

Mackay, F. & Hayfield, N. (in press) Introduction to *Journal of Lesbian Studies* Special Issue: On solidarity. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10894160.2024.2279458>

This is the Authors' Accepted Manuscript – please see

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10894160.2024.2279458> for the published version which is free to access.

Authors' Accepted Manuscript

Finn Mackay Finn.Mackay@uwe.ac.uk ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5922-2025>

Nikki Hayfield Nikki2.Hayfield@uwe.ac.uk ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1250-4786>

School of Social Sciences, Frenchay Campus, University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol, BS16 1QY, U.K.

Finn Mackay is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology and has a background in feminist activism and social policy against male violence against women and children. Finn is a regular media commentator on LGBTQ+ rights and feminism, and contributes to The Guardian; recent articles can be viewed at <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/finn-mackay>. They are the author of two books: *Radical Feminism Activism in Movement* from Palgrave (2015) and *Female Masculinities and the Gender Wars* (2021) from Bloomsbury. Finn's publications are available at <https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/FinnMackay>

Nikki Hayfield is an Associate Director of Psychology whose research interests have primarily been in sexualities, with a particular focus on bisexual, pansexual, and asexual lives and identities. Her recent research focuses on gender, reproduction, and relationships - including sexualities and relationships, childfree identities, and peri/menopause. Her first book entitled *Bisexual and Pansexual Identities: Exploring invisibility and invalidation* was published by Routledge in 2020. You can see Nikki's most recent research on their UWE staff page: <https://people.uwe.ac.uk/Person/Nikki2Hayfield>

Introduction to Journal of Lesbian Studies Special Issue: On Solidarity

We write this Introduction to the Special Issue on solidarity at a time when solidarity seems sorely lacking in the lives and communities here in the United Kingdom, where we are both based. The context in which we have produced this issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* has been a period of ongoing strikes and other forms of industrial action (such as a marking and assessment boycott - MAB) in UK Higher Education, that in themselves are acts of solidarity amongst academics and professional staff working within UK universities. It is not only the context of Higher Education that makes it feel particularly pertinent to be focusing on solidarity. In April/May 2023 the UK was visited by the United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz. He expressed concern at rising reports of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans) harassment and hate crimes in the UK and critiqued the delays on outlawing forced conversion practices against LGBTQI+ people. He also pointed to anti-trans rhetoric as problematically influencing public debate, media coverage, and political and policy discourse on trans rights - in particular around legal recognition of gender identity (United Nations, 2023). Following publication of Madrigal-Borloz's report, the UK Chief Executive of Amnesty International, Sacha Deshmukh, stated: 'Anti-trans rights rhetoric is steadily becoming another wedge issue in the UK that is undermining the domestic and international human rights framework. We are witnessing the UK backsliding on LGBTI+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex] rights, where we used to be proud in our world leadership' (UK: UN view on trans rights, 2023). Over the summer months, Pride festivals up and down the UK have seen increased levels of attendance, alongside heightened attacks at marches, and on marchers themselves. Here in Bristol, (southwest England), where we both live and work, a city centre billboard advertising the annual Pride festival was burnt down in an act of vandalism only days after it was put up (Elgee, 2023). People attending a Sunday afternoon picnic in a park for a local Trans Pride group were shot at by two men with BB guns who fired plastic pellets at the crowds (Streeting, 2023).

Most recently, in October 2023, the right-wing British Conservative Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, made comments that have been described as vile and transphobic during his speech at the Conservative Party Conference, when he said: 'We shouldn't get bullied into believing that people can be any sex they want to be. They can't – a man is a man, and a woman is a woman. That's just common sense' (see, Leeson, 2023). His comments caused outrage on social media and came just one day after the Conservative Home Secretary Suella Braverman made similar remarks during her speech at the same event, that led to her being heckled by a fellow Conservative politician (Whannel, 2023). Whilst these incidents have been reported to have caused factions among the Conservative party, so too have many highlighted the damage that the sentiments expressed in

