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Citation

Langdridge, Darren (2018). Benevolent Heterosexism and the “Less-than-Queer” Citizen Subject. In: Hammack Jr., Phillip L. ed. The Oxford Handbook of Social Psychology and Social Justice. Oxford Library of Psychology. Oxford University Press, pp. 205–219.

URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/44127/>

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Benevolent heterosexism and the 'less-than-queer' citizen subject

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Abstract

This chapter explores the dangers of 'benevolent heterosexism' through an analysis of the implicit assumptions underpinning research on sexual prejudice and 'coming-out'. I argue that whilst there has been considerable progress in the West, with regard to increasing rights for people who are LGB or Q, this has been predicated on an individualistic liberal model of politics that is not without cost. The cost in question concerns the danger of a gradual and pernicious assimilation and the growth of a 'less-than-queer' citizen subject. This new sexual subject is being produced in psychological research that is ostensibly about advancing social justice for people who are LGBQ, as well as within the broader social world. I argue that all of us in psychology that are interested in social justice need to allow space – and indeed, embrace – the anti-social queer in order to realise the justifiable anger needed to effect radical social change for sexual minorities.

Keywords: benevolent heterosexism, queer subjectivity, coming-out, liberalism, sexual prejudice

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In this chapter I explore the relationship between the social psychology of sexuality and social justice through a critical analysis of cultural and disciplinary assumptions about 'successful' outcomes for LGBTQ people¹, in particular the notion of contented 'coming-out'. Using an expanded version of 'benevolent heterosexism' (Massey, 2009) I argue that States, wider publics and the discipline of psychology itself are complicit in facilitating the production of a 'less-than-queer' citizen subject that is 'just like one of us', the us in question being the quintessential individual (white male heterosexual able-bodied middle-class) subject. The focus of criticism is the highly individualistic liberal model of social justice that underpins much rights-based political discourse around sex and sexuality in Western democracies and, I argue here, also the discipline of psychology when concerned with social justice. This has profound consequences for research on 'coming-out' and many other issues in the psychology of sexualities.

Liberalism is a highly fractured political concept with myriad varieties (Gaus & Courtland, 2010). Further, liberal political discourses across different cultures draw on a variety of different models of liberalism. To some extent these divisions are unimportant as a number of key liberal values underpin life in most Western democracies, notably a focus on the value of liberty and private property ownership

¹ The focus in this chapter is on lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and questioning people (LGBQ). This notably excludes those who are heterosexual and transgender and this is regrettably acknowledged but necessary given the very different experiences and also literatures for people in sexual and gender minorities, particularly concerning people who are transgender.

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within the rule of law. In North America in particular but also to a great extent in the UK post-1979 we can see the power of the classic (neo)liberal economics of F.A. Hayek (1960) who was a key influence on both Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. This is a political position highly resistant to collectivism, with a firm commitment to the minimal State upholding the rule of law but little else. This form of political organisation results in a society of individuals operating within a Capitalist free market that is (ideally) self-regulating, with little consideration or concern for the way that structural forces may allow and limit individual liberties.

Alongside this broad political backdrop, there has been a growth in new social movements over the last forty years with people making claims for rights, invariably driven by a liberal agenda concerned with increasing individual liberty, albeit organised through collective action that is more akin to a Rawlsian (1996) version of liberal social justice. This includes claims for sexual rights and social justice from people who are LGBTQ and transgender, based on liberal arguments for equality between people with minority identities and the dominant heterosexual and cisgendered² majority. At the very heart of both the broader liberal political project, and liberal claims for social justice concerning sex, gender and sexuality, is a strong individualism based on the quintessential political subject that is invariably male and which has been the subject of considerable criticism from feminist scholars of citizenship (Lister, 2003; Mouffe, 1993; Young, 1989). What is, arguably, lacking however is any serious consideration of the underlying structural forces at

² Cisgendered is a term for those people whose gender identity is the same as the gender assigned to them at birth, in contrast to transgender (or trans) for those people for whom their gender identity is not the same as that which was assigned at birth or is otherwise not simply cisgendered.

play in delimiting access to any rights claims or that might underpin critical reception of the journey of travel in the liberal political agenda.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge that the liberal model of social justice focusing on individual rights and responsibilities has demonstrated value in gaining greater equality for LGBQ people amongst others, I argue here that it comes at a cost: the cost being the loss of an aggressive, politically engaged – or perhaps better still, politically enraged - queer subject that seeks to effect radical social change rather than assimilating to the hegemonic demands of individual 'responsible' citizenship. Through a reading of some key psychological literature on the touchstone issue of LGBQ 'coming-out' this chapter will provide a critical challenge to orthodox psychological research that is underpinned by the ostensibly benevolent politics of liberalism. I will argue that if we seek to achieve greater social justice for sexual minorities then we must engage in work that opens up possibilities for collective political action, which will likely require the justifiable anger of the anti-social queer³ to provide the drive to effect lasting social change. The anti-social queer being that person who refuses to accept or embrace the calls to 'responsible' sexual citizenship, who sits outside normative institutions like marriage and 'the family' and instead occupies territory on the margins of acceptability. That is, while there has undoubtedly been some notable progress for sexual minorities, we must not be complacent and lose sight of the political, and the emotional fuel needed to effect change, in our work as psychologists interested in social justice. We must also

³ I use the term 'anti-social queer' to locate this argument in relation to the anti-social thesis of queer theory, exemplified in the work of Leo Bersani (1995) and Lee Edelman (2004).

not be complacent about the ideological assumptions underpinning our own work, however well intentioned, and subject them to a sustained critical gaze in order to avoid psychological research that closes down possibilities for queer folk who may not wish to readily embrace the socially proscribed role of responsible sexual citizen.

