins). These words construct both the site and offline ‘gay life’ as a potential (‘is meant to be’) community.

Straight acting guy who happens to like guys... Sorry, no camp queens. No offence, but it just doesn’t do it for me.

One of the most widely used discursive devices for constructing the self and the type of person(s) sought was the expression ‘straight acting’, often reinforced by ‘straight looking’ – that is to say conforming (at least in appearance) – to the hegemonic, (hetero)normative ideal of ‘doing male’. ‘Straight acting’ was seen as a desirable quality to claim for the production of one’s identity. The idea of ‘straight acting’ as embodying ‘normality’ was often reinforced by juxtaposition with ‘down-to-earth’ (sandy24, vin35), or ‘grounded’ (brighton2rock), ‘easy-going, laid-back’ (lenny81), ‘just ur average boy nxt door’ (karis) – or over emphasised through the repetition of synonyms, as in ‘normal sorted guy straight appearance stable + secure’ (a007guy). This discourse invokes the corollary that ‘not-straight-acting’ is ‘not normal’, ‘abnormal’.

Closely connected to the construction of ‘straight acting’ as ‘normal’ was the ‘just a regular guy who happens to like guys’ discourse – casting in a negative light those who make ‘a song and dance about it’ (henrypotter) – and/or whose social life revolves around the gay ‘scene’. Many accounts evidence frustration with available negative gay stereotypes and with the potential ghettoisation of the ‘scene’, without questioning the stereotypes, but derogating – for being so ‘in-your-face obvious/out’ – those gay men stigmatised by the stereotype: ‘I like to be able to go to straight bars with friends without the whole bar knowing you are gay – not that I’m ashamed of being gay, if you know what I mean, I’m just not into camp queens... lol’ (suncoaster). The abbreviation ‘lol’ is possibly meant to mitigate the derogatory statement as well as in anticipation of a negative reaction. The speaker subsequently adds that, under the influence of alcohol, he has been known to dance in a manner that may be construed as very camp, although he jokingly professes not to believe these rumours. This addendum continues the mitigation strategy in that the speaker seems to reclaim membership of the group he has just distanced himself from – but it is only a temporary and incidental membership, due to the influence of alcohol – and, therefore, he cannot be held accountable for this foray into camp or for remembering the exact details, so that it all evaporates into a hazy possibility, ‘rumours’.

No fewer than 30 profiles in the sample (one-in-10) contained an overt rejection of individuals construed as ‘camp’, ‘queens’ or ‘fems’. The discourse of attraction/preference for a certain type with consequent rejection of other types (sorry, not my type) was routinely used to discriminate against gay men seen as ‘camp’ or ‘effeminate’ – ‘not into camp, sorry it doesn’t float my boat’ being a blueprint with variations in the same
vein. Typically, the strategy would enable the ‘speaker’ to pre-empt accusations of discrimination by invoking the discourse of sexual attraction either as something that one cannot ‘help’, in line with hegemonic conceptualisations of sexual drive and preference as outside the realm of the individual’s agency and ‘good intentions’ or, as highlighted by Walton (2003), in line with the opposite (but performing the same rhetorical function) discourse of agentic, individual freedom of choice to welcome or reject certain sexual overtures and certain ‘types’, or even flexibly drawing from both discourses. In a quote that exemplifies this flexible strategy, the speaker, having positioned himself as straight acting (although with the qualifier ‘whatever that means’) – immediately adds, ‘don’t like camp or feminine acting people, sorry girls but not my cup of tea!’ (sultrysmoulder). This also invokes a binary, gendered construction of gay identity – opposing ‘straight acting’ to ‘camp’ and ‘feminine’ and addressing the men ‘other than straight acting’ as ‘girls’.

‘Sorry, no screaming queens (no offence)’ (reves09) is another interesting illustration of how complex constructions and taxonomies in the production of gay identity are negotiated. Before this assertion, the speaker positions himself as straight acting, looking for straight acting or bisexual/married men. ‘Queens’ signals a downward shift of gear, so-to-speak, from ‘men’; it marks a negatively valenced difference reinforced by ‘screaming’, a word that references the visual as well as the aural – and can signify ‘visibly/recognisably gay’. Thus, a pecking order of ‘doing gay’ is discursively instantiated. However, the derogatory stereotype/construction ‘(no) screaming queens’ is sandwiched between two apologies – ‘sorry’ and ‘no offence’ – enabling the speaker to distance himself from derogatory intent and to construct his assertion within the sexual preference discourse.

In some profiles it was recognised that ‘straight acting’ is not an unproblematic construction – and it was accompanied by such qualifiers as ‘for want of a better phrase’ (aaron2). Some acknowledged that it entails more than a hint of the performative, for example, ‘…straight acting guy (level 4 :(...’ In this case, ‘straight acting’ is jocularly constructed as akin to a subject one can ‘do’/‘study’ and gain proficiency in (with different levels) – and there is a reference to the popular website www.straightacting.com which offers such ‘levels’ on completion of an online questionnaire.13

Only rarely, camp is construed as a style amongst others, associated with particular aspects of popular culture – ‘[I am] not really camp but I like Kylie and Steps’ (gentlegiant) – and only one profile – posted by a 20-year-old man – contained a reflection on the prejudice towards camp – ‘I generally despise campness, but I’ve met some really classy people who are [camp], so I ain’t bothered any more’ (matt25).

With such widespread negative constructions of ‘camp’, it is no wonder that the only profile in which the speaker positioned himself as ‘camp’ did so obliquely – ‘others may describe me as camp’, and at the same time questioning this construction or at least its agreed upon homogeneity – ‘whatever that means’ (tigerlily). Furthermore, the speaker differentiated between available discourses on ‘camp’ to claim the more acceptable, ‘intellectualised’ version for his position: ‘I suppose I’m more cool camp than loud cheap camp. Wit is my only form of defence.’ As to the ‘looking for’ part of the profile – ‘really don’t mind. nothing too hairy or nothing too girly I’m not a lesbian’ – the very inclusive opening statement is contradicted by two exclusions effected through the ‘sexual preference discourse’ – and, in the case of ‘nothing too

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13 Discussion as to whether a questionnaire that purports to assign levels in ‘straight acting’ on the basis of questions referencing commonly held stereotypes about gay men (length of time spent on grooming, etc.) contributes to perpetuate the stereotypes or to deconstruct them is beyond the scope of this analysis.
As this is a written text, not even transcribed speech, words seem more ‘set in stone’ than they possibly would with the benefit of intonation and non-verbal clues.

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14 girly’, along very gendered and binary lines. ‘I’m not a lesbian’ is presented as a rational, common-sense, ‘out-there’ explanation for the exclusion of ‘girly’ men – implying that the speaker himself is constructed as a ‘girl’. While this profile seems to contain elements hinting at a subtle marginalisation of ‘camp’ by ‘camp’ and internalised homophobia, another reading could be that the speaker is using irony, the ‘wit’ that he claimed as a shield (‘defence’) to negotiate ‘doing gay’ – and in the whole construction he is possibly ‘doing swish’ – a performance to be taken with the same irony that produced it. However, irony is not transparent, woven out of the blue, but rather woven out of discourses pre-existing the individual and it can lead to the perpetuation of gendered stereotypes of ‘doing gay’. This gendered view also underlies accounts in which ‘masculine’ – often conflated with or reinforced by ‘straight acting’ – is opposed to ‘feminine’, ‘camp’, ‘queen’. For example, having constructed himself as ‘very straight acting’, ash23 seeks ‘a MAN no queens! some1 with some passion for love! only a real man could make me happy!’ – thereby denying currency to any alternative form of masculinity not aligned with normative enactments. However, there are many conceptualisations of masculinity independent of the opposition with ‘femininity’, or sometimes the opposition is between ‘boys’ and ‘men’ – ‘dont want a boy to do a mans job :)’ (personaltrainer) – in particular if looking for older partners. The word ‘masculine’ is understood as a readymade available cultural resource and is used to convey a certain impression – to instantiate a particular rhetorical space in which a complex repertoire of ‘performing gay’ can be unfolded.

Round the block, no baggage and the search for Mr Right: constructing relationships.

Many website users mainly looking for a relationship constructed a perceived emphasis on sex as a potential barrier to finding a partner or even friends: ‘ok, so I have read on so many profiles that gaydar is only for shags... so where does one go to find friends???’ lamented alan4u. In a similar vein, ennui23 states: ‘ideally I’d like to settle down in a relationship with the perfect guy, but I’m not stupid, I know there’s little chance of finding him on gaydar!’

Many men seeking a relationship stated that they did not know what they were looking for; there was an impression of confusion, uncertainty and tentativeness.

Sometimes confusion seemed a result of having exhausted the available embodied discursive categories to construct (gay) relationships/sexuality, so that the speaker was left striving to find a definition whereby his ‘looking for’ request could be instantiated/embodied: ‘been in long relationships, short relationships, had fuck buddies and had mates I’ve shagged – so now totally confused about what I want hehe’ (peterpaul). jamiecross’s account is representative of many profiles used to wonder ‘aloud’, so-to-speak, in a shared space, about a ‘do I want a relationship?’ uncertainty, in that it charts the ebb and flow of different positions that co-exist or, rather, jostle, in the production of a possible relationship-oriented self: in the opening lines, the speaker takes on a rather critical position towards the website: ‘I probably know too much information concerning some gay men following the introduction of gaydar’. There is more than a hint of commodification, large impersonal numbers, information overkill, saturation, and then this general lack of ‘mystique’ is contrasted with romanticised off-line opportunities – ‘ideally, I’d meet my next boyfriend reaching for the same book in Waterstones’ – that the speaker has had to recognise as unrealistic (‘I’ve long given up such hopes’). The potential sense of loss or even defeat is defensively counteracted by ‘I’m much happier when I am not in a rela-

14 As this is a written text, not even transcribed speech, words seem more ‘set in stone’ than they possibly would with the benefit of intonation and non-verbal clues.
tionship’, followed by ‘I’m not looking for casual sex on here either so I’m not sure where that leaves me?’ – showing not just recognition of an uncertain position, but also an undercurrent of frustration with the limitations of the available discourses to draw upon to stake one’s ‘looking for’ position on the website.

4everhot’s words illustrate the perceived tension between casual sex and a relationship: ‘Oh I know we all need a shag now and then, and that’s great, but ultimately I’m after what makes us human, as opposed to “cumsumer goodies” [...] Romance isn’t dead, you know [...] Been round “the block” enough too (read: dragged round, in fact) to know what I want now out of gay life’ – whereby casual sex is constructed as synonymous with commodification. The last statement in the quote is also representative of the ‘life experience can scar’ theme that emerged from many profiles of men looking for a relationship. To continue with the analogy, the scar tissue sometimes formed a barrier constructed through a rhetorical ‘downplaying’ of the search – a strategy that also served the function of making the speaker ‘fit in’ with the perceived sex-oriented context and to maximise his ‘gain’ from posting the profile: ‘I’m ready to find Mr Right finally but still willing to play along the way!’ (sharpfocus). The defensive ‘I’m just an average guy who enjoys life to the full, who is looking for Mr Right, but aren’t we all’ (alex80) strengthens the legitimacy of the search for Mr Right by using an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) – ‘aren’t we all?’

Sometimes humour and/or reference to popular culture were used to lighten the serious or potentially emotional/‘too close to home’ tone: ‘looking for that guy with either ‘Za Za Zhu’(if you watched Sex and the City you will know what I mean) or Va Va Voom. Like most guyz been burned a few times... tired of kissing those pesky frogs, looking for that elusive prince’ (morris1970).

Will try anything – from vanilla to sleaze. A wide gamut of constructions of sexual identity was produced in the profiles sampled. A number of profiles contained sexually explicit photographs and had no text or only few words along the lines of ‘[Looking for] hot, no-strings attached fun’ and or ‘will try anything, from vanilla to sleaze’. There was perhaps a sense that images speak louder than words, a sense of opposing ‘words’ and ‘pictures’, ‘talk’ and ‘action’ (promised by the explicit photographs) – and in some cases this impatience with ‘talk’ was reflected offline: ‘I like wee guys, big cocks, round bums, not too much chatter and a sense of adventure’ (versatile-wizard).

A high proportion of these profiles were posted by men who identified as bi-sexual in the relevant box in the ‘general information’ column; the word ‘discreet’ often featured in these brief texts produced by bi-sexual men, conveying the impression of an online identity dissonant with their everyday offline identity.

Role play was often referenced – and very creatively. It was surprising – given the binary view of sex produced by some profiles in which ‘straight-acting’ was used as a device to construct identity – to find, on the other hand, great flexibility in engagement with role play – and not just because many identi-
fied as ‘versatile’. It was equally surprising to find that, out of those who identified as ‘bottom’ or ‘passive’, given the available and widespread negative connotations of this construction, only one evidenced a defensive tone, ‘passive but not boring’ (roland2).

superhorny’s profile was representative of many that constructed a very fluid sexual identity – fluid both in terms of change over time/personal journey and in terms of interaction with sexual partners: ‘Used to be more mutual/vers but have been getting more and more into topping... Have been 90 per cent top for past two years though can still be a bttm pig for right guy, and enjoy it very much when it happens. Guess I just luv it all, however being a top is where my head space is.’

While toys were part of the production of some sexual selves, toyman constructed his sexual identity entirely through four photos featuring a collection of sex toys and constructed himself in the text as a ‘sleazy PervDaddy’ looking for analy fixated guys. Apart from toys, the ‘objects’/materials that seemed to be more involved in the construction of sexual identity through the profile photos were those that evoked popular scenarios of gay fetish culture: leather and PVC. A self-styled PVC tart positioned himself as a single bi-man, ‘just a horny sex-crazed human being. Occasionally like to xdress in PVC as a tart, high boots and all’ and was looking for someone with similar interest. The profile photograph shows someone (seen from the neck down) completely covered in PVC including gloves, sitting on a bed.

‘Female attire’ in the words of silkstockings was referenced (also as cross-dressing) in three profiles. The speaker seeks someone with whom to enact scenarios: ‘Looking for compatible female/crossdresser with accommodation who wants to take the time to dress together and become friends rather than an instant quickie...’ Another profile, for mistress4u, boasts about an ‘extensive wardrobe including leather, pvc. latex, fur and all the usual stuff for outings and innings. Loads of toys and BDSM15 gear. In short – something for every occasion.’

Fetish poses a challenge to traditional conceptualisations of sex around discourses that pathologise non-heteronormative sexual practices. If sexual identity is constructed through fetish, through objects, through the enactment of scenarios, it negates the humanistic idea that the sexual self is bounded by the body.

Overview
As seen, profiles posted on www.gaydar.co.uk evidenced a strikingly rich discursive palette of rhetorical devices to elaborate on a relatively limited range of core themes. The medium was crucial in the construction of ‘doing (online) gay’. Many profiles referenced the site in many ways – be it by wondering what to write on the profile – be it by engaging with its technological possibilities – uploading photos, encouraging fellow-users to send e-mail and voicemail messages. These features were also used to ‘emerge’ as individuals: with so many profiles available at any one time, profile owners used the technology to say – indeed, scream, ‘try me!’ – which highlights a process of commodification in line with that identified by Thorne and Coupland (1998). Another strategy that partly sustained this quest for individualism was to distance oneself from the shallowness ascribed to the ‘amorphous mass’ of others ‘on here’.

While website users mainly looking for sex revelled in the possibilities of the internet for finding new partners, and often described themselves as ‘horny and open-minded’, users mainly looking for a relationship saw the perceived emphasis on sex ‘on here’ as a barrier to finding a partner for a relationship. Many narratives of ‘looking for a relationship’ hinted at somewhat negative experiences in the past (‘been around the block’) – and all this contributed to an

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15 Umbrella term/acronym for bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism.
impression of cynicism as regards finding ‘a very special person’ online.

There was widespread discrimination towards individuals perceived as ‘camp’ and/or visibly gay. Sometimes discrimination was worryingly constructed within liberal discourses of ‘not making a song and dance’ about being gay. The implication is that being gay has been granted equality and any gay visibility goes against discourses of equality – but such discourses that construct equality as ‘granted’, i.e. given (by the heteropatriarchal/heteronormative majority) are very damaging.

A methodological point to note is that the project was located – in terms of data collection – on a faultline – between ‘found materials’ and ‘participants’. Although profiles are constructions, found materials, reference was made to how ‘profile owners’ or ‘speakers’ or ‘men’ positioned themselves.

As it is often the case with qualitative research, so many data are collected (and produced) that it is not possible to ‘contain’ this wealth of narratives within one project – and during the research process, different perspectives of engaging with the research not envisaged in the early stages may open up new lines of enquiry or modify the initial research question(s). When a study opens up new research questions, there is scope for turning limitations (such as the marginal role of photos in the analysis here, or the metrocentric bias of the sampling, the use of only one, general interest – as opposed to specialist fetish – website) into positive ideas for the future, to explore new research questions that the present analysis considered only briefly, for example, how constructing a (gay/online) sexual identity may rely on the depiction of fetish clothing and objects and how such constructions challenge embodied conceptualisations of the (sexual) self.

In short, the scope for new developments using this first study as a pilot, as a springboard, is endless. In the interim, it is hoped that this report has produced a reasonably convincing account of how the subject is produced on a gay dating website.

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Hegemonic masculinity … is a way of being masculine that marginalises and subordinates not only women’s activities but also other forms of masculinity such as ‘camp’ or effeminate masculinity. Typically, it involves the brutal repression of the activities of gay men and their construction as a despised ‘Other’. (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p.336)

According to Connell (1992) gay masculinities are subordinated and othered as they violate the heterosexual requirements of hegemonic masculinity while ‘camp’ masculinities are associated with women. As ‘Other’ masculinities, the study of gay men’s accounts of masculinity may have important implications for the analysis of gender as a whole. As Nardi (2000, p.11) notes, a full understanding of gender requires examination of the ‘divergent subcultures and diversities’ of men and women that characterise society.

Gay men have often been perceived as lacking masculinity and for many in Western cultures male homosexuality is associated with the very absence of masculinity in men (Connell, 1995). Psychological discourses regarding gay men have long linked gender identity with sexual identity. Having sexual desires for other men has traditionally been attributed to some fundamental feminine element within gay men’s psyches. In the 19th century, for instance, Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs (1864–1879/1994) postulated that ‘homosexual’ men possessed a female ‘soul’ in a male body. This concept was popularised through the work of Krafft-Ebing (1886/1965) and other early sexologists, contributing to the prevalent notion within lay and psychological theorising that lesbians and gay men were ‘gender inverted’. Before the rise of ‘gay affirmative’ psychology in the 1970s, homosexuality was traditionally within the domain of ‘abnormal psychology’ with a strong emphasis on aetiology which linked same-sex attractions and behaviours with gender disturbance (Kitzinger, 1987). Moreover, research suggests that sexual/gender inversion theory remains a well-established social perception in modern society (e.g. Kite & Deaux, 1987; Peel, 2005). This may not, however, be how gay men perceive themselves. Recent decades have seen a so-called masculinisation of gay men (Gough, 1989), and some research suggests that most gay men perceive themselves as relatively androgynous (McDonald & Moore, 1978).

Traditionally gay masculinities have not been a central focus in the masculinities literature. As Gary Dowsett (1993, p.697) commented ‘gay men occupy a strange position in masculinity research and men’s
Homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder until it was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual II* in 1973.

When gay men are mentioned, they are often tangential to the main focus on heterosexual masculinities; for example, how gay masculinities problematise heterosexual masculinities and how homophobia is crucial in the construction of heterosexual masculinities (e.g. Kimmel, 1994). To date, gay masculinities *per se* have received comparatively little attention; largely located in token gay chapters akin to Celia Kitzinger’s (1996) idiom of the ‘token lesbian chapter’ in feminist psychology. There is, however, a growing body of literature addressing gay men’s masculinities (e.g. Connell, 1992; Drummond, 2005; Nardi, 2000; Pronger, 1990).

Such work arguably draws on realist or critical realist approaches – treating what their participants say as representing their ‘real’ experiences or understanding of masculinity. We draw on discourse analytic approaches to masculinity which, as Edley (2006, p.601) notes, claim that ‘masculinity is not something that stands outside of discourse as an essential aspect or quality of men; instead, it is seen as something that is routinely constructed ‘in’ and ‘through’ discourse’. While this is not a conventional approach within the psychology of masculinity, discursive approaches are now influential in British social psychology and LGBTQ psychology.

**Psychological approaches to masculinity: Traditional and Discursive**

Until the mid 1970s social psychologists, such as Terman and Miles (1936), generally treated gender as a unidimensional construct and masculinity and femininity were viewed as opposite ends of one spectrum. Masculinity was largely understood in terms of ‘male sex role theory’ whereby psychological researchers sought to identify what these ‘masculine’ traits and attributes were and designed scales to measure individuals’ levels of masculinity (Morawski, 1985). Within this paradigm ‘insufficient’ masculinity was viewed as problematic and historically linked with homosexuality and poor mental health. With the rise of second-wave feminism and gay liberation movements, there was a shift in how social psychology conceptualised masculinity. A ‘healthy androgyny’ model became ascendant whereby it was viewed as healthy to have both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits. The androgynous person, as Bem (1974, p.162) noted, came to ‘define a more human standard of psychological health’. Smiler (2004, p.23) argues that this, together with a cultural acceptance of homosexuality led to greater tolerance of ‘hypomasculinity’.

Although androgynous approaches challenged the assumption that the ‘unmasculine’ man was unhealthy, this arguably did not eradicate social stigma related to perceived ‘effeminacy’ and did not challenge the view that masculinity was a stable attribute, which could in some way be objectively measured (Marecek, 1995). Psychological conceptions of masculinity remained essentialist and located firmly within the individual (Bohan, 1997).

As Smiler (2004) notes, conceptions of masculinity as a single, coherent stereotypical form have been challenged by sociologists who documented both changes in masculinity between time periods and the existence of various forms of masculinity in modern day society (e.g. Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). This notion of multiple masculinities led to adjustments in psychological theorising, centring on the proposition that men internalise not one form of masculinity, but the type or definition of masculinity held as desirable for their particular demographic or ‘reference’ group (Pleck, 1995; Wade, 1998). From this perspective it was viewed that gay men have particular forms of masculinity (‘gay masculinities’) which they internalise and conform to.

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1 Homosexuality was classified as a mental disorder until it was removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual II* in 1973.
Feminist informed social constructionist and discourse analytic approaches – which have gained ground in (British) social psychology in recent decades – provide a radical departure from these traditional conceptions of masculinity. The meaning of masculinity and masculine identities are viewed as provisional – worked and re-worked to meet the needs of particular interactions (Wetherell & Griffin, 1998) and, therefore, not viewed stable entities, which we can measure, but as fragmented and in a constant state of flux. Those studies which, to date, have applied such principles to the study of masculine identities (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999) have drawn on Connell’s (1987, 1995) analysis of various masculinities being constructed, whereby certain styles of (hegemonic) masculinity are socially prescribed. Although this work has embraced (some of) Connell’s theoretical standpoints (such as his acknowledgement that masculinities are culturally and contextually produced), the emphasis is on how they are complicit with (or indeed resistant to) hegemonic forms of masculinity in interaction.