these speeches will have on trans people and equality within the UK (Millar, 2023). Divisions in society on sexuality and gender identity are a part of the wider so-called culture wars that are currently so pronounced here in the UK in particular. Indeed, unfortunately the UK has been singled out by scholars and media commentators as something of a hub for anti-trans organising, having been referred to as 'TERF [Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist] Island' across social media and in mainstream news outlets (Gray, 2023). Some have stated that 'TERF ideology has become the de facto face of feminism in the UK' (Burns, 2019), while others have argued that 'Transphobia is everywhere in Britain' (Jacques, 2020), and that 'Anti-trans rhetoric is rife in the British media' (John, 2021). It is perhaps unsurprising given its pertinence within and beyond the UK, that various articles in this special issue directly address these divisions and focus on anti-trans activism in their articles.

Thurlow's (2023) article, *Sisters, it's been a while! The emotional pull of the lesbian 'gender critical' movement and a failure of solidarity*, offers some insight into what the appeal of trans-exclusionary lesbian feminist groups might be. She considers the motivations of those people drawn to this growing and persistent movement and attempts to understand the part that collective identity and self-organisation might play. Importantly, the article highlights these appeals in order to better understand the so-called 'gender-critical movement' and the traction of anti-trans inclusion narratives. Discussions of where trans people are included - or excluded - frequently centre on bathroom spaces. Within a UK context, the Conservative equalities minister, Kemi Badenoch, recently reported on the new strategy for toilets in public buildings to be separated for males and females, specifically to reduce gender-neutral bathroom spaces - despite trans rights groups noting that such facilities offer the potential to reduce discrimination (Forrest, 2023). Indeed, Abesamis and Alibudbud's (2023) article, *From the bathroom to a national discussion of LGBTQ+ rights: A case of discrimination in the Philippines*, demonstrates that toilet facilities are sites of inequalities beyond the Global North. They report on how a Filipino trans woman's experience of being stopped from using a public bathroom sparked valuable national discussions around LGBTQ+ rights. Their analysis of news articles and social media posts about this event offers insight into the discourses that are deployed by different groups, and they conclude with some carefully considered recommendations for policy makers.

Several articles in this special issue attest to resistance to transphobia, at Pride events and beyond. In their article, Rogers (2023) interrogates the over simplistic notion that lesbians make up a large proportion of TERFs, in *TERFs aren't feminists: Lesbians stand against trans exclusion*. In interviews with (mainly) lesbians in the US, many participants strongly disliked the term TERF, considered it as in opposition to feminist identities, and argued that lesbians should stand together in solidarity with trans people. Medhurst's (2023) exploration of clothing and identity considers how

resistance to transphobia can be quite literally worn on the body. In *Flags and fashion: Expressions of solidarity through lesbian clothing*, part of Medhurst's focus is on how London Pride 2018 was infiltrated by *Get the L Out* (a lesbian group opposed to what they see as 'trans-ideology'). They joined the parade wearing anti trans t-shirts, carrying anti-trans inclusion banners, and distributing leaflets calling for trans exclusion. In direct response, the campaign *#LwiththeT* emerged, wearing t-shirts and carrying signs that proclaimed their solidarity with trans people as they led Pride marches later in 2018, and at London Pride in 2019. Medhurst's is not the only article to focus on trans solidarity within community spaces. Curran's (2023) nuanced discussion of *Forging Gender and Racial Solidarities at Trans-Inclusive Women's Festivals* illustrates how tensions can arise even within explicitly inclusive spaces. Focusing on two specific festivals - *Mystical Womxn's Magic Festival* (Magic Fest) and the *Ohio Lesbian Festival* - she explores times when both racial and gender solidarity have succeeded or failed. Curran concludes that solidarity may not always be either 'fully achieved or completely lost'. Also considering cultural production, Dynda's (in press) article analyzes the activities of an autonomous trans-inclusive lesbian group - *Girlz Get United* - and details the construction of solidarity between members of different backgrounds, nationalities, and languages. This solidarity is achieved through shared community activities, including the production of zines, translation of materials into community languages, and creation of inclusive sports events.