My argument begins with a discussion of the different ways that prejudice against same sex desire has been conceptualised, with a particular focus on the move from homophobia to heterosexism. I then discuss what Massey (2009, 2010) refers to as 'modern heterosexism' and 'benevolent heterosexism', following a brief introduction to the notion of benevolent sexism that was first proposed by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Glick et al. 2004). I argue that the move in Western societies from overt homophobia towards more benevolent forms of heterosexism, alongside a Foucaultian policing of self, is pernicious and the consequence of an individualistic liberal model of social justice. This is followed by a detailed discussion of the psychological literature on the touchstone issue of 'coming-out'. Here, I contrast the early work of Vivienne Cass with more recent work by Ritch Savin-Williams in order to advance my argument that an individualist liberal model of politics lies behind psychological research on this topic, with a variety of potentially negative consequences for individual lives and social justice. Finally, I briefly consider the implications of this argument for other topics in the psychology of sexualities, in particular gay parenthood, before outlining a possible queer agenda for work in this area.

Homophobia and heterosexism

Homophobia, as a term, is attributed to the clinical psychologist George Weinberg, who coined the term in the 1960s, with it discussed in detail in his 1972 book *Society and the Healthy Homosexual*. He defined it as an irrational fear or “dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” (Weinberg, 1972, p. 4). This term became common currency in the following years and represented a significant move away from the traditional pathologisation of LGBQ people (as ‘mad’ or ‘bad’) towards a notion of social justice with a critical focus upon those who perpetrate discrimination (see Hegarty & Massey, 2006, for an excellent historical account). Homophobia implied an ego-defensive mode of relating and has frequently been understood as the result of a (invariably male) heterosexual aversion to their latent or denied same-sex sexual desire. Homophobia, as a psychological concept, has been the subject of considerable criticism (Herek, 2000), mostly concerning the inappropriate use of ‘phobia’ within the term. First, there is no evidence that prejudice towards people who are LGBQ demonstrates the qualities of a phobia in the clinical sense, where people might have particular physiological responses (Shields & Harriman, 1984). Second, a phobia implies an individual clinical response to some phenomena that invariably neglects the broader socio-cultural and historical nature of prejudice. Homophobia has, therefore, fallen out of favour with social psychologists interested in studying prejudice towards people who are LGBQ.

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Heterosexism emerged as a term at a similar time to homophobia and in general refers to an ideological system where non-heterosexual behaviours, identities, relationships and communities are treated less favourably than those that are heterosexual (Herek, 1990). Its precise origins are less clear than homophobia but it was widely deployed by activists within Women's and LGBQ rights organisations in the late sixties and early seventies (Kitzinger, 1996). Regardless, this concept describes most Western⁴ contemporary cultures and has thus served to focus attention on the social and structural inequalities faced by people who are LGBQ. It has been an attempt to locate anti-LGBQ prejudice firmly alongside prejudice against other groups where there is the use of power to structurally oppress particular minority communities, whether that is the result of sexism, racism or any other 'ism' currently conceived. Heterosexism might manifest itself through direct societal discrimination against people who are LGBQ or through more subtle means, such as the lack of visibility of people who are LGB or Q within cultures. Whilst there has been considerable progress over the last thirty years, mainly in the West, in tackling homophobia and/or heterosexism it remains pervasive in many territories and, even where there has (apparently) been considerable progress, subtle forms of discrimination still remain.

Key psychological work on homophobia/heterosexism includes the influential body of work conducted by Greg Herek, with his *Attitudes Towards Lesbians and Gay Men* (ATLG) scale now a standard measurement instrument on this topic (Herek, 1984). Whilst heterosexism highlights the social aspects of

⁴ This also applies to many other cultures and contexts beyond the West, though norms for sexual expression in some cultures may render this term meaningless.

discrimination against LGBTQ people, there have been concerns amongst some psychologists that such a macro (societal) level focus is inadequate and that we might be better to embrace the broad term *sexual prejudice* instead, a term referring to all negative attitudes directed to people on the basis of their sexual orientation (Herek, 2000). This etymological and conceptual focus is thought, by some at least, to benefit research on this topic by providing a descriptive focus with few assumptions that links work on hostility towards people who are LGB or Q with the established tradition of psychological research on prejudice. This may be true but there is a danger in engaging in internecine disputes about nomenclature when what is key is the manner in which we conduct research on this topic.

This chapter will not be the first to raise concerns about the assumptions underpinning psychological work on sexual prejudice, whether when conducted as work on homophobia, heterosexism or the broad definition of sexual prejudice. Kitzinger (1987) raised serious questions about measures of homophobia/heterosexism from a feminist social constructionist perspective. Through a detailed discursive analysis of the items in extant attitude questionnaires, Kitzinger argued that measurement of favourable attitudes towards LGBTQ people were conflated with liberal humanistic ideologies. That is, there is an assimilationist move implicit in the measurement process based on liberal humanistic assumptions that invariably leads to the minimization of difference (for instance, between lesbians and straight women). This may, ironically, result in radical separatist lesbians being cast as homophobic or heterosexist – in the eyes of the psychologists who constructed these measurement scales of sexual prejudice (Kitzinger, 1987).

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More recently, there has been further discussion of the historical, cultural and political complexity of sexual prejudice research in general and need to move beyond simple liberal models of equality (Hegarty & Massey, 2006; Massey, 2009, 2010). Hegarty and Massey (2006) point out, for instance, how Herek's (1984) now standard scale of attitudes towards lesbians and gay men involved the erasure of 'locker room' language for fear of offending participants. They argue that this demonstrates how the ostensibly scientific production of new measurement scales is implicitly, if not explicitly, shaped by the sexual politics of the researcher and broader disciplinary environment.

