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Editorial

Bisexualities and non-binary sexualities: Reflecting on invisibility, erasure and marginalisation

Nikki Hayfield and Adam Jowett

We are pleased to welcome readers to this Special Issue of *Psychology of Sexualities Review* on bisexualities and non-binary sexualities. Surveys in the UK and US indicate that increasing numbers of people are identifying as bisexual, or with other non-binary sexual identities (Gates, 2011; Lapointe, 2017). Yet despite this, a dominant theme within the academic literature has been the invisibility, overlooking and erasure of bisexuality both within academic contexts, and in the wider culture (e.g., Barker, 2007; Barker & Langdridge, 2008; Corey, 2017). This has been confirmed most recently by sociologist Surya Monro and colleagues (Monro, Hines & Osborne, 2017), who found that bisexuality was commonly overlooked or marginalised within the academic literature between 1970-2015.

Bisexuality has historically been a contested term (e.g., Bristow, 2011). Since the 1990s, a body of psychological research has identified that bisexuality is often understood by non-bisexual people in largely negative ways (e.g., Eliason, 1997; Herek, 2002; Hayfield, Clarke & Halliwell, 2014; Morrison, Harrington & McDermott, 2010; Ochs, 1996). These negative (mis)conceptualisations of bisexual people include that they are confused about their identity and that bisexuality can only be a temporary or transitionary phase. This notion gives rise to the idea that bisexual people are undecided about their sexuality, sat on the fence between heterosexual and lesbian or gay identities. Those who identify as bisexual are often considered by others to be 'really' lesbians or gay men who are not fully out of the closet (Morrison, Harrington & McDermott, 2010). The use of sexual identity labels are also policed within LGBT communities (Jowett & Barker, 2017). Due to their attraction to people of multiple genders, bisexual people are often understood to 'need' to have sex and relationships with more than one gender at all times. In turn, this conceptualisation underpins notions that bisexual people are greedy, hypersexual, promiscuous, attention-seeking, incapable of monogamy, and that they will inevitably cheat on their partners (e.g., Hayfield et al., 2014; Klesse, 2011; also see Baumgartner, this issue; Pond & Farvid, this issue; Swan &

Habibi, this issue). Some recent literature has highlighted that young people's understandings of bisexuality may be becoming more positive than they were in the past (e.g., Anderson, Scoats & McCormack, 2015; Monro, 2015; Morris, McCormack & Anderson, 2014). Nonetheless, research has necessarily continued to evidence the existence - and explore the complexities - of bisexual marginalisation (e.g., Flanders, Dobinson & Logie, 2015; Hubbard & de Visser, 2015; Monro, 2015; Todd, Oravecz & Vejar, 2016). What has been somewhat less well researched is how these negative understandings play out for bisexual people, particularly in relation to when they meet others, seek partners, and form relationships (Li, Dobinson, Scheim & Ross, 2013). We are pleased to be able to include papers in this Special Issue which contribute to developing our existing knowledge in this area.

In the last few years, bisexuality has become contested in rather different ways than in the past. This has included some young people disassociating from the term bisexual due to the problematic connotations of some definitions of bisexuality (e.g., as attraction to men and women) which may seem to reinforce and endorse gender binaries (Sergent-Shadbolt, 2015; Lahti, this issue). Some bisexual people have argued that they do not conceive of bisexuality as attraction to only cisgender men and women; instead, broader definitions of bisexuality which encapsulate recognition of, and attraction to, cis, trans, and genderqueer identities are becoming more frequently embraced (e.g., Lapointe, 2017). However, labels such as pansexual (broadly defined as attraction to any, or all, genders) and other non-binary or plurisexual terms are increasingly being taken-up by young people (e.g., Belous & Bauman, 2017; Flanders et al., 2017; Lapointe, 2017). Such identities have started to be referred to collectively as the 'bisexual umbrella'. This term comes with some tensions, not least that it may be welcomed by some but not others, and there are important implications in terms of how we undertake our research and practice (see, Flanders, 2017). While the articles in this special issue mainly (although not exclusively) focus on research with those who identify as bisexual, these new and emerging identities and terms are an area that have only recently begun to be researched (e.g., Flanders, 2017; Flanders et al, 2017; Galupo, Ramirez, & Pulice-Farrow, 2017), and are important for researchers and practitioners alike to continue to consider in their work.