It is not only solidarity with trans people that our articles in this special issue focus on. Medhurst's (2023) study (see above) highlights some of the history of solidarity between lesbians and gay men. In *Sexual identities and political solidarities among cisgender women*, Swank and Fahs (2023) consider levels of liberalism and differences between White women of different sexualities. In their study, drawing on data from the American National Election Study, they conclude that lesbian and bisexual women resist heteronormativity more so than heterosexual women (as measured through LGBT-centred consciousness, including feelings, attitudes, and political actions). However, links between sexuality and feminism were less clear. Whilst lesbian and bisexual women were more likely to score highly on embracing feminism compared to heterosexual women, bisexual women were most likely to join women's rights movements, despite lesbians generally being slightly more likely than bisexual women to have feminist tendencies. Finally, differences in terms of racial attitudes were modest, and although lesbians were more likely to support antiracist activism, there were no differences between sexualities in other measures. Intergenerational solidarity is also considered, in Rojas Durazo and Zapeda's (2023) article, *Fuego: Unleashing collective Queer Chicanx/Latinx rebellion, counterpublics and imagination*. They platform the intergenerational solidarity in the care, community, and activism of queer feminist Latinx/Chicanx students and Chicana staff within their university. They were met with resistance that necessitated further

organising and new strategies in response to the anti-solidarity and divide and rule actions of the University management where they were based. The solidarity in communities of care constructed during the early lockdowns under the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK and the US are explored in *“That’s what we think of as activism”*: *Solidarity through care in queer Desi diaspora* (Bhardwaj, 2023). The focus here is on solidarity building in South Asian communities during these isolated periods brought about by the pandemic. In these perhaps unique circumstances, activism was generated - and flourished - in high-profile anti-racist organising, against racist state violence and fatal racist police violence. However, there are often barriers for those seeking inclusion and solidarity with others. Henningham (2023) considers Aboriginal bisexual+ people in *Nowhere to bi: Barriers to belonging in the broader LGBTQ+ community for Aboriginal bi+ people in Australia*. They take a classic intersectional approach and considers existing literature to explore how those with a multiplicity of identities face biphobia, heterosexism, monosexism and queerphobia, alongside shadeism/colourism and racism. As a consequence, those who are Aboriginal and bi+ may struggle to feel included within Aboriginal communities, LGBTQ+ spaces, or the wider society. Henningham considers the implications of exclusion and a lack of solidarity, but also turns to the freedom and empowerment offered through these identities as well as exploring where positive and inclusive spaces might exist within more nuanced spaces. The articles also offers useful suggestions for how Aboriginal bi+ people might be better supported and how particular initiatives could tackle a lack of solidarity.

We are extremely grateful for the work that all the authors have contributed with their nuanced and insightful discussions of solidarity and to Ella Ben Hagai for their support in producing this special issue. The issue ends with Ben Hagai and House-Peter’s (2022) interview with a figurehead of queer theory and activism, the transfeminist scholar and activist, Professor Susan Stryker. Stryker is not completely hopeful about the future of solidarity, not just within the LGBTQ+ community but between all minoritised groups, between human society and nature, life itself. In the cracks in our society live the majority of people, all of us who have to work to get by, negotiating various vortexes of power relationships as we do. Stryker directs us back to a more collective, DIY activism that focussed on the shared experiences of oppression and did not police the borders of that, knowing that all those affected had something to offer to liberation. Indeed, as state powers constrict even further, across the globe, and the technology that on the one hand frees us to organise, is also used to suppress and stagnate, we need to re-discover autonomous ways of organising and of making things happen. The articles in this special issue have some answers and some examples. We are proud to have been part of making space for them.

