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Intersectionality and the ‘journeys’ of LGB women youth workers

SEPD school conference
May 2017
This presentation

- The conceptual framework
- The research context
- 4 case studies
- Findings and links to theory
- Conclusions
Conceptual framework

• The usefulness of an ‘intersectional’ approach

• Meta narratives

• Essentialism and social constructionism

• Queer? What does it mean?
The research

• Aims

• Scope, fieldwork and sampling

• Limitations of study

• Data collection and analysis
The case studies

• Carla
• Issie
• Helena
• Sabidah
Meta narratives

• Helena: no images of butch women with short hair; George ‘inspiring’.
• Sabidah: ‘clocking ...two women and they looked like right butch lesbians’ on black and white tele when 10

But many early images in media were negative:

• Issie: lots of people in her extended family including one gay man who lived with from 7-11 and still close to him and his partner
Essentialism or social constructionism

Complementary or mutually exclusive?
Helena dob: 1948
• 'believe[s] that we construct our identity ... [but] our sexual orientation is predetermined because I wouldn’t have chosen at 11 to start fancying girls and I wouldn’t have chosen ... all the shit that I’ve been through, I tried 2 years to make myself straight. I couldn’t’

Is it of interest/importance?
Essentialist or social constructed?

- Carla: sexuality being ‘something you realise. ... [we are] born pansexual ... born with the possibility of being attracted to anyone... socialised quite young’ regarding the limitations of sexual choice

- Issie ‘leans towards the socially constructed side of things’ but ‘believes’ that some ‘people can be born with a really strong predisposition one way or the other ... they are that way; it is in them’.

- Helena: 'believe[s] that we construct our identity ... [but] our sexual orientation is predetermined because I wouldn’t have chosen at 11 to start fancying girls and I wouldn’t have chosen ... all the shit that I’ve been through, I tried 2 years to make myself straight. I couldn’t’

- Sabidah: both gender and sexuality are ‘socially constructed’. some people are adamant that they have been ‘born into the wrong body’.
What does ‘queer’ mean?

Helena: *Abusive in my day*

Issie: *Chameleon word ... queer changes and gets owned by different groups of different people. ..... I’m not queer enough [by some people’s definition]. Nothing to do with sexuality, it’s to do with lifestyle and politics. ... queer and queer culture maybe two different things*
Queer for Carla

• Queer spaces ‘non-race, anti-racist, anti-sexist practice’. ‘Queer nights’ in smaller venues.
• ‘I didn’t feel that I had to look a certain way ... or dress a certain way. ... more accepting ... more fluid ... a bit more celebrating everyone’.

• Doesn’t assist other people to understand what you’re talking about’.
Labels accepted and rejected: Carla:

• ‘There was a certain hairstyle and a certain cut of jeans ... or brand of jeans ... that was very defined as ... the lesbian look. .... quite spikey hair’. ‘

• Gay as an umbrella term ... as there is more movement in who I am under gay ... People get it. They know what it means’

• challenge of finding a label that fits as ‘identity is never really static ... I like going back and forth. ... Queer means that there is potential for change. Whereas lesbian, if you change you’re no longer a lesbian
Intersectionality: ethnicity & social class

- Carla ‘you see the odd black person dotted around but … not in groups of black people. … The majority of black people that I see out there are toilet attendants … not … black people … accessing venues. …

- BME young people ‘they’re usually … interested in how [her] black parent has reacted’

- Sabidah: BME yp; Helena: working class yp

- Issie: needs to be aware of how her middle class upbringing
Conclusions

• LGB people/women are all different individuals

• The ‘cause’ of homosexuality not important

Rather

• how our sexual identity or orientation impacts on our current experiences and shapes how the world responds to us and how we respond to the world