Further, attempts to measure sexual prejudice from the 1970s onwards, such as those of Herek (1984), have grounded their theories in a 'minoritizing' framework (Hegarty & Massey, 2006; Massey, 2009) as a single attitudinal dimension from tolerance to hostility. The distinction between a 'minoritizing' position, where the focus is primarily of interest to the distinct sexual minority itself, and a 'universalizing' position, where the issues are cast as of interest to all across the broad spectrum of sexualities, stems from the work of Sedgwick (1990). Sedgwick draws this distinction for a number of reasons but particularly to highlight how a universalizing stance, in contrast to a minoritizing perspective, might better reflect a broad desire to engage with LGBTQ sexual subversion rather than treat these different others 'just like one of us'. Whilst treating others who are different 'just like one of us' might entail some gains for the group that is 'Other', it comes at a cost and that cost is the very difference that constitutes these people's identities and/or practices. Minoritizing views have been dominant and unchallenged until relatively

recently, with a focus on sexual identity rather than sexual practice, and with sexual prejudice best understood as an example of group oppression (Hegarty & Massey, 2006). The arguments here are not that there has not been progress, or that there is no value in the minoritizing tradition, but rather that we might wish to critically interrogate such traditions for the way they – often implicitly – conflate versions of sexual prejudice with particular political ideologies.

Sean Massey (2009, 2010) has argued persuasively that a multidimensional measure of sexual prejudice better reflects the complex and subtle ways that sexual prejudice might be expressed. This idea has been driven in large part by contemporary work on racism and sexism that has highlighted that these forms of prejudice are manifest in more subtle ways than simply tolerance versus hostility. As we likely all now appreciate, with growing condemnation of overt hostility towards people who are black or from an ethnic minority and towards women there has been a consequent growth in more subtle forms of prejudice towards people in these identity categories (Dixon & Levine, 2012). Indeed, it has been shown that people who claim to hold egalitarian beliefs about sexual minorities will act in discriminatory ways when given a socially acceptable or subtle way to do so (Moreno & Bodenhausen, 2001). As Massey (2009: 150) explains: ‘...when an opportunity presents itself (i.e. appropriate amount of interpersonal space, length of conversation, amount of criticism levelled, evaluation of rudeness, judgement of responsibility, and simple liking or disliking), implicit forms of sexual prejudice will manifest.’ Massey (2009, 2010), and colleagues (Massey, Merriwether & Garcia, 2013), has conducted a number of studies that have demonstrated what he refers to

as *modern heterosexism*, where more subtle forms of sexual prejudice are demonstrated, alongside *traditional heterosexism*, within a broad multidimensional model of sexual prejudice. Modern heterosexism includes a number of more subtle examples of sexual prejudice including: failure to see value in the accomplishments of LGBTQ people; rejection of positive qualities associated with LGBTQ people; holding on to traditional sex/gender roles (Massey, 2009).

Below, I discuss Glick and Fiske's important work on benevolent sexism and how this might be drawn on when understanding sexual prejudice through the notion of *benevolent heterosexism* (Massey, 2010), which I introduce thereafter and then seek to extend beyond current understandings. Following this discussion, I then flesh out the broader political implications of an extended view of benevolent heterosexism and how it leads to the production of a particular politically conservative (sexual) subject before moving on to trace the impact of the political on psychological research on LGBTQ 'coming out', along with a number of other contemporary issues for people who are LGBTQ.

Benevolent sexism/heterosexism

In her 1994 book *The Velvet Glove*, Mary Jackman sought to highlight the more insidious aspects of ostensibly positive intergroup relations. Her focus is upon the way that intergroup hostility manifests in everyday contexts rather than within the highly constrained conditions of, for instance, social psychological experimentation. To this end, she sought to re-imagine the classic Summer Camp

studies of Sherif (Sherif et al., 1961) to highlight the impact of the social context on intergroup relations. Jackman argues that we are less likely to see overt hostility and more likely to witness greater emotional complexity, manifest through paternalism where members of dominant sections of societies are able to define, and reward as felt appropriate, the desired characteristics of members of minority groups. This 'velvet glove' approach leads to an apparently acceptable face to acts of domination (as we might see in the call for subordinates to become 'just like one of us') and the relative invisibility of structural inequality, animosity and domination itself. After all, who wouldn't want to become a member of the dominant group with all the privilege that then follows? The pernicious nature of paternalism is particularly apparent when considering prejudice within gender relations. Explicit hostility between men and women is relatively rare⁵ and there is strong evidence that men generally express warm feelings towards women, often more than towards other men (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989, 1993). On the other hand, apparently benevolent acts between men and women may actually serve to maintain and reinforce structural inequality and the oppression of women.

Glick and Fiske (Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001; Glick et al. 2004) established an important body of work that empirically examines the complex affective nature of prejudice within the context of contemporary sexism. Glick and Fiske (1996) distinguish between hostile and benevolent sexism within a broader multidimensional view of prejudice between men and women. Hostile sexism

⁵ This is not to diminish the appalling levels of violence perpetrated by men against women, especially sexual violence in domestic settings. But, even taking this in to account, the absolute level of hostility from men towards women is relatively low.