We conceived of the idea of this Special Issue in order to play a small part in addressing the invisibility of bisexual and non-binary identities, by bringing together a body of contemporary research on bisexuality and non-binary sexualities. We recognise that we are not alone in doing so; the *Journal of Bisexuality*, established in 2000, has played an important

role in this regard and a recent special issue of the journal explored the diversity of identities and experiences that fall under the 'bisexual umbrella' (Flanders, 2017). The importance of recognising the distinctiveness of bisexual experiences is also beginning to filter into society more broadly. For example, in August the UK Crown Prosecution Service (CSP, 2017) explicitly acknowledged biphobia and that 'victims of biphobic hate crimes have different experiences and needs to victims of homophobic and transphobic offences'. The articles in this issue make an important contribution to the increasing body of literature which recognises the importance of specifically focusing on bisexuality.

Contributions to the Special Issue

We are delighted with the papers included in this issue. These manuscripts reflect research from a broad range of locations, from psychologists in the UK, Europe, New Zealand, and the US, and from authors who utilise a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. These articles span a range of topics and contribute new knowledge to build on existing themes in the bisexuality literature, as well as exploring emerging areas of interest.

The first paper in this Special Issue addresses contemporary forms of meeting and dating in an exploration of young bisexual women's experiences of using the mobile dating app Tinder in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Tara Pond and Panteá Farvid highlight that while Tinder may be associated largely with a heterosexual audience, it is also used by non-heterosexuals, including bisexual people. There has been minimal academic focus on bisexual people's experiences of meeting others, particularly in terms of online dating. Pond and Farvid highlight the complexities and contradictions in these women's accounts. They conclude that heteronormativity, biphobia and gender all shaped these women's experiences of meeting others via Tinder.

The next paper continues on the theme of dating but focuses on bisexual people's accounts of their relationships. Renate Baumgartner offers a somewhat different perspective to much of the existing research by exploring how bisexual women respond to binegativity within the context of their relationship experiences. Baumgartner draws on the concept of internalisation and argues that in some of these women's accounts of their non-monogamous relationships there is evidence to suggest that they have internalised binegativity. Meanwhile for others, bisexuality was a form of agency. This paper is a welcome addition to the literature in considering how negative understandings of bisexuality and bisexual relationships play out in complex ways for bisexual people and their partners.

The third and fourth papers in this Special Issue focus on the overlooking and erasure of bisexual identities. Joye Swan and Shani Habibi examine, what they call, the 'one and done' assumption whereby men who engage in any same-sex behaviour, regardless of sexual history, are often assumed to be gay. Their quantitative study explores how undergraduate students label a fictional character based on descriptions of behaviours and emotions. They conclude that bisexual erasure may not be as prominent, and may be declining, among heterosexual college students which could signal hope for greater recognition of bisexuality in the future. In the final paper on bisexuality within this issue, Nikki Hayfield, Emma Halliwell, and Victoria Clarke draw attention to how bisexual women's data is often amalgamated with lesbian's data and highlight how this lack of focus on bisexuality overlooks the potential distinctiveness of bisexual women's results. They focus on body image and appearance practices and report on their quantitative analysis which analysed bisexual, heterosexual, and lesbian women's data separately. Their results show that bisexual women's scores do sometimes differ from those of either lesbian or heterosexual women. They conclude that future researchers need to ensure that they consider bisexual participants as potentially distinct from either lesbians or heterosexual women and recruit sufficient numbers of bisexual people to ensure that bisexuality is not overlooked. These themes are continued in an interview with Finnish post-doctoral researcher, Annukka Lahti. Nikki asks Annukka about the status of research on bisexuality in Finland, about her recent work around bisexualities and her plans going forward.

Also in this issue

In addition to our Special Issue contributions we are delighted to include a paper by our 2016 Postgraduate Award winner, Jos Twist. Jos's award-winning article continues and extends the theme of non-binary identities to focus on trans people's partners' narratives of sexuality and intimacy. While there is a rapidly growing body of literature around trans identities and experiences, Twist highlights how little research explores the perspectives of trans people's partners. This paper reports a narrative analysis which examines how cisgender participants narrate their trans partners' transition in terms of their relationships. It also considers the impact their partners' transition had on the understanding of their own sexuality.

To end this issue, we have two contributions which mark the 50th anniversary of Sexual Offences Act which partially decriminalised sex between men in England and Wales. The anniversary of this landmark law reform has provided the perfect opportunity to reflect on

LGBTQ history in Britain (Jowett, 2017a, 2017b) and has been celebrated and marked by events across the country. Martin Milton offers his personal reflections on public commemorations of the Act, the progress that has been made over the last 50 years and work still to be done. He reflects on the complicity of psychologists in the history of criminalisation and pathologisation as well as our potential role going forward. This is followed by a review by Adam Jowett of the National Trust's *Prejudice & Pride: Celebrating LGBTQ Heritage*, a guidebook which explores the queer past of people connected to National Trust properties and collections.

We are proud of the issue and we hope you enjoy reading it.

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