Many studies taking such an approach, however, have yet to look specifically at gay men’s talk. Despite common criticisms of traditional psychological approaches for failing to recognise how other aspects of identity such as ethnicity and social class intersect with masculine identities (Wetherell & Griffin, 1991); discursive psychologists do not always specify the sexual identities of the men in their studies (e.g. Wetherell & Edley, 1999). So, whilst nuanced and sophisticated awareness of other forms of difference and diversity are acknowledged and analysed, sexual identities are commonly overlooked (see also Hegarty, 2007). When discursive psychological research has focused on sexuality the emphasis has been on heterosexual discourse surrounding masculinity and heterosexual men’s homophobic/heterosexual discursive practices (e.g. Gough, 2002; Korobov, 2004). What is lacking in this literature is analysis of how gay men talk about themselves as men within a culture that continues to socially construct them as inherently unmasculine and effeminate. This article, therefore, focuses specifically on young gay men’s accounts of masculinity and of themselves as men.

Methods

Participants

The data is drawn from a small-scale qualitative study conducted in the West Midlands. The participants were 11 men who self-identified as ‘gay’, aged between 18 and 23. Nine of the participants were enrolled on various undergraduate university courses; one was a graduate and one a telephonist. All participants were friends with others in their group. The participants were recruited using a snowballing method and the study was described to the participants as a study about gay men’s masculinities. All but one of the participants had been a member of a university LGBT society and all regularly socialised in gay bars and nightclubs. Eight identified as being white and British, one as British Algerian, one as British Malaysian, and one as British Indian. All identified as able-bodied. While the sample was rather small, this is often seen as adequate for qualitative research and discourse analysis in particular, as it is the richness of the data which is viewed as important (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Procedure

Traditional focus group methodology was adapted into focus dyads and triads²: groups of two or three close friends formed four groups. The aim was to create an informal atmosphere where the participants were able to talk amongst friends and so using larger focus groups would have been inappro-

²While there is no definitive ideal number of participants for a focus group discussion, the number typically used is often cited as being between four and eight people (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998).
appropriate. Pre-existing or ‘naturally occurring’ groups may more closely approximate naturally occurring talk. And by using a small group of friends with shared histories, participants seemed comfortable in challenging or building on each other’s accounts (Kitzinger, 1994). The focus triad method retained many of the benefits of focus group methodology; in particular the co-construction of masculinity and the negotiation of meaning in interaction (Kitzinger, 1994; Wilkinson, 1998). A semi-structured schedule of questions and picture prompts were used to generate discussion around the topics of gender, sexuality and gender/sexual politics (see Appendix I). The discussions lasted approximately one hour and were tape-recorded with the participants’ permission. The discussions were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms are used to ensure participants’ anonymity.

Data analysis
The analysis can be described as a thematic discourse analysis, applying a social constructionist approach to thematic categories (see Peel et al., 2005; Singer & Hunter, 1999; Taylor & Ussher, 2001). The thematic categories were identified as set out by Braun and Clarke’s (2006) overview of thematic analysis. The first stage involved familiarisation with the data. This began with the transcription of the data, which in itself becomes part of the analytic process. The transcripts were then repeatedly read and reread to become fully immersed within the data set. The second stage involved the initial coding of the data by categorising specific features of interest. Rather than provide a thematic description of the overall discussions, the specific area of interest reported on here was the participants’ talk about effeminacy and gay men. The data was, therefore, coded around this specific topic. Coded extracts were then collated into separate files. The third stage of analysis was to identify themes; sorting initial codes according to how they relate to one another. The final stage involved reviewing the themes; checking the analysis against the original data corpus and coding any additional data under the themes. These stages, however, were not conducted in a strictly linear fashion, but rather more organically. The interpretive analysis was theoretically informed broadly by Wetherell and Edley’s (1999) approach to masculine identities as detailed above and with the discourse analytic tradition’s interest in the ideological consequences of talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Given that the analysis was ‘critical’ of the kind of talk and discourse displayed in the discussions, the findings and their interpretation were discussed with all participants. All participants understood how the interpretation of their talk was reached and agreed for their data to be used in this way.

Results
Accounting for effeminacy
While all but two of the participants stated that generally they would consider themselves to be quite masculine or at least more masculine than feminine; throughout the discussions there appeared a shared taken-for-granted acknowledgement that many gay men are ‘camp’. All of the participants, to some degree, described their behaviour as being camp at times. Such behaviour, however, was largely constructed as an irregular occurrence which needed some accounting for – particularly by those who had previously described themselves as being masculine. We see how the participants managed their identities in Extracts 1 and 2.

Extract 1: G3
Robert: I tend to be a lot camper when I’m pissed.
Kenny: Yeah the more drunk I get the more camp I get.
Robert: Especially vodka, oh God. Me on

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5 For larger extracts the group from which it is taken is indicated as either G1, G2, G3 or G4. Omitted speech is indicated by ellipsis, (.) denotes a pause, and a dash shows cut off speech.
vodka, I fem it up so much.
Kenny: Any kind of alcohol?
Theo: But generally I’m funny with it not like ‘Oh I’m drunk, I get to be myself’ (.) it’s just sometimes it’s just funny.

Extract 2: G4
Bill: You do find you get more camper when you go out.
Asif: Yeah.
Bill: I find that sometimes (.) you’re around gay people in a gay club and you become more camp.
Adam: Why is that?
Bill: I think […] everyone’s the same way I suppose (.) there are quite a lot more (.) you’re around a lot more camp people so you can pick it up.

The participants here account for their own camp or effeminate behaviours in ways that do not construct ‘camp’ as an essential part of who they were but rather as situational. In Extract 1 Robert, Kenny and Theo use alcohol consumption to account for their camp behaviours. Theo spots the danger in this collectively produced position and is quick to further account for his behaviour as an attempt to amuse others rather than the affects of alcohol revealing his ‘true self’. Of course, ‘camp’ and ‘effeminacy’ are not necessarily synonymous. Harvey (2000, p.240) refers to a ‘definitional problem’ as to what constitutes camp. Babuscio (1993) suggests that camp may refer to a type of irony, aestheticism, theatricality or humour, however, Harvey (2000, p.241) notes that in both academic and popular commentaries, camp is described as, above all, effeminate – i.e. ‘an exaggerated feminine side – not like women are’. Within the participants’ talk, camp behaviour was similarly treated as having an effeminate quality, for example, this is evident in Robert’s statement (which itself builds upon Kenny’s) when referring to himself as ‘femming’ it up when drunk. Bill, on the other hand, claims that he ‘become(s) more camp’ in a gay club because he ‘pick(s) it up’ from those around him. At another point in the discussion Asif refers to this being similar to picking up an accent. This kind of talk resonates with some commentators who have suggested that ‘camp’ behaviour bonds gay men together subculturally (Harvey, 2000). However, from a discursive perspective, by describing ‘camp’ behaviours as being adopted in particular contexts and group situations – for example, when socialising with other gay men – effeminacy can be dissociated from their essential self and perhaps made less of threat to their masculine identities.

At another point in one of the discussions, Asif began to talk about aspects of his character which he would consider ‘feminine’ and stated: ‘I’m becoming less masculine in my mind now’. With his masculine identity in need of repair this was super- vened by the following.

Extract 3: G4
Asif: When I was in India a lot of the guys came over as camp, they were very touchy over there and the way that they behave is very camp.
Bill: Normal straight guys?
Asif: Yeah normal straight guys, but they do have all the like masculine traits as well, as in they’re quite in control, like if they want something done they’re quite bossy about it.
Bill: Asian guys always seem assertive, they always seem to get things done, well from my experience of people at work anyway.
Asif: They’ve got like the laddish behaviours and like the play fighting.
Bill: They’re always talking about cars as well.
Asif: Yeah, well it was motorbikes there [in India], I drove a motorbike there.

It could be argued that here, Asif draws on his cultural background as a British Indian man to legitimate having traits which are considered in the West to be traditionally feminine. ‘Normal straight men’ in India are described, by Asif, as having behaviours which are very camp (e.g. ‘very touchy’) whilst having masculine traits as well. He thus suggests that it is acceptable and
‘normal’ for these men to possess both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ traits and intimates that these are cultural constructs. Asif and Bill then briefly discuss traits of Indian men which are considered in the West to be traditionally masculine, for example, assertiveness, play fighting and an interest in motor vehicles. Asif can then be seen to identify with these men by claiming an interest in one of these masculine activities by riding a motorbike.

**Distancing from effeminacy**

While these men at times constructed gay men as a group as more effeminate than heterosexual men, much of their talk could be read as distancing themselves from an effeminate ‘other’. The participants repeatedly seemed to negotiate their identities in correspondence with the stereotype of gay men as inherently effeminate. In the previous theme we demonstrated how they accounted for their own (and others’) ‘camp’ behaviours in ways which minimised any ‘damage’ to their masculine identities. In this theme we show how they distanced effeminacy from either themselves personally or from their sexual identity as a gay man more generally. Consider the following extract:

**Extract 4: G2**

Ben: Like I had a friend at my primary school and he used to get ripped [made fun of] all the time because he’s quite effeminate, he was actually straight, while I wasn’t, and I remember, I saw how quite painful it was.

In what is presented as a short recollection illustrating the difficulties of being effeminate, Ben is distancing effeminacy from his gay male identity by proffering that there are heterosexual men who are effeminate. Moreover, he does this in a more persuasive way than simply stating that heterosexual men can be effeminate too. Rather he draws on his personal experience of a heterosexual effeminate friend as evidence, which he then contrasts with himself as a gay man. He also implies that his only experience of how difficult being effeminate can be is his observation of someone else being victimised. This can be similarly seen in Extract 5.

**Extract 5: G3**

Theo: You know I can walk into Lloyds bar [a ‘straight bar’] on a Saturday night and no one’s gonna punch me.

Kenny: I can’t.

Theo: Why not?

Kenny: No because of my voice (.) as soon as I start talking people know I’m gay so-

Robert: That’s an unfair assumption on their part because I know (.) I’ve known straight men camper than you are but are 100 per cent as straight as an arrow.

Theo: Yeah.

Here Theo suggests that he is not vulnerable to homophobic attack by asserting his ability to ‘pass’ as heterosexual, thus positioning himself within a male norm. Kenny, on the other hand, constructs the way that he talks as a signifier of his sexual identity. Robert responds to this statement by again disassociating the way Kenny talks with being gay. He states that this is an ‘unfair assumption’ and again draws on his personal experience of heterosexual men who are camper than Kenny but ‘are 100 per cent as straight as an arrow’, with which Theo agrees. Here the accounts of Ben, in Extract 4, and Robert, in Extract 5, may both function to resist the notion that effeminacy is a signifier of a gay identity.

As the above extract suggested, Kenny described himself as being evidently gay and referred to himself on a number of occasions as ‘feminine’ and a ‘sissy’. This could be seen as quite subversive and similar to the ‘reclaiming’ strategies used by non-heterosexuals when referring to themselves as ‘queer’, for example. Despite this, even Kenny could be seen to distance himself from effeminate others as the following extract demonstrates.
Extract 6: G3

Kenny: See I’m such a hypocrite because on telly I love people like that [Graham Norton]-
Robert: But in real life-
Kenny: In real life if I’m working with someone like that I can’t stand ’em. If I see ’em on telly I just laugh my head off and think how great they are. If I’m working next to one or working with someone like that then I just have to walk away because they do my head in after a while because they’re just too gay.
Robert: It’s the whole, nice to visit but wouldn’t want to live there kind of thing.
Kenny: Yeah too gay to function some of them.

The phrase ‘people like that’ and the words ‘they’ and ‘them’ distance himself from effeminate men which he says he ‘can’t stand’. Interestingly, despite Robert’s previous attempt to disassociate being gay with being effeminate, Kenny here describes effeminate men as being ‘too gay’. By being disparaging about effeminate gay men, Kenny can be seen as ‘repairing’ damage done to his masculine identity and (re)aligning himself with Robert and Theo in the discussion. In Extract 7 below Robert and Theo discuss the words ‘sissy’ and ‘nancy’ in ways which distance themselves from femininity/effeminacy and other gay men who are effeminate.

Extract 7: G3

Theo: I agree a lot of people do just use it [the word sissy] to- (. ) all gay people are sissies apparently and it’s like well actually no.
Kenny: Well to a degree you are because you just admitted that you do camp it up when you’re drunk.
[...]
Theo: Yeah but if someone saw me walking down Hurst street [part of the ‘gay village’ in Birmingham, UK] and shouted out ‘Oi sissy’ I’d be like ‘what the hell are you talking about’ (. ) I’m just you know-
Robert: Just a regular guy.

Theo here refutes the idea that ‘all gay people are sissies’, which Kenny appears to orient towards, suggesting that Theo himself is not one of these gay men. Kenny then challenges this by referring to Theo having previously ‘admitted’ to acting camp when drunk. Theo then compares himself to other gay men and suggests that it would simply be nonsensical for someone to call him a sissy (‘I’d be like what the hell are you talking about’). Robert then builds on Theo’s statement, finishing off his sentence for him with ‘just a regular guy’.

Conclusion

This analysis has illuminated (some of) the ways in which (young) gay men construct themselves as men and how they construct effeminacy. These men resisted essentialist notions of gay male effeminacy when applied to themselves personally and they tended to disassociate effeminacy from their identities as gay men. Despite gay men being subordinated under hegemonic masculine ideology, I suggest that these men’s talk engaged with such ideology in negotiating the issue of effeminacy. These participants endorsed, to some extent, gender non-conformity as an aspect of collective gay male culture and described themselves as ‘camp’ in certain contexts. Simultaneouosly, however, the ways they distanced themselves from effeminacy (re)produced (hetero)normative values which devalued gender non-conformity among men in general and gay men in particular.

As Kimmel noted (1994, p.134) ‘women and gay men become the ‘other’ against which heterosexual men project their identities, against whom they stack the decks so as to compete in a situation in which they will always win’. In a similar way in this study, the effeminate or ‘extremely feminine’ became the ‘other’ against which these gay men discursively projected their own identities. Effeminacy, in these data, was typically constructed as a problematic part of gay men’s identities. This highlights that the dominant discourses of masculinity which
are available in Western culture for gay men to draw upon remain imbued with heterosexism. Although these gay men actively challenged dominant notions of gay men as effeminate, a reinvigoration of (pro)feminist and radical gay politics would more fundamentally challenge dominant notions of masculinity: and could do so in ways that are inclusive of currently stigmatised forms of masculinity.

This analysis highlights that these gay men positioned themselves as ordinary, ‘regular guys’ (see especially Extract 7). This is similar to the ‘ordinary’ position found in Wetherell and Edley’s (1999) study of male students (of unknown sexual identity) in which hypermasculinity was constructed as a stereotype against which the self was produced as average, moderate or normal. Wetherell and Edley (1999) suggested that ‘ordinary’ positions may be iconic amongst men in general. However, being ‘ordinary’, ‘average’ and ‘normal’ may have particular significance for gay men, who’s sexual and gender identities have historically been perceived as abnormal and deviant. I hope to have furthered the notion that accounts of masculinities – in this case those offered by gay men – are context sensitive, multiple and not rooted within the individual in a fixed, monolithic way. The strategies used to negotiate gendered identities by the young gay men in these group discussions are products of that local context. This analysis has focused specifically on gay men whose masculinities have traditionally been marginalised. Further research needs a critical focus on how gay men resist and/or are complicit with their own marginalisation.

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**Appendix I: Group discussion schedule and picture prompts**

1. Can we start by briefly discussing what kind of things we think of when we think of ‘men’ or ‘maleness’?
2. What is the best thing about being a man?
3. What is the worst thing about being a man?
4. Picture prompts (see below)
5. Would you consider yourselves to be masculine? In what ways?
6. What do you think about words such as ‘Sissy’ or ‘Nancy’ to describe gay men?
7. Do you think there are any differences between your friendships and heterosexual men’s friendships?
8. How about differences between your relationships and heterosexual men’s relationships?
9. What do you think about the common assumption that gay men’s relationships with women are better than heterosexual men’s?
10. How would you describe your relationships with women?

**Picture prompts:**

1. The cover of a *Gay Times* magazine displaying a man with a shaved head, wearing a vest top and prominently featuring his left bicep. The headline text, accompanying the picture read: ‘TOUGH: Burn off some testosterone’.
2. A picture of the gay comedian and television personality Graham Norton, with his right hand on his hip and his left wrist exaggeratedly ‘limp’.
3. A picture of three drag queens, wearing large wigs and short dresses.
The complexity of Butch and Femme among sexual minority women in the 21st century

Esther D. Rothblum

Sixty-four sexual minority women (22 femme, 21 butch, and 21 who identified as both or neither) were asked open-ended questions about butch and femme. The sample ranged from those who considered butch/femme to be core aspects of their identity to those who found the terms meaningless or outdated. Many women mentioned appearance and/or masculinity/femininity when describing butch and femme. Women were equally divided about whether butch/femme was important to them, and also whether or not it was related to sexual activity. Few women divided housework or childcare according to butch/femme roles. Participants often stated that bisexual women were likely to be femme, yet few bisexual women in this sample identified as either butch or femme. Concepts of butch (or ‘stud’) and femme were perceived as more common in the African American and Latina communities and less so in Native American communities.

Keywords: butch; femme; lesbian identity; bisexual identity; queer identity.

Consider the following quotes:

Butch – a woman who takes on (and usually improves) any or all of the aspects of a traditional heterosexual male’s role, especially in relation to her partner. For instance, a butch can be butch because she wears men’s jeans and drinks cheap beer and loves basketball, or because she opens doors for her lady, kills spiders for her lady, or refuses to let her lady drive. (Bristol, white lesbian, 20s)

I love gender fluidity in general, and the fluidity between butch, boy, FTM, and femme in one or between two people is just really fun to watch. I love the mystery of a gender presentation that’s really hard to pin down. (Brendon, white genderqueer, 20s)

I resist the binary completely... who came up with these categories? (Butch, African American transman, 40s)

Lesbians and bisexual women have used the terms ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ for over 100 years (Gibson & Meem, 2002), but the meanings of these terms are vague. Because lesbians were considered to be masculine in appearance, gender role behaviour, and choice of (female) partners, the word ‘butch’ referred to the ways in which lesbians were ‘mannish’ (Gibson & Meem, p.3). Femme lesbians were feminine in appearance and gender role behaviour, but subverted or destabilised concepts of gender in their lesbian identity and choice of female partners (Haller, 2009).

With the advent of the second-wave feminist movement in the 1970s, however, androgyny became the norm for lesbians (Loulan, 1990). Lesbians who didn’t appear androgynous were termed ‘politically incorrect’. In particular, ‘old culture’ lesbians who still identified as butch or femme roles were criticised (Loulan, 1990, p.41).

The 1980s and 1990s reflected greater diversity in the lesbian communities, as lesbians became more visible and lesbian communities became more multicultural. The lesbian ‘baby boom’ resulted in preg-
nant lesbians and lesbians rearing children. Postmodernism and queer theory questioned gender roles and gender identity. Butch/femme terms were reclaimed, but with a difference (see Faderman, 1992). Now women could change gender roles and appearance from one day to the next, or even dress in gender-blending ways. A butch no longer was limited to finding a femme lover. And some women now identified as transgender instead of butch.

There has been considerable interest in contemporary understandings of butch/femme in the humanities, with books such as Persistent Desire: A Femme/Butch Reader (Nestle, 1992), Female Masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) and Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History (Abate, 2008). The book Stud: Dispelling the Myths (Kamau, 2008) focuses on images and poetry about female masculinity in the African American communities. Popular books such as The Femme’s Guide to the Universe (Rednour, 2000) and Butch is a Noun (Bergman, 2010), among many others, are aimed at young queer women.

Recent years have seen emphasis on the role that socio-economic class and race/ethnicity played in butch/femme identities, particularly in working-class settings and among African American and Latina communities (Lapovsky Kennedy & Davis, 1993). Increasingly, scholars have described butch/femme identities in historical or contemporary contexts across a number of cultures in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas (for overviews, see Blackwood & Wieringa, 1999; Morgan & Wieringa, 2006; Murray & Roscoe, 2001).

In contrast, there has been relatively little psychological research about butch/femme roles, and this research has assumed a one-dimensional understanding of the terms butch and femme. For example, Singh et al. (1999) asked lesbians to self-identify as butch or femme on a single item, and then compared butches and femmes on such variables as waist-to-hip ratio, testosterone levels, and desire to have children. Bailey et al. (1997) asked lesbians to identify as butch or femme on a single item, and asked them to rate the attractiveness of lesbians in personal advertisements. An exception to such monolithic conceptions of butch/femme is research by Levitt and Horne (2002), who asked women to self-identify as butch, femme, androgynous, or other; these variables were then examined in light of sexual orientation, feminism, outness, and discrimination.

There is no question that many contemporary sexual minority women use the terms butch and femme as forms of self-identity and vehicles for understanding and describing women in their communities. The current project focused on the complexity of these terms and what they mean to sexual minority women in contemporary US communities. Does butch/femme refer to physical appearance, so that women can be identified as butch or femme via photographs or visual media? How does butch/femme relate to concepts of masculinity/femininity? What role does being butch or femme play in sexual activity? Is there a relationship between butch/femme and division of housework and childcare? Are these concepts different for women of different age cohorts, ethnic/racial identities, or sexual orientations?

Method
Announcements of the project were placed on internet listservs, and asked women to distribute the announcement to other listservs of which they were a part. Announcements emphasised that this study was looking for lesbian and bisexual women in specific age cohorts (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and over 50), in rural and urban settings across the US, across income levels, and from diverse ethnic and racial groups, and that I would conduct telephone interviews with interested participants. Announcements also explained that this project focused on their understanding of butch/femme, and that I was also interested in women who do not find the terms butch or femme to be useful or representative. I interviewed 34 women over the telephone and four (local women)
in person. I had planned to conduct 40 interviews, but the announcement appeared on a number of internet sites and, as women contacted me near the end of the project, I asked them to reply to my interview questions via e-mail – 26 women did so. Thus the entire sample consisted of 64 women, which is quite large for a qualitative study. Not surprisingly, women who e-mailed responses tended to be younger (32 years on average) than those who I interviewed in person (48 years).

The participants came from 20 US states and two provinces of Canada. They ranged in age from 19 to 64, with one woman under age 20, 15 in their 20s, 14 in their 30s, 14 in their 40s, 11 in their 50s, and nine in their 60s. About one-third of participants (20 out of 64) were women of colour (African American, Asian American, Latina, Middle Eastern American, Native American, and biracial or biethnic).

