

The British Have Arrived:

Introduction to LGBT Perspectives in Psychological and Psychotherapeutic
Theory, Research and Practice in the UK

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We are delighted to welcome readers of the Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy to this collection of papers showcasing current developments in lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) psychological and psychotherapeutic theory, research and practice in the United Kingdom. This is the JGLP's second foray into the international arena, having published in Volume 7 a special issue entitled "The Mental Health Professions and Homosexuality: International Perspectives (issued in monograph volume as Lingiardi and Drescher, 2003). In that previous

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collection, our lone UK contributor, the late Daniel Twomey (2003), focused on psychoanalytic perspectives about and attitudes toward homosexuality in the UK. This volume expands upon that earlier contribution and introduces our readers to a wider range of British mental health approaches.

When reading these papers, it is worth keeping in mind some important distinctions between our two countries: (1) in contrast to the US, mental health services are subsidized in the UK by the government's National Health Service (NHS); (2) British national policy is becoming increasingly gay-affirmative—including the adoption of same-sex civil unions—while US policies at the Federal level are resisting such affirmation; (3) research intended to address the mental health needs of LGBT populations is increasingly likely to influence policy-making regarding the British health care system [Is this correct?] while similar research in the US (and much research openly dealing with sexual matters or sexual minorities) is under attack by social conservative at the federal, state and local level in the US.

This collection opens with Clarke and Peel's "LGBT Psychosocial Theory and Practice" which offers a critical review of the (recent) history of UK LGBT psychology and psychotherapy, focusing on key publications, and outlining the current terrain, highlighting similarities and differences between the UK and the US contexts (Clarke and Peel).

The remaining papers are organised into two thematic sections and exemplify psychosocial perspectives in UK lesbian and gay psychological and psychotherapeutic theory, research and practice. Section 2 explores theoretical frameworks in UK therapeutic practice. As John Gonsiorek (2000) notes in his forward to the second volume of the UK-produced Pink Therapy series (Davies and Neal, 2000), the prominence given to different schools of therapy in the UK stands in contrast with the strongly integrative (or eclectic) approaches that are the norm in the US.

Section 2 begins with Darren Langridge's "Gay Affirmative Therapy: A Theoretical Framework and Defence." While gay affirmative therapy (GAT)

provides a framework for clinical practice that is supportive of lesbian, gay and bisexual identities, a number of humanistic and existential psychotherapists seek to avoid imposing specific expectations on their clients and consequently have challenged the applicability of using a GAT framework for their practice. Langridge examines their arguments and suggests a solution consistent that would enable therapists to recognise and work with the twin impact of the psychotherapist and social world on the construction of a client's sexual identity.

Next is Martin Milton's "Being Sexual: Existential Contributions to Psychotherapy with Gay Male Clients." This paper outlines an existential-phenomenological (E-P) approach to psychotherapy and considers some of its core concepts, the stance taken to understanding sexuality and the implications for therapeutic practice with gay male clients. Colin Clarke's "Facilitating Gay Men's Coming Out: An Existential-Phenomenological Exploration" further examines, from an E-P approach, the core issues facing male clients in confronting their anxiety about whether or not to "come out" as gay.

Section 2 concludes with Aaron Balick's "Gay Subjects Relating: Object Relations Between Gay Therapist and Gay Client." Balick discusses the development of object relations theory in Britain. His paper examines object relations in the context of its unique challenges for gay male therapists working with gay male clients in what he refers to as "the gay therapeutic dyad."

Section 3 explores sexual minority identities and their needs for support and community. It begins with Malley and Tasker's "The Difference That Makes a Difference": What Matters to Lesbians and Gay Men in Psychotherapy." In order to determine what aspects of psychotherapy lesbians and gay men find helpful, the authors conducted a postal survey with a community sample of lesbians and gay men in the UK who had used counselling or psychotherapy services examined this issue. Content analysis of the responses of 365 lesbians and gay men revealed that issues

related to sexual identity were important in addition to generic qualities of the therapeutic relationship. Lesbians and gay men also listed friends, family of choice, and family of origin and complementary or "alternative" therapies as important sources of support aside from psychotherapy.

Sonia Ellis further explores sexual minority populations in "Community in the 21st Century: Issues Arising from a Study of British Lesbians and Gay Men." Historically, lesbians and gay men created "communities" because their oppressed status often rendered them invisible to each other. In the UK this led to a wide range of organised social activities and venues, including lesbian-organised Women's Centres and, following the HIV/AIDS crisis of the 1980s, a range of health-based organisations and groups available to gay men. However, with the mainstreaming of lesbian and gay culture—combined with the ever-increasing commercialisation of lesbian and gay venues—many "non-scene" venues and organised social activities for lesbians and gay men disappeared. Drawing on data from an interview-based study with UK lesbians and gay men, Ellis's paper highlights the ways in which these changes have affected the lives and lifestyles of lesbians and gay men, resulting in the social exclusion of certain individuals and groups.