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concerns those aspects of sexism that would fit with Allport's (1954) notion of prejudice where there is some form of antipathy or hostility as a result of faulty judgements or inflexibility. This is likely manifest through social distance or negative stereotypes, if not outright verbal or physical violence. In contrast or addition to hostile sexism there is also the possibility of benevolent sexism, which Glick and Fiske (1996: 491) define as:

... a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorised as prosocial (e.g. helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g. self-disclosure).

Benevolent sexism, therefore, concerns a masculine dominance manifest through ostensibly positive (often 'warm' and 'caring') relations between some men and women. Since this foundational work, social psychological research concerned with social justice has demonstrated time and time again that prejudice comes in many forms and attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that may appear neutral, tolerant, or even positive may actually be playing a role in effecting subtle (or not so subtle) acts of oppression (Dixon & Levine, 2012, Dixon, Levine, Reicher & Durrheim, 2012).

Building on this tradition, benevolent heterosexism is, therefore, an attitude, belief or behaviour towards people who are LGB or Q that might appear subjectively favourable but actually leads to the disempowerment of members of this particular

minority group (Massey, 2010). Hostile homophobia or heterosexism is well documented and continues in a dangerously potent form in many, if not most, countries of the world (Clarke, Ellis, Peel, Riggs, 2010; Herek, 2000). Benevolent heterosexism, on the other hand, is a relatively new form of oppression manifest in a limited number of otherwise ostensibly progressive liberal democracies, such as the United Kingdom (UK) and United States of America (USA). Both the UK and USA, in their different ways, comprise populations demonstrating increasing tolerance – and in some cases, warm acceptance – for people who are LGB or Q. Furthermore, legislation in both countries, along with many others, has changed at a considerable pace over the last thirty years or so and is now considerably more accepting of members of sexual minorities (see, for instance, Weeks, 2007). Members of sexual minorities are gaining ground with regard to their status as citizens through, for instance, greater protection against discrimination, equal rights to form partnerships/marry and have children, and participation in public life.

However, whilst this political progress towards equality is welcome there remain powerful hierarchies of advantage and disadvantage at play with sex and sexuality. Gayle Rubin's (1993) work highlighting the hierarchical nature of sexual practice is significant here and particularly the notion of the *charmed circle*. The charmed circle diagrammatically highlights how individuals and societies cast certain sexual practices/identities as 'good' and therefore within the 'charmed circle' whilst others are 'bad' and must remain on the outer limits of acceptability. Rubin's work has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to intersectionality and for assuming a white Western subject (Schueller, 2005), alongside the

privileging of the regulation of sex in relation to types of sexual activity over the regulation of sex through gender, race, ethnicity, class, national origin, culture, religion and other axes of difference (Ho, 2006). However, the concept of the charmed circle remains a useful tool for thinking about the ways in which individuals and societies conceptualise and regulate sex and sexualities. If we think through benevolent heterosexism in these terms then we can better understand its pervasive power. This is not a simple assault from the disapproving centre on the margins but a more subtle exercise in control that mobilises an array of people. That is, benevolent heterosexism - in these terms - is not simply the province of the heterosexual centre but also an activity of the 'less-than-queer' LGB margins, with members policing each other with regard to membership of the charmed inner circle.

Massey (2010) empirically explored the influence of ostensibly 'positive' beliefs amongst heterosexuals on anti-gay and anti-lesbian attitudes. His study was motivated by (1) a desire to understand what motivates heterosexuals to view particular qualities held by lesbians and gay men as positive, and (2) to explore the possibility that the positive beliefs about lesbians and gay men were the result of *benevolent heterosexism*. Massey found that positive beliefs frequently reflected gender norm transgression and in many ways reflect positive beliefs about the way that lesbians and gay men might be leading the way in offering a critique of heteropatriarchy and thus desirable models of resistance. Massey did not find benevolent heterosexism, in the limited sense of a correlation between positive beliefs and a measure of traditional heterosexism, in his 2010 study but I argue in

this chapter that an ideological stance best described as benevolent heterosexism actually underpins a considerable body of contemporary psychological work concerning LGBQ people. Critical to this argument is my expanded understanding of the concept that Massey first proposed, to include structural prejudice that may not be readily apparent to those who perpetuate it or indeed amongst those who suffer from it.

Building on the work of Massey (2010), I would like to extend our thinking about prejudice towards LGBQ people within a broader socio-political context, where the notion of benevolent heterosexism might prove useful in enabling us to identify new examples of the distorting power of a seemingly benign liberalism. To this end, the definition of benevolent heterosexism given above might be usefully extended to encompass structural prejudice alongside individual attitudes, beliefs or behaviours. That is, benevolent heterosexism, much like sexism and racism, is likely to appear in subtle ways in policy and practice even when such policy or practice is apparently driven by a desire to 'progress' equality for people who are LGB or Q. Work on racism has demonstrated that there can be conflict/ambivalence between 'egalitarian attitudes' and personal beliefs/actions (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986) and between a belief that racism is wrong but that members of minority groups are making unfair demands and receiving a greater share of resources than is appropriate (McConahay, 1986). These tensions are invariably underpinned by liberal sensibilities about 'equality' and 'fairness' that frequently become distorted or undermined by a variety of other personal and/or socio-political concerns. So, whilst the conservative right might loathe liberalism for the way it has led to a raft

of new political subjects making claims for rights, there might also be some of us on the left who also express reservations about liberalism. The difference is that these reservations from the left concern the way that liberal values, that I argue here also underpin work in the psychology of social justice, produce a regression to the mean in which we witness the loss of the radical (that is often associated with the bitchy and fractious), as us queers become 'more like one of them'.