The sample was about equally divided into those who identified as butch, those who identified as femme, and those who did not identify clearly as butch or femme. Of the 22 women who identified as femme, 15 of them identified as lesbian, one as dyke, one as bisexual, one as queer/bisexual, and four as queer. Of the 21 women who identified as butch or equivalent (two used the term ‘stud,’ which is more common in the African American communities and one used the term ‘boi’), 11 identified as lesbian, one as dyke, two as gay, one as bisexual, two as queer, one as transgender, one as two-spirit (a term often used in Native American communities), and two did not identify with any of these terms. The remaining 21 women did not identify clearly as butch or femme; of these women, 11 said they were neither butch nor femme, three said ‘other,’ one ‘in between butch and femme,’ one ‘medium-to-femme,’ two androgynous, two both butch and femme, and one was a former butch who now identified as a transman (this participant came out as trans a few weeks before the interview and is the only one in the sample to use the pronoun ‘he’). Of the women who did not identify clearly as butch or femme, eight identified as lesbian, eight as bisexual, two as queer, one as transgender, one as two-spirit, and one as other.

Data were collected using a qualitative research methodology. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, tapes were sent back to participants for them to keep, and transcribed interviews were e-mailed to participants for their comments. Only a few women had comments (usually providing more detail, or asking me to change identifying information), and these changes were incorporated into the transcripts. Emails were edited in order to delete real names and addresses. Everyone was asked to provide a pseudonym.

The study focused on the following questions:

- Describe what the terms ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ mean to you. What are some characteristics of a butch and a femme woman? How important or valuable are these terms to you?
- How are conceptions of butch/femme similar to or difference from conceptions of masculine/feminine?
- How do you think your lesbian/bisexual communities view butch and femme? Is there a difference between lesbian and bisexual women in how butch or femme they are or supposed to be?
- How do you think mainstream heterosexual society views lesbians or bisexual women that are butch or femme? How are butches versus femmes accepted by families of origin, in the workplace, as mothers? Are hate crimes directed at women based on masculine appearance or attributes?
- How would you describe yourself in butch/femme terms? Has your self-identity about being butch/femme changed over time? In what ways? Are there situations where you feel more butch or femme? What are they?
- Do you currently have a lover? Describe your lover in butch/femme terms. How is this similar to or different from previous
lovers? Are you attracted to women based on certain physical or personality characteristics? If so, how are these related to someone being butch or femme? How is being butch or femme related to sexual activity?

- Describe which household tasks you and your lover do, and who does which tasks. (If children) who gave birth to each child? Describe which childcare tasks you and your lover do, and who does which tasks.

Results

The results were interpreted using thematic analysis, and aimed to provide a descriptive account of participants’ experiences about butch and femme. As Braun and Clarke (2006) have described, thematic analysis is used to search for themes or patterns within an entire data set, and can be used within most theoretical frameworks. The questions (listed above) were chosen to form predetermined themes but also to allow for the emergence of new categories and subcategories from the participants’ interviews. Direct quotes are used as examples below, followed by the participant’s pseudonym, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age decade.

What is butch/femme in the 21st century?

Participants had a large and diverse understanding of the concepts of butch and femme, resulting in the following themes: (1) identity; (2) appearance and clothing; (3) masculinity/femininity; (4) lovers/sexual activity; and (5) division of housework and childcare. Additionally, the concepts of butch and femme were not meaningful to some women, and women varied widely in how important these concepts were to them. Finally, the last section describes butch/femme across sexual identity, age, and race/ethnicity.

Identity

Fifteen women (23 per cent) described butch/femme in terms of identity, often as a very core part of themselves:

‘For me, a butch/femme is a person who has an identity but it goes deep down inside; it’s not just what it appears on the outside... I think it’s the whole connection on a spiritual level. Even though physically you might be male or female, I think souls are also male/female or masculine/feminine.’

(Angel, Latina Mestiza lesbian, 40s)

Bluestocking (white lesbian, 50s) felt that women were born butch or femme: ‘I honestly believe that in as much people are born gay, I believe we’re also born butch or femme. And so one is the yin and one is the yang and there are so many degrees of feminine and butch. I’m quite feminine and I always have been and I like butches who are masculine but I think that they need to support one another and love one another and step up to the plate and create a life.’

Fiona (white queer femme, late teens) viewed butch and femme as ‘distinct genders’. Jackie (white lesbian, 40s) stated: ‘I was butch long before I was a lesbian. It seems even more core to my being than my sexual orientation.’

Jeanne (white lesbian, 40s) defined butch and femme as ‘lesbian gender.’ Simone (African American lesbian, 40s) said she uses ‘these terms to identify different types of lesbians, like a race.’ Quinn (white lesbian, 30s) wrote: ‘Butches are a gender, femmes are a gender, andron are a gender, sporty dykes, artsy dykes, hippie chicks, etc., all allow for the range of human expression and the finding of like-minded friends.’

As these examples demonstrate, when women are describing butch/femme as more core than sexual orientation, or equivalent to race in categorical importance, this highlights the centrality of butch/femme in their lives. Women who conceptualised butch/femme as an identity usually viewed these concepts as central to all aspects of their lives.

Appearance and clothing

The majority of respondents (36, or 78 per cent) mentioned appearance or clothing when defining who was butch or femme.
Lizette (Latina lesbian, 30s) said ‘Well, butches and femmes can be characterised by external qualities. The way they look… Certain mannerisms.’ Charlie (Latina lesbian, 40s) defined butch/femme as follows: ‘…basically butch denotes to me in terms of women someone who is much more masculine, someone who tends to carry herself in a different way and femme would denote someone who is a lot more feminine and who wears more dresses whereas a butch might be more comfortable in what would be considered men’s clothing, maybe t-shirts or button-down scale.’ Charlie herself identifies as androgynous, which she defines as: ‘What it means is that I feel comfortable going in between the two. On days off or on my time off, like right now I’m wearing sweatpants, t-shirt, and sweatshirt. But when I dress up for work or for special occasions I often wear skirts, dresses or suits… I’m comfortable moving within those two types of manners of dressing.’

Mandy (white lesbian, 20s) also described butch/femme appearance: ‘Butch lesbians define their gender in masculine terms and demonstrate masculine qualities of appearance. Butches, to me are ‘manly’ women. A butch woman will often dress in menswear, even so far as wearing mens’ underclothes and ‘packing’ [wearing a prosthetic penis]. To me, a butch lesbian is not to be confused with someone who wears androgynous clothing or appears androgynous. Butches are not androgynous, they are butch, which means they look like men. Femmes are lesbians who identify as very feminine. Femme lesbians are very comfortable embracing their femininity while also being lesbians. Femmes often dress in a similar fashion as heterosexual women. Sometimes butch and femme individuals display qualities of appearance of butch/femme very visibly and sometimes it is more subtle.’

Lukes and Land (1990) have emphasised the importance of appearance when sexual minorities want to be noticeable to others. They state (p.159): ‘However, because sexual minorities are not easily identifiable to each other. Because there is no protective coloration of the group, this can inhibit identification with their minority group members. In the complex web of when and how homosexuals decide to disclose their homosexuality, some may choose to do so by dressing in a stereotypical manner.’ Thus it is not surprising that women who identify as butch or femme take on the appearance, posture, clothing, and other attributes of these identities, in order to be recognisable as butch or femme in their communities.

On the other hand, some women emphasised that appearance is not related to being butch or femme. As Doreen (white queer woman, 20s) explained, ‘So someone can look butch or femme to me, but they’re not ‘really’ butch or femme unless they self-identify that way.’ Kimberly (white lesbian, 40s) said ‘I think you can look butch and feel femme or look femme and feel butch.’ And Rose (white queer/bisexual woman, 20s) stated: ‘In my opinion, appearance does not dictate behaviour.’

Gender roles and relationship to masculinity/femininity

About one-third of participants defined butch/femme in terms of gender roles. Jennie (white lesbian, 40s) described this as follows: ‘And my knowledge of actual butch and femme couples is that the femme is extrovert, the organiser, more interested in keeping up with friends and literally has the more feminine qualities in terms of girlfriends. And the butch, regardless of how butch they may be, are typically a little less social or interested in being social, doesn’t mean they’re anti-social, but just not as much so, less verbal, stereotypical male sort of situation.’ Women mentioned many examples of gender roles, from toy preferences and activities in early childhood to current interests, hobbies, jobs, and personality characteristics.

When asked specifically whether butch/femme is related to masculinity or
femininity, respondents were about equally divided on whether or not this was the case. In fact, Dex (white and Latina lesbian, 30s) preferred the terms ‘masculine/feminine’ instead of butch/femme because they carry less stigma and seem clearer to her than butch and femme.

Ronya (Middle Eastern American gay woman, 20s) considered butch/femme important terms because she had a transgender lover and so people assume she is heterosexual. She said ‘And so I find that often I’m kind of forced to come out over and over and over again... and that is even in the gay community where I almost have to prove that I’m gay enough to be included.’

The terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ themselves are complex, as Lee (white bisexual woman, 60s) clarified: ‘I experience myself as fairly androgynous – somewhere in the middle of the scale in terms of gender identity. But that doesn’t mean I remotely am interested in being a male person – I just don’t experience myself as particularly feminine in most of the usual ways that that term is used.’ Margaret (white, woman-identified-butch, 30s) stated emphatically: ‘Butch is not about masculine anything. Butch is about being in a woman’s body and expressing a femaleness that is not attracted to men, is not mimicking men, in fact a being that is sort of the anti-male. Butch is a woman loving being. Men are basically women hating or at least women loathing.’ And Tav (white woman, 60s) wrote: ‘Masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are traits defined by our culture, or society, as being most closely associated with the society’s widely accepted genders, ‘man’ and ‘woman’, ‘Butch’ and ‘femme’ are actually genders.’

Lovers and sexual activity
Generally speaking, women who identified as femme had butch lovers and vice versa. Of the 17 women who were currently in a relationship and who identified as femme, 15 (88 per cent) had butch lovers, and of the 17 women who were currently in a relationship and who identified as butch, 13 (76 per cent) had femme lovers. Twelve women (19 per cent) were not currently in a relationship. Three women were currently married to men, another woman was currently dating men, and two women had lovers who were transgender. Three women were in polyamorous relationships; as Elizabeth (white queer woman, 20s) wrote: ‘I currently have three lovers – two of whom are on the continuum of butch, and one who is more femme.’

Twenty women (31 per cent) felt that butch/femme was related to sexual activity, such as who initiated sex, who was a top or bottom, who used a strap-on dildo, etc. Twenty-three women (36 per cent) stated that butch/femme was not related to sexual activity. Although these percentages are fairly similar, the latter group had a lot more to say about sexual activity. Kate (white queer woman, 20s) stated: ‘I would say that one place that our butch/femme dynamics don’t totally extend is the bedroom.’ Katherine (white bisexual woman, 30s) said: ‘Neither term connotes anything sexual to me.’ Susannah (white lesbian, 20s) described this issue as follows: ‘There are many stereotypes about how being butch or femme relates to sexual activity, but I think they’re ridiculous, sexist and damaging. Butches and femmes can both be tops, bottoms, switches or something else entirely, can both enjoy penetrating a partner and being penetrated, etc., and none of those things make a person more or less butch or femme. Butches and femmes have sex together in every possible configuration, and also in butch/butch and femme/femme pairings, and with people of every other sex and gender. The more the merrier, I say.’

An unexpected theme was that women felt more feminine when with butch women compared to sexual relationships with men. As Casey (white lesbian, 30s) explained: ‘Oh, there is definitely a difference. I feel much more like a woman with a butch woman. I think with men I never really knew what my role was, I was never really comfortable with that. It was always more a matter of appearing the way you are supposed to
appear... I think that butch women are actually much more characteristic of what we think men are, than men actually are. They are those things that we say men are, they're controlled, they're not as emotional.' Similarly, Leyla (Middle Eastern American woman, 30s) said, 'I find myself more feminine with women... But I'm not sure whether it's more the attempt to make sure you know that your rights and your position in the relationship are more securely identified.' And Max (white lesbian, 40s) said: 'I just was having a conversation with someone a couple of weeks ago who said that when she was with a man, she got much butcher because she didn't want to be seen in that really feminine way. Whereas with women, she feels more free to play with the feminine pretty side of things. And that made sense to me.'

**Energy and vibes**

Some women maintained that they could always tell whether women were butch or femme due to 'energy' or 'vibes' that other women emitted. According to these respondents, it was impossible to hide butch/femme identity, or, perhaps, ignore one's own sexual response to their presence.

'I've always said I can I.D. a butch naked, and have done so in hot tubs. I'll tell ya the gal who will get out and put on 'men's' clothes. How do I know? By the way she takes up space and holds her body. How she sits/stands. Her energetic expression' (Bella, white bisexual woman, 30s). Max (white lesbian, 40s) referred to butch/femme as 'some kind of energetic way of relating'. Brendon (white, genderqueer, 30s) defined butch as: 'Butch is beautiful. It's brash and brawny, or beguiling and sensitive. It's more of an energy – either you are or you aren't. Or you are under some circumstances. It's something that you notice about someone even if they're in the most feminine of attire, or something that you see from across a crowded room.' Sarah (white lesbian, 60s) said 'I know who's butch by what my response is to them.'

**Opposites attract**

Some women defined butch and femme in terms of opposites, yin and yang, positive and negative ions. For example, Charlie (Latina lesbian, 40s) described the relationship as: ‘...maybe like a symbiotic relationship where both are getting what they want but with different approaches. I think the butch really likes to feel needed like to feel important and that she’s pleasing her femme and the femme does like to be pleased and so it works out in the end.’ Ergun (African American and Native American transgender stud, 30s) stated: ‘I feel that we are naturally chemically attracted to each other. On some mysterious level, we fit like a glove. True there are numerous femme/femme relationships that last for years. But, there is an invisible dynamic that exists between butches and femmes! There is a mystique!’ Rachel (white lesbian, 50s) said: ‘To me the most fundamental definition is something about erotic energy. I think that’s the most meaningful and useful way for me to describe it. It’s something about the complementarity of sexual energies. Even when people are fairly close together on the spectrum, there is some way that this small difference between them becomes a complementarity in the interaction and that is an erotic dynamic in most people’s relationships.'

Bristol (white lesbian, 20s) was intrigued that, in her experience, femmes were often defined in relationship to butches: ‘Femme—a woman who takes on any or all aspects of a traditional heterosexual female’s role, almost exclusively in relation to her partner. Women who simply ‘act like women’ are not usually considered femme, because the incarnation of ‘woman’ is considered inherently feminine. Being femme usually refers to your relationship to your female partner or partners. I find it interesting that (in my experience) butches are not usually considered femme, because the incarnation of ‘woman’ is considered inherently feminine. Being femme usually refers to your relationship to your female partner or partners. I find it interesting that (in my experience) butches can be butches in and of themselves, but femmes are usually only considered femmes when attached to a butch (as in: ‘Oh, a femme and her butch’) or another femme lesbian (as in: 'Wait! Two femmes dating each other?').
Relationship to division of housework and childcare

Nearly everyone agreed that butch and femme identities had little to do with division of household tasks among women in same-sex couples. Few women had children, but those that did similarly divided childcare across both butch and femme roles. Similarly, the majority of women did not relate the terms butch and femme to power and control.

Lance (white dyke, 20s) described housework as follows: ‘There is no specific division of labour (except she does roaches, and I do pilot lights) – we prefer to do chores together, but that’s not often practical time-wise.’ Mandy (white lesbian, 20s) described equal division of housework due to her feminism: ‘My current lover would very easily let me take over all the cleaning and cooking and she is very good at home repair and would like to do all home repair/maintenance tasks. Unfortunately, I am a feminist and insist that household chores should be shared. Although she would never say it, I do believe that she enjoys it when I take over the chores that are associated with women like cooking and cleaning but I do not enjoy taking on the role of ‘the wife’.’

A few women had a more traditional set-up for housework, where femmes did more traditionally female tasks and butches the male ones. Julie (white queer femme, 40s) has a partner who is a transman. Her partner does the outdoor work and uses tools; Julie does the cooking. Bluestocking (white lesbian, 50s) thought back on her relationships with women and said that she, a femme, had had quite traditional division of household tasks with previous butch lovers: ‘Usually quite the traditional role. The cook, the one who takes care of the house, the one who does the decorating, the one who – my one lover had a young child and I cared for the child. The traditional female role and the butch did the outdoor work. In our case we had a ranch and took care of their horses and the ranch and all that. Although I was the one who worked. And that’s not all that uncommon. Less common today, in fact considerably less common today but in my mom’s time butches were quite unemployable so it was almost always the femmes who worked.’

Green and Mitchell (2002) have described how heterosexual couples are the real butches and femmes, given that even today, there is strong division of housework and childcare along gender lines in heterosexual relationships. In that regard, butch and femme women are models of equality. For example, Liz (Native American and white gay woman, 40s) explained that she was in a long-distance relationship and was looking forward to her lover moving back soon. Liz stated ‘I’m retired military, kind of disabled vet, so I don’t work, I’d be the stay-at-home butch, I’d be taking care of the house and all that.’ It is hard to imagine a heterosexual man, retired from the military, looking forward to housework in the same way.

Butch and femme are not meaningful or not a good fit

Not everyone considered butch or femme to be good concepts for themselves or others. Some women struggled with these concepts during the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, others identified with both or neither, or invented new terms.

The era of the women’s movement was hard. Several women described their attempts to ‘pass’ as androgynous during the second wave of the feminist movement. For example, Sycamore (Native American two-spirit woman, 50s) said ‘It was hard to find femmes back then, by the way. They all looked the same [as butches].’ Margaret (white woman-identified butch, 50s) wrote: ‘You know, being butch in the heat of the women’s movement sucked because they all decided that sexual orientation was political and that being butch was somehow a patriarchal expression. Total bullshit – way too intellectual to be real. What a story – fantasy. Being butch in the androgynous 1990s sucked – once again going against the grain.'
in a sub-population; the shaming for deviancy is mean and cruel. Now, it seems that butch is a lost identity. There is so much pressure on young butch women to transition - and they follow the crowd, call each other he, boi, take T <testosterone>. - I’m a dinosaur... last of a fading from visibility breed.'

**Both or in between**

Several women identified with the terms butch and femme but identified as both or in between. These women often described situations or relationships where they switch from butch to femme or vice versa. For example, Streetpunk (Native American two-spirit woman, 60s) said she was ‘both or neither… I’m really situational.’ Simone (African American bisexual woman, 40s) described herself as ‘neither or both at the same time; it depends on my situation, the people I am surrounded by, almost chameleon-like.’ Mariel (white bisexual woman, 30s) wrote: ‘Generally I consider myself a bit of both. In fact I sort of have what I call ‘girl mode’ and ‘boy mode,’ to borrow terms from UK comedian and cross-dresser Eddie Izzard. When I’m with a woman, I notice I go more toward ‘boy mode’ – my voice lowers a bit, and I just FEEL more masculine. I don’t feel I have to smile and bring my voice up high to please people so much. Even the way I walk and stand and carry myself is affected. I’m not sure if that makes sense, but it’s just what happens – admittedly it’s been a loooong time since I was with a woman sexually, but that’s what happens with me. I often adopt this mode, even now, when I’m alone, too. But I work in retail and I am aware that I usually switch over into ‘girl mode’ when I’m at work, I think to appear more approachable and less threatening to customers.’

Other women described ways in which they were both butch and femme, such as Maureen (white bisexual woman, 30s): ‘I’m not exactly sure how to identify with the butch/femme terms. I have short hair but that is due to my time spent in the army and discovering the joys of not having to deal with long hair. I dress for comfort, but when I have to attend a black-tie affair I will pull out the heels and evening dress. I don’t really wear make-up much anymore, but that is because my partner says she likes me better without it. My body type (read: large breasts) keeps me from ever being mistaken for a man. As a child I was always labeled a tomboy, but I was raised by my father after the death of my mother when I was four. My partner tells me I think like a man at times, but also tells me occasionally to ‘stop being such a girl.’ I guess I would have to say I’m somewhere in between butch and femme.’

Some women invented their own terms. Pan (Middle Eastern American bisexual woman, 30s) described herself as a ‘glitter butch’ – ‘I’m a little flamboyant and I like sparkly things. I like glitter a lot. I like bright colours you know, pink... And, yeah, I like the gender fuck you know, the mixing up the male and female. It feels more ‘right’ for me. I guess there are a lot of people who are not traditionally gendered who tend more towards androgyny. But I’ve never really felt that way. I’ve always felt really male and very female.’

Meredith (white lesbian, 20s) identified as a ‘faggot butch’ because ‘Well, because I’m not actually – some of the trappings of butch I don’t partake in. Like the athleticism, the muscular being, sort of scowling and speaking in a very deep voice... I’m like 5’2” and sort of expressive. So I feel like the ways in which my butchness is compromised is towards a more effeminate rather than feminine – if that makes sense. It’s also about the dynamic that I’m attracted to and that I like participating in is more the homosocial male dynamic rather than the butch/femme heterosexual dynamic.’

**Terms are not meaningful**

Women who did not identify with the terms butch or femme often felt the concepts were part of the past: ‘I tend to think of them as a part of our history but not as anything very currently valuable. It’s kind of limited...
‘These terms are very loaded for me. In a sense, when I hear them paired together, they remind me of a bygone era when lesbians lurked in shadows of alleys looking for sex’ (Paige, white queer woman, 20s).

Other women avoided labels in general. As Maureen (white lesbian, 30s) said, ‘I am not big on labels and feel people are so complex and change with differing situations that these labels are often useless to me.’

**How important is butch/femme?**

Participants also varied widely in how central or important these concepts were to them. Whereas 27 (42 per cent) specifically mentioned that these terms were important to them, eight women (12.5 per cent) said the terms were not important, and the rest (about half the sample) were not clear about this. Some indicated that their communities expected women to identify as either butch or femme. Other women used these terms in dating situations, or during sex, still others said that being butch or femme did not predict sexual activity.

Several women mentioned that butch and femme were useful words in conversation with others: ‘Well, they’re damn convenient. And I really think if we didn’t have them, we’d have to make them up because… the discourse about people’s experience of their gender identity and their gender representation is so – is such a paucity of language that thank goodness we have this little smidgen of language and we certainly need more’ (Lee, white bisexual woman, 60s).

Ziwa (white bisexual woman, 20s) stated: ‘Labels are important for me in this context the same way that they are for me as a teacher. They help me find resources and find friends who are similar to me. If I had not embraced the term of femme, I would have never found other femmes, and then later realised that there was such a term as tomboy femme, and that I was not the only one who fit that.’

‘Butch/femme identities have a major part in life because they dictate a lot of things that I judge on a person-by-person basis and it is how a lot of women in my community decide how to date whom they date’ (Aisha, Black and Puerto Rican lesbian, 20s). ‘Vastly valuable. Especially femme. Rather, they are equally important to me, but butch is something I have always been aware of, whereas femme was like a secret the world kept from me until my 20s, so it’s been more of a revelation with the accompanying excitement’ (Lance, white dyke, 20s).

Margaret (white woman-identified-butch, 50s) wrote, ‘These terms are very valuable to me – without them I feel invisible.’ Sarah (white lesbian, 60s) mourned the passing of these terms as follows: ‘I’ve heard really heartfelt sorrow among butch women of my generation feeling like everybody’s leaving them and feeling really peculiar about that.’