Colm Crowley, Rom Harré & Ingrid Lunt shift the focus to youth in "Safe Spaces and Sense of Identity: Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Young People." Given that empirical data on the life experiences of contemporary school-age lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) young people in Britain is sparse, they report preliminary findings of a study conducted at a recently-initiated LGB youth Summer School. The aim was to elicit the young people's views and experiences relating to their need for support such as that offered by the Summer School. Themes drawn from participants' interviews are presented and key issues included: being positioned as different by their majority heterosexual peers; feelings of isolation and loneliness in their peer groups and families; difficulties in finding

others like themselves for companionship; and the importance of meeting more LGB people of their own age.

In "Gay Men with Learning Disabilities: UK Service Provision," Sören Kruse notes that although the UK's NHS offers many services for people with learning disabilities, sexuality issues are often overlooked. His paper explores how gay men with learning disabilities (GMLD) experience a complex set of increased difficulties in forming a functioning identity. Kruse also offers suggestions as to how practitioners could offer the best psychological service to GMLD.

The final paper in this volume is Brendan Gough's "Coming Out in the Heterosexist World of Sport: A Qualitative Analysis of Web Postings by Gay Athletes." There is very little published on how gay athletes come out to their sporting peers yet coming out is likely to present some unique challenges for those who do. Gough reports on a preliminary study based on an analysis of 8 online accounts provided by North American gay athletes for a web-based newsletter. Using qualitative research methods, several themes emerged: (1) sport as distraction from sexuality; (2) invisibility and isolation within sport; (3) coming out to the team: difficult but rewarding; and (4) becoming politicised: challenging heterosexism within sport. Gough's discussion centres on the challenges and opportunities facing gay men within sporting contexts and the implications of the analysis for possible psychological interventions with gay athletes. The need for further qualitative research in this area is also underlined.

To readers of the Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy a number of these contributions may appear sociological rather than psychological in nature; however, all of the contributions fit firmly in the cannon of LGBT psychology in the UK. A reason why some of the contributions may appear sociological is their reliance on qualitative methods and discursive and constructionist approaches. The papers by Crowley et al., Ellis and Gough illustrate the use of qualitative perspectives in UK LGBT psychology.

Crowley et al.'s and Ellis' papers are examples of experiential qualitative approaches-ones that emphasise participants' subjective understandings. Experiential approaches are grounded in an epistemology and view of language that assumes language reflects reality. Experiential qualitative researchers inspect participants' language for evidence of their underlying thoughts, feelings and beliefs. For instance, Ellis is interested in her participants' thoughts and feelings about their access to, or lack of access to, LGB community and support settings. By contrast, discursive and constructionist perspectives-such as those used by Gough-assume that language constructs reality. Gough is not interested in what feelings gay athletes' stories reflect, rather he is interested in how the stories constitute the coming out process and are used to negotiate a viable position as a gay athlete in the heterosexist world of sport.

Qualitative researchers in the UK rely both on more traditional methods of data collection (such as interviews, focus groups and qualitative surveys) and on less traditional methods-such as Gough's use of coming out stories posted on a website for gay athletes. Qualitative researchers-particularly discursive and constructionist researchers-work with a broad definition of text that incorporates traditional social science texts as well as a wide range of cultural texts including television shows (Clarke and Kitzinger, 2004, Speer and Potter, 2000), parliamentary debates (Ellis and Kitzinger, 2002), newspaper articles (Allred, 1998), and teaching and training sessions (Kitzinger, 2000, Kitzinger and Peel, 2005, Peel, 2002). As discursive studies, in particular, rely on detailed examinations of text, sample sizes tend to be significantly smaller than in more conventional qualitative research. Furthermore, because discursive psychologists view representation, generalisability, reliability and validity as wedded to a mainstream research agenda, they reject traditional sampling concerns.

We anticipate that this collection will serve for newcomers to LGBT psychological and psychotherapeutic theory, research and practice in the UK

as a useful introduction to work in the area, and for those already familiar with the UK context, as an interesting survey of current developments. There is limited literature of collaboration between LGBT-affirmative psychologists and psychotherapists in the US and in the UK. This volume of the Journal of Gay and Lesbian Psychotherapy has been a start and we hope that it will foster the possibility of increasing transatlantic dialogue in the future.

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