References

- Abesamis, L. E. A., & Alibudbud, R. (2023). From the bathroom to a national discussion of LGBTQ+ rights: a case of discrimination in the Philippines. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2251775>
- Ben Hagai, E., & House-Peters, L. (2022). Susan Stryker on solidarity: An interview for the Journal of Lesbian Studies. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 1-16. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2022.2133419>
- Bhardwaj, M. (2023). "That's what we think of as activism": Solidarity through care in queer Desi diaspora. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2228652>
- Burns, K. (2019, September 5). The rise of anti-trans "radical" feminists, explained: Known as TERFs, trans-exclusionary radical feminist groups are working with conservatives to push their anti-trans agenda. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/9/5/20840101/terfs-radical-feminists-gender-critical>
- Currans, B. (2023). Forging gender and racial solidarities at trans-inclusive women's festivals. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2187160>
- Dynda, B. (in press) Feminist, lesbian, and trans solidarity in the German-Polish collective Girlz Get United. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*.
- Elgee, E. (2023, June 19). Bristol Pride billboard set alight in suspected hate crime. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-bristol-65955843.amp>
- Forrest, A. (2023). Equalities minister Kemi Badenoch weighs into new 'culture war' with crackdown on gender neutral loos. *Independent* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/gender-neutral-toilets-tories-trans-b2392253.html>
- Henningham, M. (2023). Nowhere to bi: Barriers to belonging in the broader LGBTQ+ community for Aboriginal bi+ people in Australia. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2233339>
- Jacques, J. (2020, March 9). Transphobia is everywhere in Britain. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/09/opinion/britain-transphobia-labour-party.html>

John, T. (2021, October 9). Anti-trans rhetoric is rife in the British media. Little is being done to extinguish the flames. *CNN*. <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/09/uk/uk-trans-rights-gender-critical-media-intl-gbr-cmd/index.html>

Leeson, L. (2023, October 4). Rishi Sunak: A man is a man and a woman is a woman - that's just common sense. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/news/rishi-sunak-man-is-a-man-speech-transgender-b2424372.html>

Medhurst, E. (2023). Flags and fashion: Expressions of solidarity through lesbian clothing. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2246250>

Millar, W. (2023, October 4). Rishi Sunak targets transgender people in 'vile' Conservative Party Conference speech. *Yahoo News*. https://uk.news.yahoo.com/rishi-sunak-targets-transgender-people-160858958.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZW5vc2lhLm9yZy8&guce_refer_sig=AQAAADn7alP3tyweKX4ZJRa2UbNY6NJoqr5WI-WLPoIT3sKp4rBQtiSJRCKoE3aZB7MhGgCU8Tm1Hoe8pdONo5AjLVcdYd4zSD-P5R4yNXpP7zA0-TlxMqYjpAizGAZz8qjMYS8SPdYVyhPIIEzz8pIFJzF2Bc4_1euqqELHof7P46A

Rojas Durazo, A. C., & Zepeda, N. (2023). Fuego: Unleashing collective Queer Chicanx/Latinx rebellion, counterpublics and imagination. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2213472>

Rogers, B. A. (2023). TERFs aren't feminists: lesbians stand against trans exclusion. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2252286>

Streeting, L. (2023, July 3). Police investigating hate crime after BB guns fired at Trans Pride picnic: "It is a sad reality that the community is currently under attack". *Bristol Post*. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/police-investigating-hate-crime-after-8569077>

Swank, E., & Fahs, B. (2023). Sexual identities and political solidarities among cisgender women. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advanced online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2208428>

Thurlow, C. (2023). Sisters, it's been a while! The emotional pull of the lesbian 'gender critical' movement and a failure of solidarity. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2023.2229144>

United Nations (2023, May 10). United Nations Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity Country visit to the United

Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (24 April – 5 May 2023).

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/sexualorientation/statements/eom-statement-UK-IE-SOGI-2023-05-10.pdf>

UK: UN view on trans rights is 'much-needed common sense' (2023, May 11). *Amnesty International UK*. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-un-view-trans-rights-much-needed-common-sense>

Whannel, K. (2023, October 3). Tory politician Andrew Boff kicked out of conference after Braverman heckle. *BBC News* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-66998189>

Authors' Accepted Manuscript