Women who did not perceive the terms butch or femme as meaningful or important often indicated that these terms were outdated, more common before the current feminist movement, or not true in their more rural setting. Lenn (African American lesbian, 50s) came out in the 1970s and said about her lover at the time ‘We did not consider ourselves a butch/femme couple. Neither one of us claimed the identities because it was not PC [politically correct], not feminist.’ Quinn (white lesbian, 30s) felt that ‘butch/femme identities are denigrated by ‘enlightened’ lesbians as a ‘shameful’ part of lesbian herstory.’ Rose (white queer/bisexual woman, 20s) stated: ‘I think that a good portion of the lesbian/bi community sees butch and femme as a relic. They were roles that the queer women of the 1940s and 1950s hid behind to avoid persecution and pass as straight couples. However, many queer women still believe that butches need to date femmes, and that butch-butch or femme-femme relationships are fundamentally flawed. Personally, I disagree with this. I also perceive a lot more pressure on lesbian women to choose either butch or femme as a label for themselves and their gender presen-
tation. In the old days, queer women whose appearance was androgynous were labeled ‘kiki’ and shunned by the community. Bisexual women seem to have more freedom to be fluid and undefined due to the often fluid nature of their orientation, but we also face prejudice from some queer women who support a strict butch/femme duality.’

Some felt that the concepts were too binary and that they themselves were on a continuum, or in between, or that it depended on the situation or the identity of their lover. Bella (white bisexual woman, 30s) countered this argument as follows: ‘I think that many lesbian who don’t identify as butch or femme just don’t get it. They view it as from the old days, a stereotype, or a light-hearted fashion or sexual exploitation. Which is fine as long as there is not judgment or exclusion. But unfortunately there has been plenty of both.’

**Demographics of butch/femme women**

*Based on sexual identity*

Among the 22 women who identified as femme, only one identified as bisexual and one as queer/bisexual. Among the 21 women who identified as butch, only one identified as bisexual. The majority of bisexual women identified either as both butch and femme, or as neither, or as in between. This corresponds with prior research by Rust (1995) that bisexual women tend not to use categories or labels.

Interestingly, the perception among women in the current study was that bisexual women are femme. Ten participants (16 per cent), most of them lesbians, specifically stated that bisexual women were more likely to identify as femme. As Angel (Latina Mestiza lesbian, 40s) stated: ‘I don’t think I know a bisexual butch.’ Similarly, Blue-stockings (white lesbian, 50s) said: ‘I don’t think I know any bisexual butches.’ Terry (white lesbian in her 50s) emphasised that ‘a bisexual woman for me is an honest femme. When she’s with a woman, she definitely knows who she is.’ What could account for this discrepancy? A number of lesbian respondents indicated that they didn’t know any bisexual women well (and, to some extent, bisexual women didn’t know any lesbians well). So lesbians may be basing their perceptions on general appearance of bisexual women in the media, for example, rather than on conversations with bisexual friends or lovers.

Queer-identified people, too, avoid categories as socially constructed, and are inclusive of anyone who is not part of the heterosexual mainstream (e.g. Namaste, 1994; Rupp, 1999). Yet, unlike women who identified as bisexual in the present study, respondents who identified as queer were more likely to identify as butch or femme.

Among women who identified as lesbian, dyke, or gay, 16 identified as femme, 14 as butch, and eight as both, other or neither. In this regard, it is lesbians who are most likely to identify with butch/femme concepts.

When asked about how mainstream heterosexual society views butch/femme, most respondents agreed that femmes are more accepted; they are the ‘good lesbians’ in terms of appropriate appearance and gender roles. Yet femmes may ‘pass’ as heterosexual, making them invisible unless accompanied by a butch. In contrast, butches are feared, viewed as a threat, seen as deviant, and ostracised. Nearly everyone felt that butches were targeted for hate crimes. Annabelle (white lesbian, 50s) felt that she was viewed as butch by heterosexuals and femme by lesbians: ‘Where I put myself and where people would put me is different. And it depends – I’m sure that I seem butch to my straight co-workers because I sit cross-legged during a meeting and I wear the same clothes all week and I don’t wear make up – that sort of thing. Amongst lesbians who use that term, I think they have identified me as femme.’ Belinda (Asian American bisexual woman, 50s) emphasised how some heterosexual women are more butch than lesbians; she went to college in the Midwest and found the farm women to look ‘way more butch than a lot of the butches I knew.’
Based on age
Just as the whole sample was equally divided into those who identified as femme, butch or both/neither/other, the same was true among younger women (in their late teens, 20s or 30s) or older women (in their 40s and above). Yet older participants felt that younger women were less likely to use the concepts of butch and femme, especially if they identified as queer. Nick (African American lesbian, 50s) said: 'I think that role playing is beginning to go away, only because the new generation is more free, they don’t have to hide. It’s like everybody’s whatever. When I was growing up, the only way people would know that we were even interested or even to be approached by another woman you had to carry yourself a certain way... But now it’s like the younger people I see, they don’t play roles. You might see two feminine looking women or two butch looking women together and it doesn’t matter. But I think it’s a generational thing, the butch and femme and I think it’s going away.'

And younger women tended to view older women as influenced by more traditional conceptions of gender roles. Here is how Doreen (white queer woman, 20s) described butch/femme according to generational variables: 'How the greater lesbian/ bisexual ‘community’ in America views butch and femme varies by generation and by individual communities. I think in many places now, the butch/femme dynamic is looked down on as a heterosexist crutch and as outdated. The idea is that in the past, queer women felt they had to conform to heterosexual gender stereotypes, that they had to be either butch or femme to fit into the queer community, and that it was socially unacceptable to choose to identify as neither butch nor femme. The community at large has thus rejected butch/femme as instruments of oppression. However, many older lesbians or bisexuals are comfortable with the dynamic because they became familiar with it before it became ‘outdated,’ and some younger lesbians or bisexuals are beginning to reclaim it as something that is not heterosexualising our relationships but rather expressing something new and different that is true to who we are and distinctively queer, rather than forcing who we are into traditional straight boxes.'

Based on race or ethnicity
Participants tended to feel that butch/femme was more important in African American and Latina communities. Aisha (black and Puerto Rican lesbian, 20s) referred to butches in the African American community as ‘stud/butch/ags.’ She wrote: ‘Also, in my culture, especially in the black gay community, there is a labeling that occurs that if you do not fit into the masculine or feminine roles you have to identify yourself as one or the other or in a category... which is a ‘no-label’ but that in itself is a label.’ Paige (white queer woman, 20s) stated: ‘I notice cross-culturally [labels] hold more weight in the African American communities than in white ones. My girlfriend, who is black, finds her butch identity to be strong and an impenetrable part of who she is, similar to ‘stone butch’.’ Megan (Latina and white lesbian, 50s) described the pressure on young butch girls to take testosterone: ‘A lot of them call themselves studs, boys, aggressives (more of an East Coast term), I see them struggling, because their girlfriends are pressuring them, their friends are pressuring them... if they’re young women of colour, there’s real mixed feelings going on particularly if they are dark skinned and black, because black males are already not treated very well.’

Belinda (Asian American bisexual woman, 50s) wondered: ‘So part of my questions now are, who decided? And why did we decide it was pants-wearing <to be butch>?... And when I started thinking about what constitutes male and female dress, I thought about other cultures. And because I’m Japanese-American, I mean my father used to wear a kimono at night. He would get out of his suit and wear, in essence what another household might call a dress. And it was comfortable.’

Sycamore (Native American two-spirit woman, 50s) said: ‘You know, as a Native
American we don’t have that distinction of ‘I’m sorry this group is only for these people,’ it’s for all people who feel they belong… I knew about <two-spirits> as early as 13. You know, of that tradition being told to me by my grandmother, realising that tomboy thing wasn’t going away. She talked to me about it, but I had no idea what she was talking about. She said, you know, some people are different like you, and they’re called two-spirits, and maybe when you grow up you won’t be one. But I just want you to know about this and that it’s okay. And I had no idea what she was talking about, till I got a little older. I then met two-spirit people and thought, oh, she means that. Or that’s me, that’s a person that’s like me. But I couldn’t put my finger on what it was, other than outside appearances of there’s a butch, a grown woman butch, and that’s me.’

Conclusion
It is evident that butch and femme today are extremely diverse and complex concepts, and that women are embracing them in various ways. At one end of the continuum are lesbian, bisexual or queer women who perceive butch or femme to be core identities, equal in salience to gender, race, or sexuality, and who regard these concepts as extremely important. At the other end of continuum are women who find the terms outdated or meaningless, or who embrace the terms but find that both or neither fit them well, or who are creating their own terms and definitions. At the same time, many women in this study defined butch/femme using gendered concepts of appearance, clothing, performance, or personality characteristics, while at the same time there was disagreement and complexity about how butch and femme relate to masculinity or femininity, respectively. On the whole, butches had femme lovers and vice versa, yet women were divided about the connections between butch/femme and sexual activity. When it came to gendered division of housework and childcare, butch and femme hardly figured into the equation at all. Women who identified as lesbian, and/or those who identified as African American and Latina, were more connected with butch/femme concepts, and so were queer-identified women to some extent. Bisexual women were less likely to focus on butch/femme concepts (despite beliefs by lesbians that bi women were femmes). Older women had perceptions about younger women, and vice versa, but in fact there was little relationship between age and the importance of butch/femme.

The results of this qualitative study indicate that psychological research to date has been extremely narrow in its conceptions of butch and femme, and there is need for further information about these complex concepts and how sexual minority women are understanding butch/femme in their own lives. It is clear that butch/femme are continuing to evolve at a time of changing sexual identities, gender roles, and communities.

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References
Over the last 10 years, public interest in the exotic dancing industry has significantly increased throughout the UK and America, particularly due to its influence on popular culture. Exotic dance venues have been seen to attract the patronage of celebrities such as Sophie Dahl, while others such as Daryl Hannah and Kate Moss have expressed an interest in pole dancing. Exotic dance venues have been regularly seen to advertise in The Stage newspaper in recent years, and respectable corporate businesses are often able to claim exotic dancing services on their business expenses (Bindel, 2004). Despite this growing normalisation, much of the contemporary research conducted into the area of exotic dancing portrays it as a deviant, problematic occupation that has been argued to reinforce gender inequality and to promote the sexual objectification of women (Bindel, 2004).

With the rise of second-wave feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, dominant, patriarchal forms of masculinity which perpetuated male superiority and the objectification of women began to be challenged. For some men, this created the need to solidify heterosexual and patriarchal privilege, leading to a backlash against feminism (Egan, 2005; Eagan, Frank & Johnson, 2006). It has been proposed that the proliferation of exotic dance venues catering predominantly to heterosexual men during this time can be explained by this backlash, as these venues are suggested to feature naked women solely for the pleasure of male consumption and are designed to perpetuate a patriarchal service industry, which is said to aid in the maintenance of imbalanced power dynamics between men and women (Egan, 2004).

Frank’s (2003) research into men who frequented exotic dance venues revealed that some customers explicitly expressed the opinion that exotic dance clubs afforded them an environment where women interacted with men in a more ‘traditional’ way and provided them with an arena that they viewed as being free from feminism, enabling them to access fantasies of independence, freedom and idealised masculinity. This research suggests that part of working as an exotic dancer entails convincing customers that they are desirable, masculine and successful, which leads to the enhancement of men’s feelings of empowerment and privileged status. Customers were proposed to make sense of...
their visits to these venues by drawing on traditionally masculinised behaviour and dominant cultural ideologies of sex and gender, meaning that negative gender stereotyping underlies the exchanges between customers and dancers.

It has also been proposed that the exotic dancing industry aids in the reinforcement of cultural representations of how women should look, meaning that men who visit these venues are left with a distorted view of women and female beauty. It has been suggested that this leads men to treat ‘real’ women with contempt when they do not measure up to the ‘ideal’ of the fantasy woman that they encounter in exotic dance venues (Bindel, 2004).

As it has been proposed that exotic dancers are often encouraged to employ such body technologies as cosmetic surgery in order to achieve this fantasy image of femininity, the bodies of dancers are suggested to appear so similar as to become depersonalised, dehumanised and commodified. Customers then fragment these commodified bodies into physical attributes, meaning that the women are no longer seen as autonomous individuals but as inanimate objects. As well as encouraging men to sexually objectify women, this is also thought to lead to dancers viewing their identities as divorced from their physical selves, meaning that they feel alienated from their bodies (Wesely, 2003).

Some past research focusing on the women who work in the exotic dancing industry has appeared in such academic publications as Social Problems and Deviant Behaviour. These publications illustrate the way that exotic dancing has been conceptualised by the academic community in general. Such research has suggested that negative background variables are among the main causes for women to pursue ‘deviant’ careers in exotic dancing, and that dancers lead deviant lifestyles and have deviant self-conceptions (Ronai & Cross, 1998).

Previous research has claimed that there are a number of common background factors associated with women who go on to pursue a career in exotic dancing. Lack of parental guidance, parental alcohol and/or drug abuse, sexual abuse, teenage pregnancy and homelessness are some of the factors that have previously been associated with women becoming exotic dancers. It is the abuse victimisation and subsequent lowered self-esteem associated with these factors which is proposed to lead women into their eventual career choice, as working in a striptease venue is thought to be a way for them to achieve the approval and acceptance that they failed to receive from their families (Sweet & Tewksbury, 2000).

It has been reported that the managers of exotic dance venues often pressurise women into displaying a sexually idealised body by encouraging them to undergo invasive cosmetic surgery or directing them to the use of illegal drugs in order to control their weight. In addition to this, dancers were often reported to develop eating disorders, abuse laxatives or obsessively exercise in order to achieve a thin body, as they are suggested to be financially rewarded for displaying this culturally constructed image of feminine beauty. Dancers were said to become extremely self-critical and develop low self-esteem if they fell short of this lucrative sexualised ideal (Wesely, 2003). Factors such as these are proposed to demonstrate how a career in the exotic dance industry can lead to ‘deviant’ lifestyles and ‘deviant’ self-conceptions.

McCaghy and Skipper’s (1969) research suggests that the ‘deviant’ lifestyle associated with the occupation of exotic dancing can lead to women becoming isolated from affective social relationships, having unsatisfactory relationships with men and can lead to an opportunity structure that allows for a wide range of sexual behaviours. They suggest that the combination of these factors leads to the emergence of homosexual behaviour as a form of adaptation among many women working as exotic dancers. McCaghy and Skipper argue that because dancers are continually exploited, they become disillu-
sioned with men, causing them to believe that lesbian or bisexual relationships would provide them with greater fulfilment.

The research mentioned here provides examples of how dancer’s experiences have previously been pathologised. However, whilst research into the arena of exotic dancing has tended, for the main part, to concentrate on how it is a deviant, sexualised, social problem for women and that this ‘deviant’ behaviour stems from negative early life experiences, for men to work in the exotic dancing industry is considered to be merely an unusual and curious occupation (Ronai & Cross, 1998). Male dancers have been found to have greater societal acceptance and support than female dancers (Bernard et al., 2003) and when research is conducted with male exotic dancers their early life experiences are not considered, suggesting that the orientation to the occupation is not pathologised, nor considered deviant, for men (Ronai & Cross, 1998).

Evidence such as this has lead such academics as sex radical feminists and queer theorists to propose that rather than pursuing a ‘deviant’ career as a result of pathological experiences, exotic dancers are in fact rebelling against feminine role requirements and the narrow restrictions placed on female sexuality.

Within patriarchal society women are expected to express their sexuality only within the confines of narrowly structured boundaries, boundaries that can be considered restrictive and oppressive. The female body has traditionally been constructed as an object, something that has power done to it. In contrast with this, it has been proposed that working within the sex industry can contribute to women’s sexual power (Reed, 1997). Within sex radical feminist research, the exotic dancing industry is suggested to provide one of the few arenas where women are able to exercise unchallenged command over their bodies, providing women with an environment where they are able to freely express their sexuality while maintaining authority over it (Reed, 1997).

A career within the exotic dancing industry has been suggested to provide women with a greater feeling of control over their sexualities. Through interaction with male customers in an environment where sexualised behaviour is consensual and clearly defined, women are able to realise the value of their sexuality and internalise clearer boundaries about context-appropriate behaviour. Within society and the institution of compulsory heterosexuality, women are expected to politely tolerate and respond to the sexual advances of men, whether they are welcome or not. The environment of an exotic dance venue is suggested to help women realise that they own their bodies and are under no obligation to comply with the sexual subservience they have been socialised to accept (Dudash, 1997; Pendleton, 1997).

Women have traditionally been encouraged to remain ignorant about their bodies and sexualities. The female body has been constructed within patriarchal society as defective and incapable. This construction is deeply embedded within a variety of discourses and cultural practices and has served to propagate imbalanced power dynamics between men and women as well as to instil a sense of shame and alienation from the body in women in order to maintain patriarchal control (Malson, 1998).

However, it has been proposed that exotic dancers are given the opportunity to become more comfortable with their physicalities through the amount of time they spend dancing naked as well as the fact that they are able to see and interact with other naked women (Dudash, 1997). It has been suggested that the environment of an exotic dance venue can promote empowerment and self-awareness in women as they learn that they do not have shameful ‘private parts’ that are dismembered from the rest of their bodies. This enables women to feel more connected with their bodies and helps to instil a greater feeling of power, autonomy and control (Dudash, 1997).
Contradictory to past research that suggests most exotic dancers conform to the cultural feminine ‘ideal’, sex radical feminist research suggests that women of many different body types are employed in the industry and, therefore, interaction with other naked women aids not only in self-awareness but also helps dancers to realise there is beauty in diversity, allowing them to become more comfortable with their own bodies (Dudash, 1997). As the airbrushed renditions of femininity portrayed in the media are the closest most heterosexual women come to seeing other naked female bodies, it is thought to be unsurprising that they harbour feelings of inadequacy towards their own bodies (Reed, 1997). This helps illustrate how interaction with ‘real’ naked women can be a liberating, empowering experience (Dudash, 1997; Reed, 1997).

It has also been argued that working in the exotic dancing industry can be likened to queer politics as it promotes the destabilisation of compulsory heteronormativity (Johnson, 2006; Pendleton, 1997). ‘Stripper sexuality’ has been likened to other non-normative sexual orientations such as bisexuality and polyamorous relationships as it provides an alternative to the narrowly prescribed gender roles associated with the institution of heterosexuality (Johnson, 2006). Through a career in exotic dancing, women are proposed to come to realise that what they had previously been socialised to take as morality and respectability is in fact a way of regulating sexuality. As a career in exotic dancing holds the potential to proliferate alternative sexualities it has been suggested to be a way to undermine the mechanisms under which women and people of non-normative sexualities are subordinated (Johnson, 2006; Pendleton, 1997).

Pendleton (1997) suggests that women who perform sexuality such as exotic dancers are in fact ‘putting on the trappings of femininity in order to reap material gain’ (p.78). The stereotypical construction of femininity that exotic dancers portray while they are performing is exploited for economic gain and can, therefore, be seen as subversive. This performance of femininity is suggested to be a means of drawing attention to its constructedness, enabling it to begin to be deconstructed.

However, although sex radical and queer theories surrounding exotic dancers and the industry may be compelling, the kind of dichotomous thinking that has been provided by the research mentioned above (exotic dancing as pathological or exotic dancing as empowerment) can be considered to be potentially problematic as it fails to elucidate the multiplicity of meanings that working as an exotic dancer may hold for the women involved. It has been suggested that exotic dancer’s opinions of their experiences have only been referred to when they can be used to confirm an assumed position. Some recent research has begun to suggest that acts and behaviours observed within exotic dance venues may in fact hold multiple meanings and consequences and that feelings of empowerment and disempowerment may intertwine throughout a dancer’s experiences (Barton, 2002).

The issue of power and control within the exotic dancing industry has been suggested to be complex and contradictory, circulating between both customers and dancers. As has been discussed earlier, women exploited their role as the object of masculine desire by excessively performing femininity, using it for their own economic gain and, therefore, acquiring a sense of agency. However, this mimetic strategy is constrained by economic pressures as the dancers are still subject to the customers’ willingness to pay for their services (Egan, 2006a). Also, while the dancers may gain a sense of agency through their interactions with customers by performing a particular kind of femininity that aligns with the heterosexual/bi male fantasy of a woman who is both an emotional caregiver and sexually seductive – a ‘whorish wife’ – as it gives them a sense of control over their customers and their situation, this kind of appropriation of women’s emotional labour can be
viewed as supporting male dominance at a societal level (Egan, 2006a; Frank, 2003).

Exotic dancers are said to use a variety of covert strategies in order to gain a sense of power and agency in what could otherwise be seen as an exploitative environment (Egan, 2006b). For example, through the use of the music that dancers employed during their stage shows they were able to cultivate feelings of power and control. By dancing to rock music, that clearly expresses ideas of strength, independence or discontent, dancers can express the feelings that they cannot openly convey to customers, enabling them to gain a sense of empowerment in what is thought to be an otherwise inequitable situation (Egan, 2006b).

However, while these strategies of resistance can be viewed positively as they empower the women who work in exotic dance venues, the strategies remain covert as to explicitly express these feelings could lead to a loss of income or the loss of a dancer’s job. In this way, resistance only takes place at a micro level, meaning that customers’ views on gender and sexuality are not overtly challenged, therefore, while the exotic dance venue may promote empowerment for women, it may still reinforce a sense of male dominance and female objectification for the men who visit the clubs (Egan, 2006b; Frank, 2003).

This research offers explanations as to how working as an exotic dancer may involve moving between subject and object positions, elucidating how the environment of an exotic dance venue may neither relegate women to the status of passive objects nor evince feelings of complete autonomy and empowerment, demonstrating the multiplicity of meanings that this occupation may hold for the women who work within it.

While some exotic dancing venues cater for lesbian/bisexual women, the current study focuses on venues with a predominantly heterosexual/bi male clientele. It intends to explore dancers’ experiences from a non-pathological, non-deviant perspective. It is intended to explore the meanings of these experiences to the women involved, whether women who work as exotic dancers construct themselves as empowered/disempowered, how they experience the job and how it relates to their perception of their own bodies, sexualities and relationships.

**Methodology**

The participants consisted of five women working within the exotic dancing industry: Dennie, a 25-year-old bisexual dancer who had been in the industry for two years at the time of interview; Celine, a 30-year-old heterosexual dancer who had been dancing for eight years; Narcissa, a 20-year-old bisexual dancer who had been dancing for three years; Sapphire, a 24-year-old bisexual dancer who had worked in the industry for five years; and Magenta, a 28-year-old bisexual dancer who had been dancing for eight years. All participants used pseudonyms in order to assure their anonymity.

Semi-structured individual interviews were used to collect data, while the discourse analytic method was utilised in order to analyse this data. The discourse analytic method was chosen for this study as it is based on a social constructionist epistemology, meaning that it adheres to the social constructionist view that the way people think, the meanings they derive and the way they relate to objects in their surroundings are constructed through language and that language itself is a form of action (Burr, 2003). The way people construct their reality can, therefore, vary across situations and is seen as serving a purpose, such as to achieve social objectives. Therefore, social constructionism rejects the idea of an objective truth (Burr, 2003).