In the following section I seek to trace the impact of the political, particularly through the notion of benevolent heterosexism, on one particular substantive topic within the discipline of psychology: LGBQ 'coming-out'. This topic has been chosen as a 'touchstone' issue concerning fights for LGBQ equality. It is also a topic in which there has been considerable progress, in the West at least, though the battles for equality are far from over, as we shall see below. What this topic also possesses is a clearly determined end-point in which we can see liberal sensibilities in action through the production of a subject who is at once free whilst also constrained by the self-same liberal sensibilities that helped to blaze a path for equal treatment by a State and broader society.

'Coming-out'

'Coming out' as someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer remains of considerable significance within the life course of many – if not, most - people with some form of same sex sexual desire, though this is undoubtedly changing rapidly

amongst some sections of some societies (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005). That is, whilst there has clearly been change amongst some (often privileged) groups of younger people about the need to identify specifically as LGB or Q (Savin-Williams, 2005), there are undoubtedly many young people who will still want/need to embrace some sense of a fixed identity and entry into particular communities that follow such identification. The kid in the poor part of a northern town in the UK or Chicago project⁶ in the US will be unlikely to find a welcome home for too much sexual experimentation amongst their peers and will still need to locate safe spaces amongst peers with similar same sex desires in LGBQ venues. So whilst change is clearly occurring in how young people, in particular, might eschew fixed sexual identity labels and instead embrace more experimental, more open, and sometimes also more resistant stances, this is deeply inflected by a number of key factors such as geographical location, wealth/class, race/ethnicity, and dis-ability amongst others. Privilege is undoubtedly central here in allowing young people to open up experimental spaces in which they can resist normative expectations.

Most of the earliest work on 'coming out', and sexual minority development in general, has adopted a process perspective in which there are thought to be clearly definable stages and a particular end point to the coming out process (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1981/1982; Troiden, 1979; Woodman & Lena, 1980). This continued for many years with a good body of work following a similar path (see, for instance, Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Morris, 1997). These models have most often been theoretically derived, drawing on the work of developmental theorists like

⁶ I am using this example emblematically, noting that many projects, including Cabrini-Green in Chicago, have now been shut down.

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Erikson (1968), with some limited qualitative data and only rarely quantitative data in support. Conceptually these models are based on the idea that adolescence is a critical developmental period in which a person's sexual identity might become manifest, moving from a feeling of 'being different' towards acknowledgement of same sex desire and then identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual (though the latter was often simply ignored in the early models). The end stage of most models is some sense of synthesis or integration, in which a person's sexual identity becomes an integral aspect of self and where the emotionally volatile nature (and the presence of anger and resentment as a result of difference) of the previous stages has dissipated. This is argued to lead to increasing acceptance of self and the social world into which that person is thrown.

The most important of these models is the one produced by Vivienne Cass (1979), as it is the most widely known and well used model with some, albeit limited, empirical support (Cass, 1984; Brady & Busse, 1994; Halpin, 2008; Halpin & Allen, 2004). It is also still the focus of considerable attention (see, for instance, Savin-Williams, 2011). Cass (1979) describes six stages of identity formation that are based on two assumptions: (1) that identity formation is a developmental process and (2) that stability and change in behaviour result from the interaction between the individual and their environment. The theoretical basis of this six stage model assumes that development proceeds in a linear fashion (cf. Erikson, 1946) and that this development results from an interaction between the individual and their social world. This theoretical stance is particularly informed by interpersonal congruency theory (Secord & Backman, 1961), which proposes that individual

stability and change are dependent on the degree of congruence or incongruence between an individual and their⁷ environment. Movement between stages, therefore, occurs as a result of some incongruence between the individual and their environment. Like a number of other models of sexual development, this work was primarily derived from clinical work with 'homosexuals' and reflects the social (and sexual) circumstances of this particular period in history (in the US mostly). Underpinning much of this work is an implicit, and rarely examined, US humanistic perspective in which self-actualization and authenticity are prized above all else as the apotheosis of successful living.

The stages in the model proposed by Cass (1979) include: (1) Identity confusion, where there is increasing awareness of same-sex desire and incongruence between self and heterosexual world; (2) Identity comparison, involving a move from an immediate concern with personal identity toward potential social alienation; (3) Identity tolerance, in which the person learns to 'tolerate' their feelings and seeks out the company of similar others (with positive experiences reinforcing a move to the next stage); (4) Identity acceptance, where there is acceptance, not mere tolerance, and active engagement with similar others; (5) Identity pride, and the sense that their identity is completely acceptable and indeed also the source of some pride. This also involves anger at the sexual prejudice of others and the heterosexist nature of the society that they inhabit. Contact is likely maximised with LGB or Q sub-cultures. The final sixth stage is termed identity synthesis, where there is recognition that the 'them and us' strategy

⁷ Here and below I avoid use of he/she and instead employ they/their in the singular to resist the assumed gender binary that this implies.

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in which all heterosexuals are viewed negatively is wrong and counterproductive. Similarities between someone who is LGB or Q and people who are heterosexual are recognised and there is synthesis to the extent that a person's identity becomes merely one aspect of selfhood rather than their whole identity.