Discourse analysis concentrates on the way that people use language in their social interactions and is concerned with such psychological phenomena as identity and emotion. As opposed to the traditional positivistic approach to psychology, which suggests that such phenomena are internal cognitive representations that are expressed
through language, the discourse analytic method proposes that these phenomena are constructed through language, that they are context-dependant and are ways by which people set out to achieve their objectives (Willig, 2001). A ‘discourse’ has been defined as ‘a systematic, coherent set of images, metaphors and so on that construct an object in a particular way’ (Burr, 2003, p202) and the discourse analytic method functions on the understanding that different discourses can be utilised in order to construct an object, event, person or situation in a variety of ways (Coyle, 2007).

The current study utilised the Foucauldian discourse analysis methodology. This approach was appropriate for the current study as Foucauldian discourse analysis adheres to the discourse analytic framework through its focus on the linguistic construction of social reality whilst placing particular emphasis on political issues such as identity, power relations and social change (Coyle, 2007). This methodology proposes that the world is comprised of a structural reality that can be viewed in terms of power relations. These power relations underpin the way people construct their understanding of the world. Dominant discourses within society are seen as aiding the reinforcement of existing social structures and the power relations associated with them (Coyle, 2007). This is relevant to the current study as the dominant discourses in society that surround exotic dancing portrays it as a deviant, pathological career choice. This construction of exotic dancing could be considered to reinforce the subjugation of women through the restrictions it places on the appropriate expression of female sexuality.

The concept of positioning, which is particularly associated with Foucauldian discourse analysis, also has particular relevance for the current study. Positioning refers to the idea that when a person is constructed through discourse they are then allocated a certain subject position within that discourse which is expected to adhere to ‘a set of images, metaphors and obligations concerning the kinds of responses that can be made’ (Coyle, 2007, p.103). A person can either accept or resist the position accorded them within the dominant discourse through the way they linguistically construct themselves. The way that participants draw upon dominant discourses and subsequently resist them in order to construct their identities as exotic dancers was explored within this study.

**Analysis**

Three main interpretive repertoires were found to emerge from the discourse: dominant discourses/resistance, empowerment/dispersionpowerment and embodiment/disembodiment. These interpretative repertoires were selected as they highlight three key tensions within the women’s narratives which illustrate the multiplicity of positions the women held within the exotic dancing industry and the way in which they oscillate between these positions throughout their experiences.

**Dominant Discourses/Resistance**

All the women taking part in this study demonstrated an awareness of the dominant discourses that position exotic dancers as existing outside the ‘acceptable’ boundaries of female sexuality within society.

**Exotic dancing and the media**

Sapphire: ‘...Umm on television and in films and stuff like that they’re usually portrayed as like umm either the lowest you can get or sluts or like like umm what you do when you have no options left umm usually like it’s usually like ‘oh, this is what will happen to you if you become a stripper’ sort of thing you’ll end up on drugs and being raped and you know from films I’ve seen and stuff like that...’

Here Sapphire describes how the figure of the exotic dancer is portrayed by the media. The media is seen as constructing women who work within the exotic dancing industry as existing outside of the societal ‘norm’ for
female sexuality. As ‘stripper sexuality’ has been described as providing an alternative to compulsory heteronormativity and the suppression of female sexuality, the demonisation of exotic dancing in the media and its attempt to segregate dancers into an ‘outsider femininity’ can be viewed as an effort to contain a form of non-normative sexuality (Johnson, 2006). In Sapphire’s construction of how the media portray exotic dancers, an unpleasant fate awaits the women who venture into the industry. This could be viewed as a warning for women against stepping outside the narrowly prescribed gender roles expected of them, providing a way to assert control over female sexuality.

Exotic dancing as synonymous with prostitution
Magenta: ‘...You’re always gonna get some people who think what you do is wrong and that you’re like, you know, some scarlet woman. People some people are gonna brand you as a whore, I guess. Like people seem to like people who don’t know any better will probably they probably think stripping is synonymous with prostitution, I would say...’

In this extract, Magenta draws on the dominant discourses surrounding exotic dancing that suggest women who take their clothes off for money must also be ‘whores’ and that the industry is ‘synonymous with prostitution’. By labelling exotic dancers as whores, they are automatically placed on the ‘bad’ side of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy that dominates today’s society (Pendleton, 1997). In order to stay on the ‘good’ side of this dichotomy, women must adhere to the narrowly structured boundaries of gender roles within patriarchal society; they must appear emotional, dependant and vulnerable as well as conforming to the restrictions placed on the expression of female sexuality (Jackson, 1999). By placing exotic dancers on the ‘bad’ side of this dichotomy, they are again being constructed as an ‘outsider femininity’ to be avoided. This can be viewed as aiding in the reinforcement of restrictions placed on female sexuality.

It’s just a job
Celine: ‘Yeah but yeah as a stripper you’re just like any other person doing a job and trying to make a living really yeah.’
Dennie: ‘You do the job because its good money and I mean it is just a job at the end of the day. It is a job and a job that pays quite well so.’
Magenta: ‘...I mean I enjoy dancing but also you know it’s well it’s like my job, it’s what I do. It’s a job.’

The women who took part in this study placed importance on the fact that working as an exotic dancer was ‘just a job’ and in doing so resisted the dominant discourses that constructed women working within the exotic dancing industry as belonging to an ‘outsider femininity’. By constructing exotic dancers as existing outside of the ‘acceptable’ boundaries for female sexuality, the dominant discourses found within society can be seen as perpetuating existing power relations that place women at a disadvantage to men by placing restraints on the way women express their sexuality. The women’s construction of exotic dancing, as being a job rather than an expression of their sexuality, enables them to resist the dominant discourses of society by creating a discourse which places exotic dancing within the boundaries of acceptability. As what they are doing is ‘just a job’ they can be perceived in relation to the majority of the population whose jobs are not seen as defining their sexuality, therefore actively resisting their status as ‘other’ or ‘deviant’. 

Monetary reward as motivation
Dennie: ‘...the money’s good obviously. That’s a big contributing factor I’d say to being a stripper. The money...’
Celine: ‘...why not do it if you can get better money quickly as a dancer instead
of working your tits off in some other job... but I think it’s a really good thing because you can make really good money and have a better quality of life.’

Sapphire: ‘...and on top of that you’re making mega money, the kinda money that you just can’t make anywhere else. Like err like what other job err as a student, what other job can you earn like a grand in a night?...’

The above extracts further demonstrate how the women in this study resisted the dominant discourses that position exotic dancers as having a ‘deviant’ or ‘outsider’ femininity. Through constructing their motivation for working in the exotic dance industry as revolving around money they resist the construction that their choice of occupation is linked to the expression of their sexuality. This discourse of monetary reward as motivation also helps the women acquire a sense of agency as it means they are constructing themselves as actively seeking to improve their ‘quality of life’ through earning a high wage.

**Exotic dancing as pathology**

**Dennie:** I think it’s still quite a taboo job in most societies I mean I think a lot of people do look down on it and say it’s sleazy and disgusting and and they see it as women being mistreated and that women who do – women who strip don’t have a choice and are all victims. People think women are made to do it maybe and are pushed into doing it...

In the above extract, Dennie illustrates how the occupation of exotic dancing and the experiences of the women who work in this industry have been pathologised. She draws on the dominant discourses that suggest women must come from psychologically damaging backgrounds and be imbued with negative self-perceptions in order to consider a career in exotic dancing. Dennie suggests that people outside the industry construct dancers as being ‘all victims’, a construction which can also be seen in Sapphire’s (Exotic dancing and the media) description of how the media portray exotic dancing as something women do when they ‘have no options left’ and are subsequently raped or descend into drug abuse. Such constructions are perpetuated by academic publications such as Sweet and Tewksbury’s (2000) research which suggest that abuse victimisation and negative background variables lead to women pursuing a career in exotic dancing.

By constructing exotic dancers as victims they can be seen as being relegated to a passive role, a role which strips them of agency as they are portrayed as being unable to make informed choices about their lives due to the victimisation they have suffered in the past. This can be viewed as a strategy by which women are subjugated, as they are infantilised through the assumption that they are unable to assert control over their own lives.

**Agency through choice**

**Dennie:** ‘Yeah it’s my choice what I do with my life and if I wanna take my clothes off for money, lots of money I might add, then that’s my choice. It has nothing to do with anyone else.’

**Narcissa:** ‘...But I think but I think every stripper I’ve met has had the choice. Like my friend, she keeps telling me ‘I need to find a day job, I need to find a day job!’ and she never does! Because she likes it! It’s a thing of choice...’

**Magenta:** ‘Yeah but at the end of the day it’s my life and I’m living it the way I want to, you know? This is my choice, my occupation is my choice...’

These extracts demonstrate how the women who took part in this study actively resist dominant discourses that relegate exotic dancers to a passive ‘victim’ role by asserting agency through a discourse of choice. In these examples, Dennie, Narcissa and Magenta are constructing a career in exotic dancing as being a matter of choice, rather than victimisation.
than something they are forced into through negative life experiences. Through this discourse of choice, these women are asserting control over their lives and occupations as they are choosing a career in exotic dancing and through constructing their decision to become exotic dancers as a choice, they are also implying they could choose not to work in the industry, thereby renouncing a victim status.

This repertoire demonstrates how women who work within the exotic dancing industry are continually faced with dominant discourses that construct them in a negative light and seek to disempower and objectify them. Despite this, the women who took part in this study were able to draw on these discourses and actively resist them, creating a space to construct themselves as agentic subjects.

Empowerment/Disempowerment

One of the dominant discourses in society that surrounds exotic dancing suggests that dancers are being exploited and subsequently stripped of agency due to their position as objects within the industry. This discourse can also be found within the academic literature (Bindel, 2004). However, the women who took part in this study often expressed feelings of power and control throughout their narratives.

Autonomy through the experience of power

Magenta: ‘...When you see when you see all these men staring at you like mesmerised and you just think ‘yeah, I’m doing that to you, I make you feel like that’. It makes you feel good about yourself and like strong. Like you have this power over them and they want you, but they can’t touch you or like or like do anything except watch!...’

Magenta’s narrative suggests that the role of the exotic dancer is more complex than simply that of the disempowered object of the male gaze. Although she could still be positioned as such due to the fact that the men are watching her and viewing her as a sexual object, Magenta constructs herself as feeling ‘strong’ and as having ‘power over’ the male customers. Through her discourse, Magenta is constructed as an autonomous subject acting on her environment as it is she who is making the men ‘feel like that’ while they are construed as occupying a passive position, unable to ‘do anything except watch’.

Autonomy through control over ones’ environment

Magenta: ‘...If you don’t wanna dance for a guy or he’s rude to you, you can tell him where to go. You are in control...’

Narcissa: ‘...I really feel that I’m the one with the power when I’m working. I mean you have the choice. You have the choice of dancing for the guy or not... To be honest you can always say ‘no, you bastard! No, I don’t wanna dance for you, I’m gonna walk away now.’

The above extracts again demonstrate the complex position that a dancer holds within the exotic dancing industry. Exotic dance venues have been described as spaces where dominant ideas can be subverted and challenged as public nudity and the open expression of female sexuality can take place within them (Frank, 2003). However, Magenta and Narcissa’s narratives suggest that the men who frequent exotic dancing venues may still try to assert their privileged male status through being ‘rude’ to the dancers. Magenta’s suggestion that customers can be ‘rude’ and Narcissa’s description of some customers as being ‘bastards’ suggest that customers may seek to disempower dancers through negative comments.

Despite this, the women who took part in this study still found a space for empowerment within this atmosphere as they were able to assert control by choosing whether they would dance for these customers or not by telling them ‘where to go’ or by ‘walking away’. As has been mentioned previously, in a patriarchal society women are consistently...
confronted by many forms of sexism within their daily lives, from the unwanted advances of men to restrictions placed on female behaviour, all of which they are expected to politely tolerate or comply with (Pendleton, 1997). However, within the exotic dancing industry, the freedom and authority that women have over their sexualities combined with the clear boundaries that are created when sexuality is performed in exchange for money instead of something women are expected to give to men on demand can create a space for empowerment and agency where women no longer feel obliged to passively accept subjugation.

Control and agency

Sapphire: ‘...I think stripping has taught me to be a stronger person. Yeah you can you can be who you are more I think because under in that kind of environment you know the stripping kind of environment I dunno, I think it just teaches you to be stronger and more independent. Definitely more independent. You know that you umm yeah you know your limits and you don’t have to put up with any shit from anybody...’

Magenta: ‘...I just think dancing helps you it’s helped me to be a strong confident woman and when I’m not in the club I can take this feeling of strength and control with me and use it in other areas of my life, you know what I mean? I won’t be pushed around and I know what I want...’

Here, Magenta and Sapphire construct themselves as feeling strong, independent and in control as a result of their experiences as exotic dancers. Traditionally women are viewed as being passive and dependant and have been defined in terms of their relationship (both sexually and economically) with men (Jackson, 1999). The fact that the women who took part in this study ‘know their limits’ and ‘won’t be pushed around’ demonstrate that the feelings of empowerment they have experienced in the club enable them to assert a greater level of control over their everyday lives. Having had the experience of being able to assert control and agency while dealing with the men who frequent exotic dance venues, Magenta and Sapphire were able to construct themselves as strong, autonomous individuals in their own right rather than the passive objects of heterosexual/bi male interest.

This finding is in keeping with sex radical feminist literature which suggests that an increased inner clarity about boundaries and context-appropriate behaviour can instil women with intolerance for context-inappropriate behaviour, meaning that women who work within the exotic dancing industry are less likely to passively accept harassment and inappropriate advances from men (Reed, 1997; Dudash, 1997).

Disempowerment through negative interactions

Narcissa: ‘...But yeah sometimes I just have those evenings where I just wanna cry and sit in the changing rooms for the whole evening sometimes it makes you feel like that.’

Sapphire: ‘...And and you know I’ve sp- this sounds stupid but but I’ve spent, you know, nights crying in the changing rooms because I’ve made no money or the customers have been rude and its depressing. You’re drunk and you’re tired and you think, you know, you think ‘ugh I can’t be bothered with this’.’

Despite the fact that the women who took part in this study consistently managed to create a space for empowerment within what is primarily considered to be an environment designed to perpetuate male privilege, the above extracts demonstrate that these women’s experiences were more complicated than simply feeling empowered or disempowered. Although the women were able to cultivate feelings of power and strength through their experiences as exotic dancers, there were also times when they clearly felt
Disempowered. Negative gender stereotyping often underlies customers’ interactions with dancers and the men often talk about dancers in demeaning, derogatory ways (Frank, 2003). Although the women were frequently able to deflect such negative behaviour by asserting their agency through choosing not to dance for these customers, Narcissa and Sapphire’s narratives make it clear that consistent exposure to rude and offensive customers within an evening can lead to feelings of disempowerment.

It has been suggested that concepts such as gender inequalities, sexual autonomy and power become magnified when the physical body is depended upon for income (Dudash, 1997). It, therefore, makes sense that while the women who took part in this study reported having heightened feelings of power and control due to their experiences as exotic dancers, disempowerment may also, at times, be felt more strongly than it would outside the exotic dancing venue. The fact that Sapphire and Narcissa spent some evenings crying in the changing rooms suggests that they could be left feeling deeply affected and disempowered by negative experiences within the exotic dancing venue.

This repertoire serves to demonstrate the complex position that the dancer holds within the exotic dancing industry. Rather than occupying one of the dichotomous positions that dancers have been proposed to hold within much past research (e.g. either empowered or disempowered) the narratives of the women who took part in this study suggest that their status is continually negotiated, moving between disempowered object and empowered subject.

**Embodiment/Disembodiment**

Another theme that arose from the women’s discourses was that of embodiment, where embodiment is taken to mean the lived and felt experiences of being in a body, for example, dispositions, emotions and senses that are tied to the process of thinking and action (Del Busso & Reavey, in press).

It has been proposed that within the social construction of heteronormativity, heterosexual men are constructed as being autonomous subjects and have been found to be unproblematically embodied (Holland et al., 1998; Young, 1998). In comparison with this, women have been culturally defined as the passive object of male intentions and manipulations. Women are actively encouraged to view their bodies as an object as they are aware of the male gaze which objectifies them and in order to attain heteronormative femininity, they must construct their bodies as a surface adorned by such things as make-up and style of dress (Holland et al., 1998; Young, 1998). In order for women to exist within the ‘acceptable’ boundaries of female sexuality, they must present a passive sexuality and subordinate their desire to men’s (Holland et al., 1998). This means that women feel disembodied in that they view their bodies as being separate from their sense of self (Martin, 1989). The treatment of the body as a passive surface and the discontinuity that women feel with their bodies can lead to disempowerment, as the production of a disembodied femininity is thought to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity (Holland et al., 1998; Young, 1998; Del Busso & Reavey, in press).

It has been proposed that the treatment of women’s bodies as objects or as surface through the monitoring and evaluating of their physical appearance by men can result in women experiencing a loss of sense of self and can instil them with feelings of disembodiment and disempowerment (Del Busso & Reavey, in press). Exotic dancers are constructed through dominant discourses as being the disempowered object of the male gaze. Despite this, the narratives of the women who took part in this study illustrate that through working as exotic dancers they often experienced themselves as embodied subjects.

**Embodiment through dancing**

Dennie: ‘Yeah umm but yeah in a way I guess it can make you feel more at ease
with yourself with your body I mean. Like when I’m dancing on the stage or for a customer I do feel sexy and I do feel at ease with my body. It does make you feel more in tune with your body and more aware that it’s a part of you which I don’t think I really felt that way about my body before I started dancing...’

Magenta: ‘...So with the dancing like especially the stage shows you just become more in sync with your body I think and that means you start to feel more connected with it. I think it’s helped me learn more about myself and yeah, it’s helped me to feel like ‘this is me, and it feels pretty good’.’

Sapphire: ‘Yeah well I just think it means you know yourself better than the dancing means that you’re just more aligned with your body I think. It helps you to really know yourself like inside and out and that can be a really good thing, you know? It can make you just it can make you feel more confident about yourself yeah.’

When the women are dancing ‘on the stage or for a customer’ they are the object of the male gaze as the performance they are displaying is for the men who frequent the exotic dance venue. It has been argued that at these times, when the female body is produced as an object for the male gaze and is viewed as a sexualised, feminine surface, women experience themselves as disembodied, lacking in agency, and lose confidence in their ability to act upon the world (Young, 1998; Del Busso & Reavey, in press). However, the above extracts demonstrate that it is at these times that the women who took part in this study experienced themselves as embodied subjects. The fact that these women feel ‘connected’ and ‘aligned’ with their bodies while they are dancing suggests that it is through their experience as exotic dancers that they come to feel a sense of embodiment while their suggestion that it ‘feels pretty good’ and could make them ‘feel more confident’ about themselves suggests that this sense of embodiment instilled them with a sense of their own agency and ability to act on the world.

The successful production of heteronormative femininity has been proposed to lead to hampered and restricted body comportment which is in direct contrast to masculine body comportment, where full use of the body’s lateral and spatial potential is utilised. It has been proposed that this causes women to feel a timidity and lack of trust in their physical capabilities which can hinder their engagement with the world and, therefore, their sense of embodiment and agency (Young, 1998).

The pole dancing that exotic dancers perform on stage is a strenuous activity that involves physical strength and full body movement. It has been argued that through movement, women experience themselves as capable and embodied in comparison to the disembodiment they feel when they are viewed as a passive, static surface and that this sense of embodiment through movement is linked with women’s ability to experience themselves as empowered agents acting upon the world (Del Busso & Reavey, in press). In the above extracts, the women make particular reference to the dancing and stage shows as times when they felt ‘in sync’ with their bodies and ‘more aware’ that their bodies were a part of themselves, indicating that in line with previous research, their sense of embodied agency is linked with the experience of movement and physical capability.

However, it has been argued that the times when women are most likely to experience embodiment were in non-gendered, non-sexualised situations where they were not being viewed as objects of the male gaze (Del Busso & Reavey, in press). The experience of the exotic dancer is, therefore, complicated and contradictory as they are simultaneously the sexualised object of the heterosexual/bi male gaze through their production of an ‘ornamented surface’ which reflects heteronormative standards of feminine beauty (e.g. make-up and body.
technologies such as the removal of body hair (Bartky, 1993) and active, embodied subjects. It could be argued that despite the fact that they are still the object of the male gaze and are presenting an ornamented surface, exotic dancers are also embodying a non-normative female sexuality in that they are not merely a passive, static surface, which has been suggested to be necessary in order for the female body to retain its appeal to men (Del Busso & Reavey, in press). This could be a contributing factor to the women’s experiences of themselves as embodied subjects.

**Explicit objectification and disembodiment**

Dennie: ‘Like if some guy says to you ‘oh, nice pussy’ or something like that I mean it’s not exactly nasty but it, I’m not sure how to explain that, it can just make you feel bad sometimes, like you’re not, like you’re just a commodity...’

Narcissa: ‘But then again, you know sometimes there are those really stupid guys who either think, you know, oh because they’ve got the money umm they can just say and do to you whatever you know whatever they want...’

Sapphire: ‘...it can still really affect you sometimes or like when customers just think that because you’re working in a in like a club, because you’re working in an environment where you’re taking your clothes off they think umm that you’re a whore basically, that they can do anything, it doesn’t matter, you don’t matter... you know, because they can insult you or try to grab hold of you, you know, that kind of crap. They think ‘what’s the problem? You’re a stripper’...’

The above extracts demonstrate that there were times throughout their experiences when the women in this study felt disempowered and subsequently disembodied. These experiences took place during their direct interactions with customers, rather than the times where they were engaged in movement and simply observed by the customers. Sapphire, Narcissa and Dennie demonstrate that the times where they felt disembodied and disempowered were when they were being explicitly objectified, when the customers felt ‘they can just say and do to you... whatever they want’ or when they attempted to ‘insult you or try to grab hold of you’. When this occurred, it can be argued that the women’s sense of self was disrupted due to their overt objectification, meaning they were denied access to feelings of embodiment and their sense of agency was subsequently diminished.

It has also been suggested that when the female body is viewed as a fragmented surface divided into separate parts such as the ‘breasts’ and ‘legs’ rather than a whole, autonomous individual, women can be left feeling disembodied as their fragmented bodies become divorced from their sense of self (Holland et al., 1998; Del Busso & Reavey, in press). Dennie’s narrative reflects this assertion as through comments made to her such as ‘nice pussy’ her body is fragmented and she is left feeling ‘bad’ and like a ‘commodity’ rather than as an agentic, embodied subject.

It may be of interest to explore the link between the fragmentation of women’s bodies into ‘shameful private parts’ (Dudash, 1997) and feelings of disembodiment, and whether comments such as ‘nice pussy’ would differ from comments such as ‘beautiful eyes’. It is possible that there could be a link between the social construction of some body parts as having negative connotations (whilst others are deemed socially acceptable) and women’s access to feelings of embodiment. This is an area that may warrant further investigation.

This repertoire once again demonstrates how the position of the exotic dancer is more complicated than the dichotomous positions accorded them by much past research. Exotic dancers can be constructed as both body-object and body-subject with the women oscillating between these positions throughout their experiences as exotic dancers.
Discussion

It has been proposed that women living in a patriarchal society live a contradiction, in that they must negotiate the tension between experiencing themselves as both subject and object (Young, 1998). This same tension can be found throughout the narratives of the women who took part in this study, with their positions oscillating between embodiment and disembodiment, empowerment and disempowerment and the way they construct themselves in comparison to the way dominant discourses in society construct them. As has been mentioned previously, concepts such as gender inequalities, sexual autonomy and power are suggested to become magnified when the physical body is relied upon for income (Dudash, 1997), yet these concepts are also ever present in the day to day lives of all women living in a patriarchal society. In this way, it can be argued that the position of the exotic dancer is a magnified version of what all women in patriarchal society experience, as both positions involve the constant negotiation of the ambivalences associated with the contradiction of being both subject and object.

In highlighting the fact that all women hold similar positions and experience similar tensions to exotic dancers we are able to see that the way dancers’ experiences have been pathologised reflects how women and female sexuality in general are still regarded with mistrust and as something ‘other’ in patriarchal society. The study of exotic dancing and the magnification of the positions and tensions experienced by all women that it reveals, may enable us to better see how the subjugation of women and female sexuality continues to operate in today’s society and may open a space for resistance to this continued subjugation.

Qualitative research methods have a strong emphasis on the use of reflexivity, which can be described as disciplined self-reflection on the part of the researcher in order to emphasise that, in accordance with a social constructionist epistemology, there is no ‘objective truth’ and that the researcher brings their own assumptions to the research based on their cultural/historical background and their position in society. By demonstrating the researcher’s subjective position, reflexivity also helps to dissolve the power differentials between researcher and participant (Wilkinson, 1988). As a bisexual woman who has spent five years working as an exotic dancer and who is also a feminist, I became interested in researching the experiences of women working in the exotic dancing industry as I was dissatisfied with the way that dancer’s experiences had been pathologised throughout the majority of past research and also throughout the discourses within wider society. My own experiences had lead me to believe that the exotic dancing venue provided a space for the empowerment of women and female sexuality and that the sense of empowerment I gained through working as a dancer offered me a way of resisting dominant discourses in society that position women and female sexuality as inferior and subordinate to men. This meant that the main assumption I bought to the research was that other women would also construct themselves as being empowered through their work as exotic dancers.

While I had also had many negative experiences during my time working as an exotic dancer, I had tended to downplay these in favour of the experiences that lead to my feelings of empowerment. However, after conducting the interviews for this study and beginning to analyse the experiences of the women involved, I began to consider the complexity and multiplicity of positions that the women and myself held within the exotic dancing industry and to consider the tensions involved with negotiating these positions.

The complex and contradictory position of the exotic dancer as simultaneously both sexualised object of the male gaze and active, embodied subject is an area that warrants further research. The current study can be considered limited in its ability to explore the embodied experiences of women...
working in the exotic dancing industry as it has been proposed that discourse analysis, with its focus on the constructive quality of language, is an inadequate research method for the exploration of actual embodied experience (Brown et al., forthcoming; Del Busso & Reavey, in press; Gillies et al., 2004). Del Busso and Reavey (in press) argue that a research method which focuses on exploring the rich, phenomenological detail of specific experiences such as life history interviews may enable participants to move beyond talk and discursive description about the body, allowing them to explore the actual lived experience of being in a body. Further research into the embodied experiences of exotic dancers which utilises such a method may be beneficial in order to further elucidate the complexities of the positions and tensions that these women negotiate and how these same positions and tensions apply to women in wider society.

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Gay Psychologists and Gay Clients: Exploring therapist disclosure of sexuality in the therapeutic closet

James Lea, Robert Jones, & Jaci C. Huws

Therapist self-disclosure of sexuality can be therapeutically beneficial when both therapist and client identify as gay. This study attempted to explore the views and experiences of gay male clinical psychologists disclosing their sexuality to gay male clients. Five gay male clinical psychologists were interviewed, and subsequent transcriptions were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Six main themes emerged from the data: Being gay in a straight world; Disclosure and the therapeutic agenda; Contexts of disclosure; Other ways of knowing; Disclosure of sexuality: a big deal?; and The invisible curriculum. Overall, the study highlighted the participants’ thoughtfulness regarding their decisions and reasons to disclose, suggesting that disclosing their sexuality could be beneficial, but also potentially unhelpful to their gay clients. It is hoped that these findings will generate discussion and reflection, and in a small way help make gay issues more visible within clinical psychology, psychotherapy and counselling training.

Keywords: clinical psychologist; therapist self-disclosure; sexuality; IPA.

Background

MENTAL HEALTH difficulties within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community are reported to be high (King et al., 2003), and it has been suggested that LGBT people may encounter institutional heterosexism and homophobia when seeking psychotherapy (McFarlane, 1998; Bartlett, Smith & King, 2009). Davies (2007) argues that a ‘heterosexual bias permeates most therapy training programmes and therapy literature’ (p.19), and it has been argued that LGBT lifestyles and culture are overlooked in clinical psychology training (Butler, 2004; Milton, Coyle & Legg, 2002). This heterosexism is based on the assumption that heterosexuality is equivalent to normality (Braun, 2000; Butler & Byrne, 2008). An attitude of gay affirmative practice has been proposed as an alternative to this heterosexual bias, and attempts to create safe, meaningful and non-pathologising therapy for non-heterosexual clients (Butler et al., 2008; Coyle & Kitzinger, 2002; Davies & Neal, 1996; Langdriddle, 2007; Lebolt, 1999). Gay affirmative practice is a belief system or attitude, rather than a therapeutic model, and advocates that therapists (heterosexual or non-heterosexual) have a substantial knowledge of the issues faced by this diverse group, ensuring culturally competent practice (Crisp & McCave, 2007; Hodges, 2008; Milton & Coyle, 2003). Limited empirical support exists for gay affirmative practice, although recent qualitative studies suggested that an affirmative approach was valued by LGBT clients (Lebolt, 1999; Pixton, 2003).

Therapist self-disclosure (TSD) remains a controversial area (Knox & Hill, 2003), and in its broadest sense ‘can refer to any behaviour, verbal or non-verbal, that reveals information about a person (therapist)’ (Farber, 2006, p.133). Appropriate TSD should be used for the benefit of the client, and not serve the needs of the therapist (Hill & Knox, 2002). A review of TSD suggested that benefits to the client include: strengthening the therapeutic relationship, normalising client’s experiences, providing alternative points of view and encouraging clients to...
disclose (i.e. reciprocal disclosure) (Farber, 2006; Knox et al., 2003). Possible reasons to not disclose include: shifting the focus from client to therapist; burdening or confusing clients; and altering boundaries and the therapeutic relationship (Hill et al., 2002). Within gay affirmative practice, appropriate TSD is believed to reduce potential power differentials and result in a more equal and honest therapy (Barker, 2006; Coyle et al., 2002), which is in line with more feminist approaches to TSD (Simi & Mahalik, 1997). TSD of sexuality may be particularly salient when both therapist and client identify as non-heterosexual, and it has been suggested that therapists be willing to consider disclosure of sexuality on an individual client basis (Guthrie, 2006; Milton et al., 2002).

A preliminary literature review suggested that research into TSD of sexuality is limited, although theoretical and experiential accounts exist. Frommer (1995) suggested that gay men can develop an ‘outsider syndrome’, whereby ‘(the gay) child is most often an alien within his family… (and) often adopts the identity of an outsider even before he can label the nature of his difference’ (p.78). Rochlin (1982) believed that openly gay psychotherapists are able to share an enhanced empathy, represent a positive role model and have knowledge of gay culture, without needing to be educated by the client, which may counter the ‘outsider syndrome’ within therapy. Recent literature shares the above sentiment, and suggests that TSD of sexuality can indeed be helpful for gay clients, as it challenges heterosexism; socialises clients into positive gay roles; reduces feelings of isolation; and aids connection with the therapist as they are perceived as being safe to engage with within a therapeutic relationship (Davies, 2007; Milton et al., 2002; Moon, 2008). However, it should be noted that there are levels of therapist outness with clients (Barker, 2006), and TSD of sexuality must be appropriate to the client’s needs so as not to cause confusion about boundaries, or stunt the therapeutic exploration of clients who are questioning or ambivalent about their sexuality (Coyle et al., 2002).

Literature exploring contextual issues illustrates the inherent complexity of this area (Coolhart, 2005; DeCrescenzo, 1997; Kane, 2006), especially given the fact that therapists’ sexuality may be assumed (Russell, 2006); or disclosed unintentionally by meeting clients in a relatively small gay scene (Kessler & Waehler, 2005; Taylor et al., 1998). The influence of clinical setting on TSD of sexuality has also been implicated, whereby the disclosure of sexuality by therapists is more visible and acceptable within sexual health (Hanson, 2003), whilst in contrast is less visible and possibly more risky within inpatient settings (Fish, 1997). Bartlett, King and Phillips (2001) also commented on the fact that gay and lesbian clients may actively seek out therapists that share their sexual identity, which demonstrates a further complexity, as sexuality is disclosed at the point of referral.

Using focus groups and a grounded theory approach, Satterly (2004) researched a diverse group of gay male therapists’ experiences of disclosing their sexuality to gay and heterosexual clients. Themes implicated in the decision to disclose or not disclose included: professional identity, clinical setting (e.g. sexual health), alternative ways of knowing, benefit of the client, reciprocal disclosure, authenticity of the relationship, role modelling and sharing a culture and community. These research findings seem to echo the more theoretical ideas presented above, and suggest that gay therapists working with gay clients offers a unique context for understanding and researching TSD of sexuality.

The aim of the proposed study was to supplement the relatively limited research investigating gay male therapists’ disclosure of sexuality to gay male clients. The research focused solely on exploring the views and experiences of male gay clinical psychologists’ disclosing their sexuality to male gay clients in Great Britain, as clinical psycholo-
gists, especially those who identify as gay are under-represented within this area. Particular attention was given to exploring the reasons for disclosure and non-disclosure from a gay perspective, and also the influence of training in clinical psychology and the clinical psychology profession on the disclosure of sexuality.

Method

Qualitative perspective

This research used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith, 1996; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999) to explore and understand participants’ experiences of disclosure and non-disclosure of their sexuality to their gay clients. IPA adopts an interpretative approach to data collection and analysis, whereby a double hermeneutic exists (Smith & Osborn, 2004), as the researcher uses their own beliefs and expectations of the world to interpret the personal worlds of participants. IPA research recognises that a researcher’s interpretations are not free from bias, and these biases are embraced within the methodology and deemed necessary to make sense of a participant’s lived experience (Smith et al., 2004). Fundamental assumptions underlying the use of IPA are as follows: peoples’ narratives are a product of cognition and how they construct the world; language does not represent reality; more than one reality exists; and participants’ narratives can be understood through subjective interpretation of the researcher (Willig, 2001).

Participants

Five participants took part in the study. Participants were qualified male clinical psychologists who self-identified as ‘gay’ or ‘homosexual’. As the purpose of the study was to explore the disclosure of sexuality to clients, further criteria for inclusion were: (a) experience of working therapeutically with male gay clients; (b) experience of disclosing their sexuality to male gay clients; and (c) experience of actively deciding not to disclose their sexuality to male gay clients.

The aim of these inclusion criteria was to attempt to obtain some homogeneity within the sample, which is an important detail of IPA methodology, given that the focus is on understanding the frames of reference for a small group of people (Smith et al., 2004).

Once ethical approval had been granted from the relevant National Health Service (NHS) Research Ethics Committee, participants were recruited by e-mailing an outline of the study and inclusion criteria to a private Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) therapy practice; two relevant sections of the British Psychological Society (BPS); and the Lesbian and Gay Psychology listserv, which is an academic and clinical internet forum for psychologists and psychotherapists interested in LGBT issues. Interested potential participants contacted the first author (JL) by e-mail and were sent a copy of the participant information sheet describing the study. A subsequent telephone conversation was arranged to discuss the study and inclusion criteria more thoroughly. Fifteen potential participants expressed interest in taking part in the study, although only five were suitable. Six participants were excluded as they were not clinical psychologists, and a further four were unable to take part as they did not have experience of disclosing their sexuality and actively deciding not to disclose. The ages of participants ranged from 28 to 40 years old, and the ethnicity of all participants was white British. In terms of theoretical model, all participants described themselves as eclectic and integrative: specific models included Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT); Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT); Psychodynamic; and Systemic. All participants trained within Great Britain: three worked within the NHS and two worked in private practice.

Data collection

Individual interviews were conducted at a convenient time and location for the participants. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were given a further written outline of the study, information about
consent, anonymity and their right to withdraw. Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used instead of their real names in any subsequent reports, but they were given the option of refusing to allow their direct quotes being included in the write up, if they felt it would compromise their anonymity. All participants consented to the inclusion of direct quotes, and gave written informed consent to participate.

In accordance with the guidelines for the conduct of IPA studies (Smith et al., 2004) the interviews followed a semi-structured style. This maintained some form of structure for collecting data and later analysis, but also allowed participants the opportunity to share personal experiences beyond the researcher’s preconceived ideas (Smith et al., 1999). The interview began by asking participants to talk about their professional background. Participants were then asked more exploratory open ended questions related to: views of own sexuality, experience of disclosure and non-disclosure, own experience of coming out and training (see Appendix 1). The interview schedule was based on a review of related information and literature, and informed by the first author’s (JL) own experience of being gay and a trainee clinical psychologist. The average length of the interviews was 50 minutes. Interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. After completing the interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask questions of the researcher and reflect on their experience of taking part.

**Analytic process**

The first author (JL) read the first transcript thoroughly several times, annotating significant points, making preliminary interpretations and noting any connections or contradictions within each participants account. The transcript was then read again. Using the preliminary notes a higher level of abstraction took place, whereby themes, connections, concepts and links with the literature were made. Connected themes were then clustered and main themes were generated. Each main theme was re-checked against participants’ accounts to make sure they were consistent and credible. During this process, certain themes were discarded if the evidence in the transcript was not rich enough or did not fit into the overall structure. Initially, the same procedure was carried out on each transcript. However, as themes were developed they were tested against earlier transcripts for convergence and divergence, meaning that modifications were made to previous coding. Eventually a list of six master themes and corresponding sub-themes was created for the five participants, and this was used to produce a coherent narrative of participants’ experiences. The other members of the research team (RSPJ and JH) also made credibility checks to ensure that the analytical interpretations were grounded in the data. Finally, it is noteworthy that the analysis and subsequent writing up of the results informed each other as a flexible process, and this is comparable to the experience of other IPA researchers (Smith et al., 1999).

**Reflexivity**

The first author (JL) conducted the interviews and identified himself as gay. Politically he adopted the label as representing his membership to a minority cultural group. He was also within his final year of clinical psychology training, and described his therapeutic style as relational and psychodynamic. He had experience of disclosing his sexuality to a gay client during therapy, which he had reflected on both personally and professionally. Fundamentally, he believed that disclosure of sexuality could be beneficial for gay clients in reducing feelings of isolation and creating a safe therapeutic space for the exploration of issues related to gay life and culture. During the research, he chose to reveal his sexuality and profession to participants, which appeared to aid in the development of rapport and a shared language with participants, but may have also suggested that the researcher would take a gay affirmative position. Being of the same sexuality and
profession as all participants afforded an insider perspective from the outset, and allowed the iterative search for themes from a fundamentally psychological and gay position. Any findings should be taken as attempts to understand this area, speaking to and for the people involved, the information shared, and the researcher’s knowledge of the topic.

Results
From the process of analysis, six major themes emerged: being gay in a straight world; disclosure and the therapeutic agenda; the contexts of disclosure; other ways of knowing; disclosure of sexuality: a big deal?; and the invisible curriculum. Each theme will be discussed and illustrated with grammatically corrected extracts to enhance readability.

Being gay in a straight world
Participants offered a rich insight into the potential exclusion, stigma and homophobia faced by gay men within a heterosexual majority. It seemed that this knowledge of the ‘gay experience’ inhabited the space between personal and professional, thus providing an insider perspective in their clinical work with gay men:

I think a lot of gay men feel they would be judged by straight people when talking about particular types of sex, or relationships, or bits of their identity. (Neil)

Understanding the potential difficulties gay clients experience relating to the straight world seemed to influence participants’ choices about disclosure of their own sexuality. Neil, Nick and Rhys noted that a function of disclosing their sexuality was to allow clients to feel at ease and comfortable in the room. This disclosure of sameness created a space of comfort and free disclosure of the client’s difficulties.

…it sometimes kind of feels like something you just have to give away in order to make the conversation easier. (Neil)
confident about their own sexuality... we saw it as a strong therapeutic tool to be openly gay. (Kevin)  
Finally, all participants were emphatic in their discourse that disclosing sexuality should be therapeutic and meaningful, and ultimately be done for the benefit of the client.  
I kind of have a sense that it should be useful to the client in some way, it's not something I like to do just as a routine thing. (Neil)  

Disclosure and the therapeutic agenda  
Participants dealt with the complexities of disclosing their sexuality (or not) to clients based on the therapeutic agenda, and their roles as psychologist and psychotherapist. If asked directly, there appeared to be a desire to explore and understand the meaning behind the question. Whilst this may be interpreted as a caricatured therapist response to any question, it seemed more about honouring and understanding the individuality of the client, and whether it was necessary for them to know:  
I think it's important to be curious about why and how that question came into their mind, is it because they feel that you, that they’re not understood by you, you know there are so many different hypotheses to explore before you give a response. (Nick)  
Disclosure for whom was an issue most participants grappled with, and there was a reflective thoughtfulness about their own motivations to disclose:  
...absolutely, I don’t ever feel I have reasons myself to disclose my sexual orientation, I’ve never felt that they have needed to know that because of my agenda... I never feel as though it’s my agenda and that the person sat across from me needs to know my sexual orientation. (Rhys)  
There was also a concern that the disclosure could be perceived and experienced as meeting the needs of the therapist, rather than the client, thus breaking a fundamental rule of psychotherapy:  
...some of the clients were really cute, it just makes the issue of disclosing my sexuality more complicated because I find a client attractive, then am I telling them that I’m gay for my own reasons, which feels very uncomfortable and I wouldn’t do it, it’s not about the therapy, it’s about me. (Kevin)  
A further theme related to therapeutic boundaries was evident, whereby participants cautioned against making their own sexuality too much of a focus if it had the potential to nullify the uniqueness of a therapeutic relationship:  
...at the end of the day, the relationship needs to be a therapeutic one and an effective one really... if it sort of descends into sort of chit chat, you know it’s not going to happen because it’s not going to be helpful. (Nick)  
Revealing one’s sexuality, therefore, served as a means of developing an effective psychotherapeutic relationship and agenda. However, Jon and Rhys noted that such disclosures might be boundaryed, such that the disclosure does not necessitate disclosing personal aspects of life as a gay man. The focus is on disclosure of sexuality alone, with its purpose being to ensure the development of a meaningful therapeutic relationship.  
...in my opinion (that) was crossing a different type of boundary, and I didn’t necessarily want to disclose any more about my life, but my sexuality was fine, and I disclosed because it was anonymous enough. (Jon)  
Although disclosure of sexuality might provide a role model for clients, the metaphor of a ‘biased witness’ was nonetheless referred to. There was a sense that their disclosure would in some way minimise the significance of their exploratory role in the therapy, and give the simplistic message that it is okay to be gay:  
...that the person would be able to dismiss your views that it was ok because you were gay as well... they would just see it as bias and, therefore, it wouldn’t mean anything, therefore my attempts to help
people to become more confident about their sexuality would be undermined by the process... I could just be seen as a biased witness. (Kevin)
The notion of a biased witness also seemed linked to Neil and Rhys’ refusal of disclosing their sexuality to clients who were still questioning their sexual identity. It could be speculated that their disclosure would not only give the potentially glib message it is okay to be gay, but more importantly, that it would colour the clients exploration of themselves within therapy.

...a client... who was very very confused about his sexuality, and... I think that was the only time when I have actively withheld... I had a very strong sense that it would be the wrong thing to do there. (Neil)

Some participants also felt that disclosing their sexuality might take precedence over their professional identity, leading to reduced disclosure, especially in inpatient settings.

...one of the reasons for me not disclosing... (is) that that might take over my identity too much, so I wouldn’t be a clinical psychologist, I would be the gay clinical psychologist, which would be frustrating because I’m not a gay clinical psychologist. (Jon)

Finally, most of the participants alluded to the fact that their decisions and reasons to disclose were in some ways intuitive. However, Neil expressed this idea eloquently, and in particular hinted at the mismatch between the objective scientific approach to therapy, and how this contrasted to the subjective art of therapy:

...how you make sense of it I suspect ends up more an intuition than anything else with individual clients, and that’s never been a satisfactory explanations has it in the research literature... but I suspect that is what a lot of therapists do, unless there’s some more formal way of doing it. (Neil)

The contexts of disclosure
It was apparent that participants’ disclosure of their sexuality was influenced significantly by the setting within which they offered therapy to gay clients. Due to experience within the sexual health field, Rhys, Nick, Neil and Jon noted how their sexuality was usually assumed by clients, rather than directly disclosed.

I think there is a big assumption working in sexual health that a man working in sexual health is likely to be gay and there is a lot of truth in that as well... but they’re not all, and so I think clients might probably err on the side of likelihood. (Neil)

In contrast, disclosure of any kind for participants working within inpatient settings (e.g. forensic secure services) was perceived as less appropriate, due to the risk issues related to this client group. There was a sense that institutional homophobia might create therapeutic difficulties between participants and the heterosexual clients they worked with.

...the reason for not disclosing in this environment is because... most of the clients know each other and I’m aware some of my individual clients that I work with, where the issue is nothing to do with their sexuality have strongly negative attitudes towards gay people. (Kevin)

For Kevin and Jon, their relationship with colleagues was also an issue that further complicated disclosure. There was a concern that they would be ‘outed’ by colleagues, and felt that this would affect their role as a clinical psychologist.

I wonder whether there will be leakage from staff. (Kevin)

...it’s not something they would mention in front of that patient because there’s an implicit agreement that I choose to disclose what I wish with the patient, others don’t do it on my behalf. (Jon)

In contrast, private work within a LGBT therapy organisation presented a different and unique context for disclosure, as participants’ sexuality was known to clients from the outset, as this information was included.
in the organisations website. In some ways it was more acceptable for participants to be openly ‘out’ in private practice:

…it’s different though in my private work with (LGBT organisation), because you have to be open about it, you’re required to be open about it to be on the register… it’s just something that people will know about me really. (Nick)

This context illuminated the idea of client choice and that gay clients may actively seek a gay therapist. Neil noted that expressing this choice was akin to asking for a certain gender, race or model of therapist. However, there was a sense that this was only available to clients within private practice.