Anyone who is LGB or Q, or who has worked therapeutically with people who are LGB or Q, will - I suspect - see considerable face validity in the model of Cass outlined above. It certainly resonates with my own experience and also that of the many clients I have seen in my clinical practice over the years and I suspect that this is a strong reason for the enduring popularity of this model in spite of the lack of a great deal of empirical support. The model also does more than simply describe the process of 'coming out', it provides a new elaborated language of coming out that can join the many tales that have increasingly been told about this hitherto private experience (cf. Plummer, 1995). Cass (1984) herself sought to validate the model through a survey of 178 people, finding some support for her model but also evidence for the blurring of stages (particularly between 1 and 2, and 5 and 6). There were also differences for men and women suggesting that a universal model of sexual development may be inadequate to the task. Halpin and Allen (2004) also sought to evaluate the Cass model through an examination of whether the psychosocial well-being of 425 men improved through the six stages. The findings were somewhat ambivalent with regard to support for the model, with high levels of well-being during the first two stages, reduced well-being during the middle tolerance and acceptance stages and high levels again in the final two stages. Criticism of stage models like that of Cass (1979) has been extensive and, perhaps a

little surprisingly, still continues (see, for instance, Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001, and Savin-Williams, 2011). Amongst the charges levelled at the model are that it: insufficiently accounts for male/female difference; fails to account for bisexuality; does not really recognise the complex interplay of individual and social world, nor the way that identity development is a lifelong process; forces individual variation into a limited number of fixed stages and thus fails to account for the lived experience of very large numbers of people who are LGB or Q.

So, given the somewhat dated nature of these models of coming out and also the extensive criticism levelled at them, why is it worth paying attention to them now? Well I would argue, first, they still have considerable currency within academia or why else would Savin-Williams feel the need for further critique of the Cass model in 2011? Research continues to draw on these models albeit often in ways that bares only a passing resemblance to the original work (see, for instance, the Gay Identity Questionnaire of Brady & Busse, 1994 and its application again in 2008 by Halpin). Second, these models continue to influence psychotherapeutic practice, where the influence of constructivist/constructionist thinking has been remarkably slow in having any impact on quite a number of therapeutic orientations (Davies, 1996; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Third, I would argue that these developmental models have become 'anchored' within broader social representations (Moscovici, 1988) of everyday understandings of sexual development and thus still exert considerable influence. That is, I am pretty confident that amongst the average man and woman on the street in the UK or US there will be a fairly ready model of LGBQ development available and that will be

one based almost exclusively on stage models like that of Cass (1979). Plummer's (1995) ground-breaking work on sexual stories is testament to this. He describes how the coming-out story from the 1970s to the present is a "story of our time", peculiarly modernist in its individualism, the use of causal language, a sense of linear progression and ending with some sense of discovering 'the truth'. Challenges to this modernist tale may well be afoot as new sexual stories are being conjured up (Cohler, & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2001, 2011) but the tale of coming-out as a personal struggle and triumph against the odds remains pervasive in most Western communities.

Perhaps the most important reason to examine the work of Cass and all those others concerned with sexual identity development, however, is to allow us to trace how an individualist liberal political stance (often grounded in immense privilege) has underpinned work on sexual identity development: apparent from the work of Cass in the 1970s to the work of Savin-Williams in the 2010s. The criticism I wish to present here is different from that discussed above concerning the inadequacy of stage models to capture the subtlety of sexual identity development, valid as that might be. Instead, I want to focus on the benevolent heterosexism at the heart of the liberal narrative of development, progress and social integration that underpins the work of Cass and other theorists working on psychological models of sexual development. As I have argued elsewhere (Langdrige, 2008, 2012) and will expand upon here, the model proposed by Cass, whilst demonstrating some degree of face validity, suffers not only from the restrictions that result from a view of development occurring in rigid stages but also from the desired end point. For Cass,

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the end point is *Identity synthesis*, in which we see the loss of anger and resentment and instead greater acceptance that us queers are actually just like all those heterosexual people around us and there is nothing really different or special about being LGB or Q. The pride and the anger at a sense of injustice that was felt in the previous stage is lost to a sense of quiet contentment with life as it is, as given. The image of the person conjured up by such a developmental end point is the now classic 'good gay citizen' (Bell & Binnie, 2000), who is 'just like one of us', the 'us' being the heterosexual majority living appropriate to the norms of society, expressed most powerfully through particular kinds of relationships and parenthood. But is this really the right endpoint for those of us that grow up within environments where heterosexism is endemic? And is this ostensibly benevolent aim the best for the LGBQ individual or wider society? We know that heterosexism marks us as different, as other: we are not the same in so many important ways. Can we walk hand in hand down a street of our choosing without fear? Can we kiss our loved one/s in public, beyond the limited confines of LGBQ spaces or known tolerant environments? Can we marry our multiple partners or refuse the very foundation of ownership that underpins that institution but still get tax kickbacks for us and all our fuck-buddies? Can we fuck as many people as we want, tie them up and beat them into a frenzied stupor? Can we camp it up, revel in drag, and play with gender? And on it goes ... Add in gender, class/poverty, ethnicity, race and/or disability and the restrictions on freedom become even more potent. The truth is that we cannot behave the same as people who are heterosexual, in even the most mundane of ways, let alone with regard to those more obvious citizenship campaigns for

equality around marriage and family. Nor can we completely queer the cherished institutions of heteronormativity, such as marriage and 'the family' from the inside such that we all fit in as some happy extended family. The very nature of queer is to destabilise, to unsettle and to be anti-social, and through this to resist the norm and instead open up new possibilities in which we might radically rethink the centre.