…the idea that we’re seeing in private practice of gay affirmative therapists, that one might actually chose a therapist who is known to be gay or not straight and you know (LGBT organisation) of course are based upon these lines… perhaps in the same way that they might choose the gender of the therapist, or the ethnicity of the therapist, that they actually want to try and get as similar match as possible. (Neil)

Other ways of knowing

Participants noted that direct verbal disclosure of their sexuality was relatively infrequent, and it seemed that this was due to other ways of knowing. As within sexual health, client assumptions about the sexuality of the participants played a significant role across settings, suggesting that sexuality is possibly invisibly visible between two gay men:

…a lot of them like I said earlier assume it rather than necessarily know, and I never try and correct them. (Rhys)

Neil expressed the notion of unconscious communication, whereby the client may be given hints as to the sexuality of the participant because of their style of interacting, and that this acted as a type of non-verbal disclosure of sexuality:

…I don’t think I do it consciously but I might drop hints along the way that I have some knowledge or understanding or experience of some things they are speaking of, and that in itself is a kind of more implicit coming out or disclosure (Neil).

Sharing the gay scene with clients also emerged as another way of clients knowing the sexuality of the participants without direct verbal disclosure. Participants felt that gay clients were sensitive to cues of sexuality through experience of the gay scene and life as a gay man, and that this accounted for some of the assumptions made by clients.

I guess that there might be something there that makes me look gay, and if you’re a gay man and you’re out on the scene then you will probably be more cued into who looks gay and who doesn’t… I wish I knew the answers, but there are obviously subtle cues that aren’t necessarily verbal. (Rhys)

Finally, Neil and Kevin implicated the role of the internet and the ‘Google factor’ (Zur, 2008) as a non-verbal disclosure of their sexuality. Whilst it was not considered that clients would search their therapist’s research in psychological journals, it was conceptualised as an aspect of the participants’ identity that was open in other professional arenas, and theoretically was accessible to their gay clients.

…actually it would be easy enough for people to find out about my sexuality if they really wanted to in terms of the research I do, and some of the things I contribute to could easily be Googled… of course, there are places on the internet and in the real world where I can be found, where my sexuality is probably obvious. (Neil)

Disclosure of sexuality: A big deal?

Disclosure was not always an easy option, and revealing one’s sexuality to gay clients could be anxiety provoking. Waiting for a reaction to one’s disclosure was associated with the metaphor of an unexploded bomb, whereby the anticipated aftershock of a negative reaction was generally absent.
there’s a kind of microsecond when it’s actually in the space between you, and you’ve said it and they haven’t responded and you wonder how it’s going to land…my experience tells me that it’s generally going to be okay… I’ve never had an experience where the client has reacted in a way that has not felt okay. (Neil)

Whilst it is clear that disclosing sexuality is a complex and potentially emotive issue for gay clinical psychologists in this sample, it was also interesting to note that the act of disclosing to a client was usually described as more mundane and less extraordinary than initially thought.

…by and large it’s something that happens and happens without much event, and that would be an interesting thing to report, that actually it’s no big deal, because its set up even in the asking of the question. (Neil)

Participants also questioned how useful their disclosures had actually been, and there was a sense that it may not have been as significant within the overall therapeutic encounter.

…sharing that I’m gay doesn’t mean that their difficulties disappear. (Rhys)

…you know (it) didn’t seem to have a big influence or be a big factor in whether you get somewhere with someone really. (Nick)

**The invisible curriculum**

Participants expressed an irritation at the heterosexual views that permeate clinical psychology training, and the fact that the profession in general is unable to speak to, and speak of, those members who identify as gay. Gay issues were viewed as being the invisible and overlooked component of curriculum and practice.

…I know it isn’t being discussed and can feel the absence of it, but I think if I was heterosexual then I would understand less the homosexual issues, and perhaps I wouldn’t even notice it isn’t even there in clinical psychology, but I notice that it’s not there… I’m part of that minority group. (Jon)

It was also apparent that participants felt that gay issues were situated under the umbrella of diversity and difference, and in one case as pathology.

I remember having some teaching in my training around dealing with difference, which did include other issues such as race and religion and not just sexual orientation. (Rhys)

…it was about clients that identified as gay and were messed up, and might have problems with that and maybe discrimination and abuse and some sort of sexual problems. (Jon)

Disclosure of sexuality was absent within training. Generally, therapist self-disclosure was presented within the classical psychoanalytic concept of a blank screen, advocating the avoidance of any intentional personal disclosure.

…such a powerful discourse in psychology and therapy generally that you shouldn’t, that you should keep your personal details about yourself out of everything. (Nick)

The lack of relevant LGBT teaching coupled with a biased model specific view of self-disclosure seemed to create an uncertainty within the participants about their disclosing behaviour. Nick noted the anxiety and potential difficulties that can arise from this position of uncertainty:

…when you’re having powerful discourses about not doing something, and you find yourself in a different situation or get a different point of view you can feel quite anxious, like am I doing something wrong here, and could lead to a situation when you feel you can’t talk about it in supervision. (Nick)

**Overview and discussion**

The present study adds to the literature in novel ways by providing a clinical psychological view of TSD of sexuality using an IPA analysis. Generally, such TSD has been viewed as beneficial to gay clients, as it positively impacted on the therapeutic relationship. However, caution was expressed when
disclosure served the needs of the therapist or affected the uniqueness of that therapeutic encounter. Further complexities, such as client assumptions of sexuality and other ways of knowing, as well as the discourse of disclosure being no big deal were apparent. Finally, a lack of focus and visibility of gay issues, and specifically disclosure of sexuality, was evident within clinical psychology training and the profession.

Insight into the negative effects of exclusion and homophobia created a unique context for disclosing sexuality. Participants seemed to have an increased empathy and sensitivity to the potential discomfort clients experienced relating to a presumed heterosexual psychologist, and a heterosexist health care setting (Bartlett et al., 2009; McFarlane, 1998; Rochlin, 1982), therefore, disclosure allowed clients to engage meaningfully, and be an insider rather than outsider (Frommer, 1995). Disclosure of sexuality as normalisation (i.e. coming out process); allowing reciprocal disclosure (i.e. therapist disclosure to allow client disclosure); and providing a role model for clients were evident. These functions of disclosure have been noted generally within the literature (Farber, 2006; Knox et al., 2003), and specifically with regards to gay therapists working affirmatively with gay clients (Davies, 2007; Lebolt, 1999; Milton et al., 2002; Moon, 2008; Pixton, 2003; Satterly, 2004). However, it was also noted that there were hierarchies of outness (Barker, 2006) and that disclosure of sexuality needed to be boundaried, whereby disclosure of sexuality was not synonymous with disclosure of the intricacies of life as a gay man.

The therapeutic agenda and role of psychologist/psychotherapist seemed paramount regarding the disclosure of sexuality, and disclosure seemed to be reflected on within a generic therapeutic framework. Disclosure was considered inappropriate when it was beneficial only to the psychologist and moved focus from the client’s story, as this only served to nullify the purpose and uniqueness of therapeutic boundaries and the relationship (Coyle et al., 2002; Farber, 2006; Knox et al., 2002; Knox et al., 2003; Satterly, 2004). However, it was expressed that the actual decision to disclose may be more intuitive, rather than guided by formal concrete frameworks (Farber, 2006). The potential for disclosure of sexuality to take over professional identity, and being seen as the ‘gay psychologist’, echoes findings in the literature, especially within inpatient settings (Fish, 1997; Satterly, 2004). Disclosure of sexuality when clients were ambivalent about their own sexuality was not endorsed, as it may skew clients’ exploration of themselves (Coyle et al., 2002; Satterly, 2004). Interestingly, this was further illustrated in the notion of a biased witness, whereby therapists may be perceived as giving clients the message ‘it’s ok to be gay.’ This point relates to Barker’s (2006) reflection regarding the disclosure of sexuality, that ultimately ‘we may be damned if we do and damned if we don’t’ (p.294).

The context in which disclosure of sexuality took place was also significant. Linking to previous findings, sexuality within sexual health settings seemed more visible and acceptable due to the significant number of gay male clients receiving services (Hanson, 2003; Satterly, 2004). Therefore, sexuality was usually assumed by clients rather than directly disclosed by participants (Russell, 2006; Satterly, 2004). This possibly highlights gay cultural assumptions about the sexuality of men working in sexual health, thus therapists are presumed as ‘gay in gay places’. Conversely, inpatient settings were viewed as less conducive to the disclosure of sexuality due to the small closed environment, and there was also a concern that disclosure may be done on ones behalf by colleagues. This reticence to disclose may be due to the institutionalised homophobia that exists, as well as the potential risk of physical harm from clients in forensic settings (Fish, 1997; Satterly, 2004). Private and work with an LGBT organisation was a unique setting for TSD of sexuality, as sexuality was known to clients from the outset, in fact openness of
the therapist regarding their sexuality was required. This relates to the ideas of client choice (Bartlett et al., 2001), although this choice, or matching of sexuality may only be actively endorsed in private and voluntary sectors (Satterly, 2004).

Other ways of knowing was an interesting theme, which related to unintentional and non-verbal disclosures referred to in the literature (Farber, 2006; Knox et al., 2002). Again, the role of assumption was significant as it meant direct disclosure was not necessary. Gay clients seem to be sensitive to cues of sexuality in their therapists (Satterly, 2004), for example, manner, jewellery, tone of voice, such that sexuality could be argued as invisibly visible to gay men generally. Sharing the gay scene with clients and unexpectedly meeting clients on the scene created a further complexity to disclosure, as the ‘disclosure’ was ultimately unintentional, which seemed to cause anxiety and concerns regarding therapeutic boundaries for therapists (Kessler & Waehler, 2005; Satterly, 2004; Taylor et al., 1998). The ‘Google factor’ (Zur, 2008) represented a further non-verbal form of disclosure, as the sexuality of therapists could be researched using the internet, which has not been reported within the literature.

The present study illuminates how disclosure of sexuality may not be perceived as a big deal by therapists who are out. Similar to views expressed in the literature, there is an inherent anxiety and concern about the effects of TSD on clients (Farber, 2006; Knox et al., 2003), but interestingly, the idea that disclosure of sexuality specifically may be mundane and happen without much event seems novel. Furthermore, the disclosure of sexuality is believed to exert positive therapeutic effects in gay affirmative and feminist practices, indeed the current research also supports this; but there was also the finding that it may not be as significant as initially thought. The actual effects that disclosure of sexuality have on therapy were questioned, and it could be argued that its positive effects are related to the relationship and process issues within therapy, rather than on the psychological difficulties per se.

The impact of clinical psychology training and the profession suggested that there is inherent heterosexism and an invisibility of gay issues, which relates to literature on general psychotherapy training (Davies, 2007) and clinical psychology specifically (Butler, 2004; Milton et al., 2002). Gay issues were not dealt with in mainstream clinical psychology training, and when there were taught components they were conceptualised as diversity and difference, which again perpetuates heterosexual norms. With regards to self-disclosure, training focussed on the psychoanalytic idea of a ‘blank screen’ and therefore a discourse of non-disclosure, which leaves little room for trainees to consider and reflect on the possibility of disclosing their sexuality to a client. The lack of LGBT relevant teaching and a rigid view of self-disclosure created anxiety about the disclosure of sexuality, and it could be speculated that training does a disservice to gay trainees, and simply compounds the anxiety when thinking about disclosing sexuality.

Reflection and recommendations

Participants were difficult to recruit due to the restricted inclusion criteria and the limited number of male gay clinical psychologists within the profession. Whilst the inherent insider perspective of the first author (JL) was viewed as a strength of the study, it may also have meant that participants censored their accounts as they may have felt exposed discussing their sensitive experiences with a trainee clinical psychologist. Within the current study, participants’ own coming out experiences did not emerge as a rich theme related to participants disclosure of sexuality, however, future IPA research could focus on this issue, and explore whether therapists own experiences of coming out relate to their disclosure of sexuality to clients. It would also be helpful to explore the views and experiences of lesbian and bisexual clinical psychologists.
disclosing their sexuality to clients, as this would highlight similarities and differences within this intriguing and complex area. Fundamentally, more qualitative and quantitative research focussing on the disclosure of sexuality is needed, to ensure that sexuality becomes visible in the therapy room, and in psychotherapy training.

Findings from this study will hopefully generate discussion and reflection within the world of clinical psychology training, and in a small way help to make gay issues more visible. It will also provide a narrative for gay trainees and qualified clinical psychologists to refer to and explore their own dilemmas regarding disclosure of sexuality; hopefully highlighting that disclosing sexuality can be beneficial when working with gay clients, although must be done thoughtfully, and at times courageously.

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References


Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

**Professional background information**
- Number of years post-qualification experience (DClinPsy or equivalent).
- Region of residence and employment.
- Current place of work and client group.
- Therapeutic orientation.
- Approximate number of gay male clients worked with.
- Clinical settings where work with male gay clients took place.
- Types of therapy and/or intervention offered to gay clients.

**Views of own sexuality**
In your own words, how would you describe your sexual identity or sexuality?
How does your sexuality influence your role as a clinical psychologist generally?

**Experiences of disclosing and not disclosing sexuality to gay clients**
Can you tell me about your experiences of disclosing your sexuality to gay male clients?
What are the factors that influence your decisions to disclose your sexuality?
Can you tell me about your experiences of not disclosing your sexuality gay male clients?
What are the factors that influence your decisions to not disclose your sexuality?

**Experience of ‘coming out’**
How has your own experience of ‘coming out’ in your life influenced your decisions regarding the disclosure of your sexuality to gay male clients?

**Experience of clinical psychology training**
How has your own experience of clinical psychology training influenced your decisions regarding the disclosure of your sexuality to gay male clients?

**Experience of training on LGBT issues**
Have you any experience of receiving training relating to therapy with gay clients? If YES, how has this experience influenced your decisions regarding the disclosure of your sexuality to gay male clients?

**Conclusion**
Finally, in light of what we have discussed today, can you tell me how disclosing your sexuality to your clients actually makes you feel?
Measuring sexual orientation of a Portuguese gay, lesbian and bisexual internet sample

Henrique Pereira, Isabel Leal & João Maroco

This article surveyed the measurement of sexual orientation of a Portuguese gay, lesbian and bisexual internet population. Total number of participants in the study who filled out the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (Portuguese version) available on the internet was 714 men and 91 women all gay, lesbian or bisexual identified (a total of 1000). This method was chosen because the internet is now an important tool used by gays, lesbians and bisexuals for socialising and to gather information. Basic ethical issues were observed namely, informed consent, maintenance of privacy and confidentiality. Key theoretical issues were addressed such as the categorisation of sexual orientation, its origins and development. Data analysis consisted of subjecting the items of the Grid to a factor analysis of principal components, internal reliabilities by Cronbach’s alpha coefficient (α=.94), frequency analysis and comparisons between temporal dimensions (present, past, and ideal). The results indicate that sexual orientation is a dynamic process and can be subject to change, when subjected to temporal analysis. The implications of such results are also discussed.

**Keywords:** sexual orientation; heterosexuality; bisexuality; homosexuality.

‘Sexual orientation is one of the four components of sexuality and is distinguished by an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectionate attraction to individuals of a particular gender.(…) Three sexual orientations are commonly recognised: homosexual, attraction to individuals of one’s own gender; heterosexual, attraction to individuals of the other gender; or bisexual, attractions to members of either gender. Persons with a homosexual orientation are sometimes referred to as gay (both men and women) or as lesbian (women only). Sexual orientation is different from sexual behaviour because it refers to feelings and self-concept. Persons may or may not express their sexual orientation in their behaviours’.

Public Affairs, American Psychological Association (2002).

Traditionally, sexual orientation has been studied from polarised points of view, in which a person would express it by contrast to an opposed sexuality. In this context, for instance, homosexuality would be treated as a consequence of social sexual roles inversion and categories were dichotomously presented, leaving no other possible classifications (McConaghy, 1977). Sexual orientations other than what is purely heterosexual, hence, were considered to be homosexual and deviant. This has been changed when the works of Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948) opened a road to understanding when they explored sexual orientation exclusively in terms of erotic feelings, based on the function of physical reactions towards determined stimuli – other or same-sex partner and based on the type of sexual behaviour practiced. For Kinsey, it was clear that sexual orientation could only be understood on a one-dimensional continuum, where heterosexuality and homosexuality were at extreme polar ends, but never 100 per cent attainable and thus non-existent.
In this way, the majority of people would fall somewhere on this continuum.

The Kinsey model, however, presents an important limitation: it implies a reciprocal relation, i.e. the more one is heterosexual the less homosexual he or she should be and vice versa (Sanders, Reinich & McWhirter, 1990). This is the reason why in 1980, Storms presented a modified Kinsey model, considering that both homosexuality and heterosexuality could be viewed as orthogonal independent dimensions and not as the extremes of a single dimension. From here, four categories were proposed, depending on the degree of homoeroticism and heteroeroticism and presenting a bi-dimensional structure where bisexual people are represented as having high levels of homosexuality and heterosexuality and not just as having moderate levels for each either one.

Presently, there is a good number of studies and literature on the subject. However, the body of literature underscores a need to consider other dimensions when trying to understand the real nature of sexual orientation besides the variables used by the likes of the Kinsey model and its predecessors. This is particularly important especially due to its dynamic character and to the fact that it may vary throughout the lifecycle (Nusbaum & Rosenfeld, 2004, p.146). This aspect is fundamental in the undertaking of this study – to demonstrate the current trend in the sexual orientation of the Portuguese internet community.

This paper recognises that, as a communication medium, the internet is increasingly becoming a scene of social construction and that it is helpful in understanding the way social realities get constructed and reproduced today. According to Kelsey and Amant (2008), the internet has created opportunities for individuals to engage in social interactions and that its use has now shifted to a means with which to create and maintain individual and group social relationships. (p.478) Hence, the internet was used as a primary tool to achieve the objectives of this study.

Sexual orientation

A clear definition of what ‘a sexual orientation’ is and its origins has been insufficient in most research studies due mainly to a lack of empirical data on the research that is currently available on the topic. For example, from a psychoanalytical perspective, the factors contributing to a homosexual orientation reside in the unresolved nature of parental relationships which facilitate the identification with the same-sex progenitor. One of the most popular psychodynamic views involves the conception of a poor and hostile same-sex progenitor and the establishment of an over protected relationship with the opposite-sex progenitor Bieber et al. (1962) and Evans (1969). Most such studies generalised their theories based on a sample from a patient group. Several studies have shown that there are significant psychological differences in people who seek treatment and those who do not seek treatment among gay, lesbian and bisexual self-identified individuals that cannot be generalised.

Generally speaking, sexual orientation is defined as a preponderance of sexual or erotic feelings, thoughts, fantasies and/or behaviours that are present from an early age, perhaps as early as conception (Savin-Williams, 1990). From this perspective, sexual orientation is considered to be a lifelong process instead of an event.

Sexual orientation can also be understood as a physical and emotional preference (Shively & DeCecco, 1977) This is seen in the context of the proposition that the development of sexual orientation is a process instead of an event. The physical preference can be seen as two independent continua of heterosexuality and homosexuality; for each individual there is a continuum for physical heterosexuality and for physical homosexuality. Qualitatively, individuals can be seen as heterosexuals, homosexuals or bisexuals; quantitatively, individuals can be considered heterosexual or homosexual. Emotional preference can also be considered as two independent continua from affective hetero-
sexuality and affective homosexuality (Shively & DeCecco, 1977).

This theory – sexual orientation as a physical and emotional preference – allows us a deeper approach when making observations of varied manners of sexual expression, but can also lead to the creation of certain conflicts between physical and emotional manifestations. However, these conflicts can be resolved at two different levels: behaviour and fantasy. The behavioural level is often utilised to describe and identify sexual orientation, whereas the fantasy level is usually used in clinical settings and helps to clearly identify sexual orientation. A complete identification should include both parameters.

Klein (1993) considers that when talking about sexual orientation one should take into consideration seven different dimensions: (1) sexual attraction; (2) sexual behaviour; (3) sexual fantasies; (4) emotional preference; (5) social preference; (6) homosexual or heterosexual lifestyle; and (7) self-identification. All dimensions valorise past, present and ideal positions.

Klein (1993) conceptualises his work within the study of bisexuality, and tries to test the fact that sexual orientation is a multi-varied, and dynamic process, made of sexual and non-sexual variables, differentiated throughout a certain frame of time. This assumption involves the fact that people may modify their sexual orientation, in such terms that the label they utilise today may not necessarily be the same as yesterday’s or tomorrow’s.

Origins and development

Behavioural theories have conceptualised sexual orientation development associating it to specific instrumental learning behaviours, mainly during childhood and adolescence. Accordingly, Kinsey (1948) rejected the ideas that heterosexuality, bisexuality and homosexuality were innate and considered sexual orientation to be the result of significant learning experiences. Masters and Johnson (1979) also shared the idea that first same-sex positive experiences would determine a homosexual orientation.

Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith (1981) analysed the family history of hundreds of homosexual and heterosexual men and women and concluded the following: (1) when boys and girls reach adolescence their sexual orientation is already determined even if they haven’t had any sexual contact with other people; (2) in the majority of cases homosexual feelings appeared three years prior to the first sexual encounter; (3) homosexual men and women showed no poor heterosexual relationships in their childhood; (4) identification with the father had no correlation to any type of sexual orientation; and (5) for homosexual men, the most important feature in the expression of their sexuality was the non acceptance of social sexual roles, whereas for homosexual women, the most important feature was the nature of family relationships.

Other studies suggest that there is a strong correlation between the development of a certain sexual orientation and the presence (or not) of behaviours associated with social sexual roles. Green (1987) in his prospective investigation demonstrated that 75 per cent to 80 per cent of the boys studied who showed typically feminine behaviours could be considered homosexual or bisexual in their adolescence. Bailey and Zucker (1995) in their meta-analysis with 41 retrospective studies of this type concluded that both homosexual men and women had informed crossed gender behaviour during childhood.

Shively and DeCecco (1977) also proposed that the development of sexual orientation is also linked to the development of social sexual roles. From their perspective, the emotional aspect of the parent’s sexual orientation is easier to be observed than its physical aspects, which in turn, contribute to the faster development of emotional characteristics of sexual orientation in the child. Subsequently, conflict between the sexual orientation and other components of sexual identity can occur. The most common conflict occurs between the sexual orienta-
tion and the biological sex, since physical heterosexual orientation is socially associated to procreation. The child usually resolves this conflict by separating the two aspects.

There seems to be a lack of studies regarding sexual orientation from a heterosexual perspective. At this point, we cannot disregard biological and genetic contributions to the explanation of sexual orientation. Yet, our focus is this matter is on the psychosocial variables influencing this process. Most likely there isn’t a single way of being heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual; there are, however, several paths to develop this and several factors need to be taken into consideration.

Method

The objective of the present study is to measure sexual orientation of a large internet sample. In line with the previous thesis that sexual orientation is dynamic and constantly changes, the study seeks to demonstrate the current trend of sexual orientation in the specified population. Also, it was our goal to determine psychometric properties of the instrument utilised in order to fill the gap verified in the literature regarding the measurement of sexual orientation.

Participants

The participants are composed of 1000 volunteers drawn from several Portuguese speaking internet-based communities. All participants were from 14 to 72 years of age (M age=30.5 years, SD=10.23), and the majority of them were male (81.2 per cent male; 18.2 per cent female).

Participants came from Portugal (45.4 per cent), Brazil (49.6 per cent), and other countries (5 per cent). The distributions for economic status presented 16 per cent low, 56.1 per cent average, and 27.9 per cent high. Meanwhile, 45.5 per cent of all participants have college education.

The majority of participants are single (59.8 per cent), 7.8 per cent are married (heterosexual marriage), 17.8 per cent have a same-sex relationship, and 8.2 per cent a legalised same-sex unions.

Finally, 69.4 per cent of all participants identified themselves as gay or lesbian, whereas 22.1 per cent identified as bisexual. A significant 4.3 per cent did not identify with any category of sexual identity and 3.7 per cent identified as curious.

Instrument

The instrument used in the present study is the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid, which is a system to describe one’s sexual orientation in a detailed and informative manner. It was developed by Klein (1993) and involves the establishment of seven components of sexual orientation: sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasy, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle and self-identification. For each component, past, present and ideal measures are presented.

The factorial structure of Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid remained unknown (Weinrich et al., 1993), although it was utilised to test the fact that sexual orientation is, in fact, a dynamic and multi-varied process, composed of sexual and non-sexual variables, differentiated throughout time.

A Portuguese version of the Grid was put together after the author’s permission to do so was given.

Procedures

Participants were asked to collaborate through the internet. The researchers sent e-mails via mailing lists, joined internet-based communities and participated in Forums and Chat rooms of Portuguese speaking gay and lesbian groups, asking them to go to the address where the Portuguese version of the Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid was available. This website was built for the purpose of this study. The website was visited by approximately 10,000 internet users, and 1000 completed the Grid successfully.
Results
Reliability and factor analysis
We examined the reliability of the Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid. The variables explored included all 21 items of the Grid. Cronbach’s alpha for the overall scale was .94, suggesting excellent internal consistency of the items. Since a .92 KMO indicated a very good validity for the Factorial Analysis, this procedure was made using a principal components extraction. The results presented five principal factors, representing 78.60 per cent of explained variance. After a Varimax rotation, the items were organised accordingly to temporal criteria (present/past/ideal) for dimensions of ‘sexual attraction’, ‘sexual behaviour’, ‘sexual fantasy’, ‘emotional preference’, and ‘self-identification’; and accordingly to a common criterion of ‘social preference’ and ‘lifestyle’. These results are shown in Table 1.

Measures of sexual orientation
From the frequencies analysis of the items of the Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid (obtained from the mean scores of the items), we can observe that the majority of participants refers homoerotic exclusivity in all variables, except in variables of social preference and lifestyle.

Yet, as we can see in Table 2, important discrepancies when comparing frequencies between present, past and ideal moments were registered.

Table 1: Final aggregation of principal components of the Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid after Factor Analysis (KMO=0.92), extraction method: principal components with Varimax rotation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>Item (e loading)</th>
<th>Eigenvalue</th>
<th>% Explained Variance</th>
<th>Cronbach’s α</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIMENSION 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(IDEAL)</td>
<td>Item 3 – IDEAL Sexual attraction (0.83)</td>
<td>10.13</td>
<td>0.95</td>
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<td>Item 6 – IDEAL Sexual behaviour (0.86)</td>
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<td>Item 9 – IDEAL Sexual fantasy (0.84)</td>
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<td>Item 12 – IDEAL Emotional preference (0.79)</td>
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<td>Item 21 – IDEAL Self-Identification (0.75)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Item 2 – PAST Sexual attraction (0.85)</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 5 – PAST Sexual behaviour (0.82)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 8 – Past Sexual fantasy (0.78)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 11 – PAST Emotional preference (0.76)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 20 – PAST Self-Identification (0.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 1 – PRESENT Sexual attraction (0.78)</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 4 – PRESENT Sexual behaviour (0.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 7 – PRESENT Sexual Fantasy (0.76)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 10 – PRESENT Emotional preference (0.69)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 19 – PRESENT Self-Identification (0.48)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Item 13 – PRESENT Social preference (0.86)</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 14 – PAST Social preference (0.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 15– IDEAL Social preference (0.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 16 – PRESENT lifestyle (0.81)</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 17 – PAST lifestyle (0.73)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Item 18 – IDEAL lifestyle (0.66)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
These discrepancies between temporal dimension were all subject to a statistical assessment, and all variables tested significant when comparing present, past, and ideal moments ($p=0.05$), using the MANOVA analysis.

Figure 1 presents the mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual attraction’ for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between the three moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace $= 0.535$; $F(12,000; 1986,000) = 60,468; p<0.001$), which indicates that in the past participants had less exclusively homosexual attractions than in the present, and that ideally they would have less exclusively homosexual attraction than in the present.

Figure 2 shows the mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual behaviour’ for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between all moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace $= 0.451$; $F(12,000; 1986,000) = 48,157; p<0.001$), which indicates that in the past, participants had less exclusively homosexual behaviours than in the present, and that ideally they would have less exclusively homosexual behaviour than in the present.

Figure 3 presents the mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual fantasy’ for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between the three moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace $= 0.439$; $F(12,000; 1986,000) = 46,546; p<0.001$), which indicates that participants in the past had less exclusively homosexual fantasies than in the present, and that ideally they would have less exclusively homosexual fantasies than in the present.

Figure 4 shows the obtained mean scores for the dimension ‘social preference’ for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between the three moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace $= 0.618$; $F(12,000; 1986,000) = 74,058; p<0.001$), which indicates that in the past, participants had less exclusively homosexual preferences than in the present, and that ideally they would have less exclusively homosexual preferences than in the present.

Table 2: Frequency analysis for all items of the Klein’s Sexual Orientation Grid (1 represents exclusive homosexuality; 7 represents exclusive heterosexuality).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1 – PRESENT sexual attraction</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2 – PAST sexual attraction</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3 – IDEAL sexual attraction</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4 – PRESENT sexual behaviour</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Item 5 – PAST sexual behaviour</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6 – IDEAL sexual behaviour</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 7 – PRESENT sexual fantasy</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 8 – PAST sexual fantasy</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 9 – IDEAL sexual fantasy</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10 – PRESENT social preference</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 11 – PAST social preference</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12 – IDEAL social preference</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13 – PRESENT emotional preference</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 14 – PAST emotional preference</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 15 – IDEAL emotional preference</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 16 – PRESENT lifestyle</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 17 – PAST lifestyle</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 18 – IDEAL lifestyle</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 19 – PRESENT self-identification</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 20 – PAST self-identification</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 21 – IDEAL self-identification</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual attraction’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Pillai’s Trace=0.535; F(12,000; 1986,000)=60,468; p<0.001).

Figure 2: Mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual behaviour’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Pillai’s Trace=0.451; F(12,000; 1986,000)=48,157; p<0.001).

Figure 3: Mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual fantasy’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Pillai’s Trace=0.439; F(12,000; 1986,000)=46,546; p<0.001).
that in the past, participants had less exclusive social preference for same-sex individuals than in the present, and that ideally, they would have less preference for exclusively same-sex individuals than in the present.

Figure 5 presents the mean scores for the dimension 'emotional preference' for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between all moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace = 0.594; F(12,000; 1986,000) = 69,853; p<0.001), which indicates that in the past participants had more emotional preference for only same-sex individuals than in the present, and ideally they would have more emotional preference of both-sexes than in the present.

Figure 6 presents the mean scores for the dimension 'lifestyle', for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences for all three moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace = 0.506; F(12,000; 1986,000) = 55,996; p<0.001), which indicates that in the past, participants had a more bisexual lifestyle than in the present, and that ideally, they would have a more homosexual lifestyle than in the present.

Finally, Figure 7 shows the mean scores for the dimension 'self-identification' for present, past, and ideal moments. Differences between all three moments are statistically significant (Pillai’s Trace = 0.614; F(12,000; 1986,000) = 73,346; p<0.001), which indicates that in the past, participants self-identified less as homosexuals than in the present, and that ideally they would identity less as homosexuals than in the present.

Discussion
The results obtained in this study corroborate the idea that sexual orientation is, indeed, a dynamic, multidimensional and complex process, which changes through time. One of the first implications of such results resides in the fact that more intra-psychological variables (such as sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, sexual fantasy, emotional preference, and self-identification) were aggregated by temporal criteria (present, past, and ideal) whereas more inter-psychological variables (such as social preference and lifestyle) were aggregated by common criteria, other than temporal dimensions.

When measured in different temporal frameworks, all comparisons indicated statistically significant results, which clearly show how sexual attraction is dynamic and does not reflect a static continuum in our lives. Rather, it reflects conditionalisms of social nature, intricated in the categories of sexual identity that are concurrent with the categories of sexual orientation.

An emergent issue about this particular finding is that if one argues that sexual
Figure 5: Mean scores for the dimension ‘emotional preference’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Pillai’s Trace=0.594; F(12,000; 1986,000)=69,853; p<0.001).

Figure 6: Mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual attraction’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Traço de Pillai=0.506; F(12,000; 1986,000)=55,996; p<0.001).

Figure 7: Mean scores for the dimension ‘sexual attraction’ in present, past, and ideal moments after significant MANOVA (Pillai’s Trace=0.614; F(12,000; 1986,000)=73,346; p<0.001).
orientation is a changeable and a dynamic process, one could also argue that gays, lesbians and bisexuals could also change their sexual orientation. Spitzer (2003) reclaimed such a goal, but it is our conviction that that is not the case. In fact, our data show fluctuations that go from a more heterosexual pole in the past to a more homosexual pole in the present, and a more bisexual pole ideally and not of a pattern that show a conscious choice to change orientations. An important variable to these fluctuations is the fact that heteronormativity and homophobia leads individuals in a more precocious stage of human development (as measured in the present study as in the past dimension) to yield to societal pressures. Here, the earlier part of the human life cycle is more susceptible to societal pressure, while in the present time individuals feel more liberated from those pressures, and allow themselves to express fully their sense of sexual orientation. Finally, as they may feel that their sexual orientation is not the most important part of who they are as individuals, an approximation to more bisexual component may be ideally conjectured for their future.

One other question may arise from these results: ‘who remains heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual?’ It is important to consider that the maintenance of our sexual orientation involves aspects of stability and uniformity, but as Laumann et al. (1994) demonstrated, sexual behaviours and sexual attractions are more stable than self-identifications. This has direct implications in terms of what categories for self-identification are available in the social context.

**Correspondence**

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**Isabel Leal** is an Associate Professor at the Higher Institute of Applied Psychology (ISPA-IU – Portugal), and a clinical psychologist with special interests in psychology and sexuality, pregnancy, parenthood and health. She has over 30 years of clinical practice and vast number of publications in the field both in Portugal and abroad.

**João Maroco** is an Associate Professor at the Higher Institute of Applied Psychology (ISPA-IU – Portugal), and a statistician with interests in the application of statistics to psychology, particularly in the validation of psychological measures and psychometric properties of instruments.
References
We write this book review from two perspectives: from that of a trainer and that of a trainee.

The trainee perspective: Eight months ago when I began a community HIV and sexual health specialist placement as a third-year trainee clinical psychologist having had no clinical experience of working with clients with sexual health difficulties (and indeed limited teaching opportunities), I was on the search for a book that would equip me with a basic theoretical knowledge and understanding of human sexuality, provide me with the opportunity to reflect on my own personal values around sex and sexuality, and give me the confidence and skills to talk about sex in the therapy room. My search led me to *Sex, Sexuality and Therapeutic Practice: A manual for therapists and trainers*. This manual centres around six chapters, covering: sex: body, behaviour and identity; talking about sex; health, disability and sex; sexual and gender minorities: consideration for therapy; sex and sexuality across the lifespan and culture, sex and sexuality. The manual primarily adopts a reflective-practitioner model of learning, and although it draws on social construct, systemic and cognitive behavioural approaches, therapists of all therapeutic orientations would be drawn to this accessible, jargon-free, reader-friendly book; a refreshing change to the often overly academic, technical, medical, dry books that litter our library shelves! Furthermore, for a novice, the book gently opens up vistas which may be difficult to access, such as working with certain sexual practices that therapists (and perhaps, particularly trainee therapists) may find challenging, such as female genital mutilation, BDSM, etc.

The book does not lure the reader into pretending it is something it is not; it is a foundation training manual, written in a way that signposts readers at the end of each chapter to further reading on the related topic. The book encourages readers to participate in exercises, which can be utilised as a self-reflective exercise, but can also be adapted to use within a group setting, teaching sessions and to use within individual client sessions.

The trainer’s perspective: It was that time of the year again, when I was being roped in to ‘do some sexuality teaching’ for an undergraduate psychology course and for a day-long workshop for a Doctoral programme in clinical psychology. Customarily, it was also time to update my presentations, change some of the content, and perchance even choose another background for my slides. Therefore, the time was just ripe, when I received this book through the post to be reviewed.

Although written and edited by a group of clinical psychologists, the book itself does not tie itself up to any one profession, but as the title and subtitle suggest, is geared towards advancing therapeutic practice and helping therapists and trainers of all persuasions. I found I could dip into this book as a therapist (for instance, to look for relevant information on certain legislation, or to complete some self-reflective exercises on my own ideas and beliefs about sex and sexuality).
This textbook, as Barker says on the back cover of this book, offers a ‘much-needed introduction’ for students of LGBTQ psychology. The authors are leading researchers and writers in the field of LGBTQ psychology, and their wealth of experience is abundantly seen throughout the book.

The book is divided into three sections. The first sets the stage for discussing psychological aspects related to LGBTQ lives, by providing a historical narrative beginning with the work of Hirschfeld and Ulrichs. We think the choice of the labels describing sexualities (LGBTQ) and the historical timeline being drawn from the late 1800s defines the scope of the book. We would have liked to have read a critique of these terms/identities right at the beginning of the book, although the ideas surrounding their use are evident through much of the book.

The book goes on to compare some dichotomous constructs, such as social constructionism vs. essentialism. The authors provide a robust critique of some essentialist studies, but there is less in terms of a critique of constructionism. The book does deserve credit, however, for introducing various concepts that are sometimes omitted from mainstream psychology teaching, such as feminism, critical sexual practices), as a trainer (particularly for the useful individual, dyad, and group exercises), and as a general browser (enjoying some of the epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter).

The book works well as an introductory text, which provides some interesting groundwork to build on. It facilitates such development by offering good sources for further information by way of listing useful websites, names of organisations and professional groups, and literature for further reading for most chapters. I think it also sets the stage for another book, which perhaps focuses on some of the more clinical aspects of presentation, by engaging more boldly with therapeutics (including more in-depth theoretical models and critically appraised research that relate to it). The book does however acknowledge its ‘foundation’ status and makes an early confession, ‘This book is not a sex therapy manual’ (p.3); any yet, does offer insights to improve therapeutic practice. The book uses several pedagogic methods to enable this, such as quizzes, tips, case studies, and vignettes, amongst others. However, I think its major triumph is the use of the reflective-practitioner paradigm, which it advocates throughout.

The book was clearly borne out of a need established though some research that was conducted by the authors. Therefore, not only were the authors (who are clinicians working in the area of sexual health) fully aware of the lacuna in the market, they decided on the content of the book based on findings from a focus group discussion they had with trainee therapists. This is another strength of the book.

Our verdict: If you, as a trainer or trainee, are looking for a resource that will provide you with practical knowledge, awareness and understanding of sex and sexuality in today’s world, steer you in the direction of more in-depth reading, provoke and challenge your own personal values around sex and sexuality, this book will not disappoint!
psychology, queer theory, and positive social change. It is also encouraging that from the outset, the authors call for a more critical emphasis on intersectional theorising within LGBTQ psychology – and a consequent acknowledgement of participants’ positioning in terms of gender, culture, social class, age and ability.

It is absolutely commendable that the authors have considered ‘doing LGBTQ research’, as their chapter in some respects attempts to ‘mainstream’ LGBTQ issues within the body of scholarly research, but at the same time highlights some of the specific challenges that researchers may face when embarking on LGBTQ research. This is useful for the novice researcher, but also reminds the seasoned lot about some of these issues. The authors opt to describe research paradigms as those that fall within the qualitative realm and others that can be considered quantitative, but in doing so, do not engage with mixed-methods methodologies. Further, the coverage of particular qualitative approaches appears somewhat partial, at times. For instance, the textbox highlighting ‘qualitative methods of data analysis in action’ covers examples only from thematic analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and narrative analysis. The omission of key discursive psychological and conversation analytic LGBTQ research examples from this highlighted list is striking, however, discursive analytic research is covered later in this chapter, and conversation analytic research elsewhere in the book. Given the intended student audience of the book, however, it may have been helpful to have provided a more encompassing list of qualitative approaches here, as less careful readers may miss the impact and promise of discourse and conversation analytic methods for LGBTQ psychological research.

We were particularly pleased to see an entire section devoted to ‘Understanding social marginalisation in LGBTQ lives’, as this is something that is often neglected in LGBTQ writing. This forms the second section of the book and nicely breaks down the monolithic idea of who ‘gay’ is, and documents the diversity of LGBTQ experiences. This section also usefully provides a thorough coverage of contemporary research on prejudice and discrimination and an international legislative framework for the differential recognition of LGBTQ rights. Similarly, in the chapter on ‘Relationships’, the authors highlight the differential legal recognition of same-sex relationships internationally. In doing so, they acknowledge that, ‘laws are changing rapidly in this area so more countries may have same-sex marriage... when you read this’ (p.174). With this in mind, it is perhaps understandable that California remains included in the list of states and countries that recognise marriage rights (listed in the book as being recognised in 2008). However, despite this book reaching our shelves in 2010, there is no mention of the impact of Proposition 8, which was passed in November 2008 – effectively removing the right of same-sex couples to legally marry in California. The psychological impact of this regressive amendment – which was overshadowed at the time by the mainstream media coverage of the US presidential election – was arguably significant for many LGBTQ people, internationally. Commendably, the authors do nonetheless draw attention to the activist scholarship of Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson on equal access to marriage, irrespective of gender and sexuality. This is a crucial area of LGBTQ research where psychologists can make an appreciable impact.

The third section of the book is devoted to ‘LGBTQ experiences across the lifespan’. This section covers topics related to coming out (with useful schematic representations), identity development, school life, relationship patterns and issues, parenting, and ageing and old age. The chapter on parenting and family provides a particularly helpful critical evaluation of the defensive and reactive stance of much comparative research on LGBTQ families, and draws attention to more recent emerging research
that seeks instead to emphasise the experiences of LGBTQ families in a heteronormative context. It also highlights the paucity of research into single and multiparental families – a gap that will hopefully be remedied in coming years, in recognition of the diversity of many LGBTQ families.

The structure of the book is innovative in that it engages the reader by providing the voice of ‘key researchers’ on a given topic, offering a précis of key studies, and the gaps and absences in the given area under discussion. As teachers/facilitators, we found the ‘Questions for discussion’ section at the end of each chapter quite useful in encouraging group discussions. The section on ‘Further reading’ at the end of each chapter not only lists references, but also helpfully describes what each reference is about. The ‘gaps and absences’ section of each chapter is also an excellent pedagogic device, and a marker of a truly critical textbook. This feature allows for the ready identification of gaps and absences in the research areas discussed and should prove invaluable in assisting students to think critically about key limitations in these areas. For students – and neophyte LGBTQ psychology scholars – this may prove an invaluable aid in terms of guiding the direction of research projects.

One of the things we found difficult to gauge about the book at the outset was its intended readership, in terms of level of scholarship. We felt that although the book is perhaps pitched at an undergraduate level, given that it contains a vast array of topics, presented in different formats, there’s something in it for everyone. One of us put this to the test by including it on the reading list for a Doctorate in clinical psychology programme, and the feedback from trainees indicated that the book was enormously useful. We too found it a good source of information, particularly because it succinctly summarised some of the key studies in this field.

On balance, we believe this is an excellent introductory textbook, quite comprehensive in its scope, very readable, and appeals to undergraduate to doctoral level students and professionals.
Notes for Contributors to

Psychology of Sexualities Review

Submissions
The Editor of Psychology of Sexualities Review invites empirical, theoretical and review articles on any aspect of
the psychology of sexualities. The Editor would also like to encourage the submission of book reviews,
bibliographic articles, short articles on relevant research papers for 'Research in Brief' (see Vol. 1, pp.21–22 of
Lesbian and Gay Psychology Review for an example), conference reports, letters and notices of events and
activities likely to be of interest to members of the British Psychological Society's Psychology of Sexualities
Section.

Academic submissions
Electronic manuscripts (maximum 8000 words including references) should be typewritten, double-spaced with
1” margins on A4 page-layout. Each manuscript should include a word count. On a separate sheet, include the
author's name, professional address, telephone number, e-mail address and current professional activity.
As academic articles are refereed, the rest of the manuscript should be free of information identifying the
author(s). Empirical, theoretical and review articles should include an abstract (maximum 120 words) and up to
six keywords that describe the paper (for indexing purposes).

Graphs, diagrams, etc., should be supplied in camera-ready form. Written permission should be obtained by the
author for the reproduction of tables, diagrams, etc., from other sources.

Full bibliographic references should be contained in the list of references at the end of each article. They should
be listed alphabetically by author, be complete, accurate and in APA format (see www.apastyle.org).

If in doubt about any formatting issue, authors should either consult the editor or should adhere to the format
used in articles published in Psychology of Sexualities Review. For further details, see the Psychology of
Sexualities Review webpage at: www.bps.org.uk/pss/pss_review/pss_review_home.cfm

Submitting your work
Articles and General Submissions should be sent electronically to the Editor, Kristoff Bonello at:
kristoffbonello@hotmail.com with the text 'Manuscript Submission POSR' in the e-mail header. Submissions
should be sent as a Word document attachment, together with a covering letter. A copy should be retained by
the author(s). PDF attachments are also acceptable.

Book Reviews, bibliographic articles, conference reports, contributions to 'Research in Brief' and 'Focus on
Activism', letters and notices about courses, conferences, research and other forthcoming events are not refereed
but are evaluated by The Editor. However, Book Reviews and all other reports should conform to the general
guidelines for academic articles.

Other submissions
Book Review submissions should be sent to: Roshan das Nair, Trent Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, IWHO, B13,
International House, The University of Nottingham, Jubilee Campus, Nottingham NG8 1BB.
E-mail: roshan.nair@nottingham.ac.uk

All other submissions (‘Focus on Activism’ and ‘Research in Brief’ submissions) should be sent to The Editor as
detailed above.

Authors should not use sexist, racist or heterosexist language and follow the British Psychological Society's
guidelines for the use of non-sexist language contained in the booklet Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and
Guidelines.

Deadlines for notices of forthcoming events and letters are listed below.

For publication in: Copy must be received by:
Spring 5 November
Autumn 5 August
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