Of course, if we are privileged enough then we will be able to carve out space in the world where we can live as we wish but the majority do not enjoy the luxury of such privilege even if they live in the UK or US, let alone those in countries where any hint of same sex desire is punishable with imprisonment, violence or even death. Should we really feel content at this situation, happy with the gradual accumulation of rights for a lucky few? Is it right to feel content when faced with the suicide of young people on the grounds of their sexual difference (Mustanski & Liu, 2013), let alone contentment at the verbal and physical violence meted out to people who are LGB or Q? Surely anger is a more appropriate emotional response to a developmental experience of difference and oppression within a persistently heterosexist social world. Complacency is the real danger as we gain elements of heterosexual privilege through the polite politics of liberalism and think the fight is all but over. And this is, of course, the desired end point for Governments of all persuasions, quiet satisfaction rather than difficult politically engaged – and enraged – subjects set on the reconstruction (or destruction) of the status quo: there is no need for opium to quiet the masses, just the gradual drip, drip, drip of the possibility of privilege so that we can become 'just like one them'.

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The policing of this emotional boundary comes not just from the state but also from within sexual minority communities themselves. Privilege is powerfully seductive and it is no surprise that people who are LGB or Q are no better at resisting the seduction of being 'good citizens', following the norm, any more than people who are heterosexual. *The Velvet Rage* by Alan Downs (2006) is a worrying testament to this danger. In this extraordinarily popular book, Downs advances a peculiarly personal three stage model in which gay men are encouraged to move to 'authenticity' through the rejection of anything that might be considered distinctively 'queer'. The desired end point here is a form of integration identical to that of Cass's model, an integration that leads to the loss of any culture that might be distinct from or at odds with the heterosexual norm.

Of course, one might argue that by engaging with same-sex marriage or parenthood then these institutions are queered from the inside. There is some truth to this argument but it is grossly overstated. Access to privilege in these terms is strictly limited with those that push the boundaries too hard systematically excluded. If you are engaged in a relationship with more than one person, in to any form of non-monogamy, keen on BDSM or kink, or any other number of delights outside the 'charmed circle' of heterosexual norms for marriage and the family then you will most certainly not be welcome or able to queer these institutions in any meaningful way. The costs of this strategy are also high for such political strategies carry heavy implications for future progress, or rather, the lack of progress. What happened to stories of 'families of choice' (Weston, 1997) that were at the centre of queer narratives of family before the growth of lesbian and gay families with

children? This narrative had potent power to fundamentally change the core of what constitutes 'the family' but is now much rarer, as it has been substituted by entry into 'the family' as currently constituted instead (Langdrige, 2013). Beyond this, the rise of 'post-' discourses, whether this is 'post-feminism' or 'post-gay', premised on the notion that everything is equal now should ring serious alarm bells for all with any capacity to critically interrogate the reality of life for women and people who are LGBTQ. In the context of the rise of lesbian and gay families, Bersani (1995: 5) describes the situation thus:

Suspicious of our own enforced identity, we are reduced to playing subversively with normative identities – attempting, for example, to 'resignify' the family for communities that defy the usual assumptions of what constitutes the family. These efforts whilst valuable, can have assimilative rather than subversive consequences; having de-gayed themselves, gays melt into the culture that they like to think of themselves as undermining ... De-gaying gayness can only fortify homophobic oppression; it accomplishes in its own way the principal aim of homophobia: the elimination of gays.

The discipline of psychology plays its own part in this assimilative exercise. Dixon et al. (2012) make a persuasive case for recognition of the value of emotions beyond love and understanding when seeking to effect social change around prejudice. They highlight the unintended consequences of orthodox models of

prejudice reduction founded on fostering a sense of harmony between groups in conflict and offer up insights into how justifiable anger might be necessary to motivate structural change. As I have pointed out elsewhere (Langdrige, 2012), their arguments are particularly salient for understanding prejudice towards people who are LGB or Q, particularly when thinking through the way that stage models of development end with identity synthesis and quiet contentment. As Dixon et al. (2012: 425) state:

In so far as prejudice reduction undermines the already tenuous possibility that subordinate group members will develop the kind of insurgent consciousness that fuels resistance to inequality, it may ultimately reproduce rather than disrupt the status quo.

And so the danger with a state of quiet contentment as the end point of sexual development - in these terms, at least - is the loss of the affective quality of otherness needed to motivate collective political action. The resulting sexual subject of the 'benevolent' model of coming-out proposed by Cass is a-political, which is particularly ironic given the historical role of coming-out as a political act (Plummer, 1995).

But the critique must not end with Cass and be a simple historical exercise concerned with the limits of our psychological past in effecting profound social change. There are many contemporary psychologists (and other social/human scientists) whose work may be subject to a similar critique: the regression to a

conservative mean is just as potent now as then. The work of Ritch Savin-Williams (2001, 2005, 2011) has had an important impact on understandings of sexual identity development in many different ways and we should not lose sight of his valuable contribution to this field. Indeed, he is arguably the most influential writer on the psychology of sexual development at the present time and it is for this reason that his work warrants particular critical scrutiny. I argue that whilst Savin-Williams rejects the stage model of Cass for very good reasons, he has (perhaps inadvertently) replaced one – albeit 'benevolent' - conservative model of sexual development with another, and his own model serves to extinguish queer radicalism, difference and otherness just as much as the work of Cass and others did in the 1970/80s.

Savin-Williams (2011) sets out to offer a critique of the model of Cass (1979) and then outlines his own alternative, one grounded on his work on the developmental experience of contemporary US youth. I have mentioned many of the criticisms of the Cass model above so will not recount the arguments of Savin-Williams on that point here. Instead, I want to concentrate on his own model and the arguments that he makes to support a model based upon the idea of differential developmental trajectories. I should add here that I think there is value in the notion of different developmental trajectories and much to be said for the way that this concept eschews stages of development. However, in my view the model proposed by Savin-Williams (2011) is as conservative – if not, more so – than that of Cass (1979).

The idea that the next generation do not need to define their sexual identity against a heterosexual norm advanced by Savin-Williams (2011) is intriguing, though I think the evidence for this is overstated and generalised way beyond the sample that provided the data for this assertion in the first place, a criticism levelled by a number of others (e.g. Li, Katz-Wise & Calzo, 2014; Meyer, 2010). Regardless, it speaks to a liberal sense of progress and freedom for young people in being able to explore their sexual desire without fear or constraint that is undoubtedly appealing to many. Cohler & Hammack (2007) seek to understand the radical difference between, in their terms, the more traditional 'narrative of struggle and success' versus the 'narrative of emancipation' (exemplified in the work of Savin-Williams) of LGBTQ people in a socio-historical context. They are undoubtedly right that the stories we have available to us to narrate our sexual lives will shift and change over time (and also across culture) and rightly highlight the need to contextualise all such stories. A narrative of emancipation is not something that we would have been likely to hear spoken thirty years ago anywhere in the world but is now available anew, for some at least (mostly those privileged to live in cosmopolitan enclaves in the West). And whilst Cohler & Hammack welcome the possibility of a new narrative of sexual development as a supplement to the narrative of struggle and success, they also sound an important note of caution about the dangers of the narrative of emancipation as currently expressed:

The unconditional promulgation of the narrative of emancipation,
however, obscures its foundational premise of differential developmental

trajectories. ... While we view the emergence of a narrative of emancipation as in part connected to the influence of the queer theory movement on a new generation, we also view it with scepticism for the ways in which it encourages youth with same-sex desire to dismiss their distinctiveness from the larger culture. Cohler & Hammack (2007: 54).

Cohler and Hammack (2007) are, of course, right here about the potentially assimilative effect of a hegemonic narrative of emancipation. Indeed, if we dig beneath the surface of the liberal ideal of Savin-Williams (2011) then a conservative version of the same-sex desiring subject appears as the end point of the 'differential' developmental trajectories proposed. The early stages of Cass, where we see awareness of difference, are rejected in favour of a position in which there is complete denial of difference:

These young adult men knew their same-sex attractions and desires but they chose not to have their same sex sexuality define them or to be the major decider in their personal identity. Rather than obsessing over their sexuality, these young adult men were occupied with typical college pursuits, including sports, fraternities, and careers. Savin-Williams (2011: 684).

Concern with one's sexual desires has become an 'obsession' in this analysis with the rejection of this 'obsession' leading to the universally happy outcome of the

young man with same-sex desires becoming the typical college 'jock'. There is no space for difference, nor space for recognition of oppression, or indeed space for anger at the continuing heterosexism that these young men (or even, other people less fortunate than him) might face in this model of development. Much as Kitzinger (1987, 1989) argued in her insightful discursive analysis of measures of sexual prejudice, this psychological model (like that of Cass) conflates sexual development with liberal (and humanistic) ideologies, and as a result serves to minimise difference. Unless I am mistaken, men (and women) with same-sex sexual desires do not have full equality before the law in the USA, nor the unfettered ability to walk without fear hand in hand down any street in any town that they might wish. And yet we have the production of a less-than-queer subject here, deeply inflected with privilege but with apparently little care for effecting change in the social world that they inhabit, let alone a desire to effect change in the social worlds of other people with far less sexual freedom. And so it continues:

Young people with same-sex desires look and act like other youth, value marriage and family life, have the same career aspirations, and hold the same diverse range of attitudes towards mainstream values. Savin-Williams (2011: 684)

And so we see the end to any hint of radicalism, as the same-sex desiring subject is not only extinguished as differently identifiable (as LGB or Q) but is also married with a family and fully assimilated as heterosexual. The stages of

development may have disappeared in this model, and there *might be* greater recognition of multiple possible pathways, but only so long as they lead to the same end point. The end point is the liberal subject that is the result of a benevolent heterosexism; brought into the fold from the 'dangers' of difference and Otherness, anger and resentment; brought into the clutches of a quasi-heterosexual citizenship with a warm welcome and loving kindness. Whilst Cohler & Hammack (2007) rightly recognise the need to resist a hegemonic narrative of emancipation, their bifurcation of sexual development into (an almost historical) narrative of struggle and success versus (a contemporary) narrative of emancipation may inadvertently contribute to a sense of (liberal) linear social change in which emancipation (in the form of Savin-Williams) is the necessary or desirable end point. What of a narrative of *successful difference*, for instance, in which people with same sex desires might not struggle quite so much but still seek to hold on to as identity as LGB or Q? Or a narrative of queer identity in which there is active resistance to any notion of assimilation into the heterosexual norm? This has already been explored in the work of Hostetler & Herdt (1998) and Hammack (2005; Hammack & Cohler, 2009, 2011; Hammack, Thompson & Pilecki, 2009) but has no presence in the accounts of development being actively promoted by much traditional psychological research on this topic.

So, where next?

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The warm embrace of a benevolent heterosexism, of course, extends beyond sexual development to include all of those touchstone issues that are currently at stake in contemporary political discourses in the West. Critical examination of these issues and the assumptions underpinning this work, on the part of the both participants and researchers would be a great benefit for the discipline. To give one brief example of some of the issues at stake: in my 2013 article on gay parenthood I explore young gay men's expectations about parenthood in the context of Edelman's (2004) arguments about 'reproductive futurism', and the way that the figural image of 'the child' – and a consequent heterosexual logic - underpins all contemporary politics. What became clear from the stories of these gay men, and those in many other studies, was the growth of a story of parenthood as a possibility and the lack of any queer revelling in refusal and difference. That is, even amongst those men that did not want to become parents, the arguments were based on desire to not repeat their own (invariably negative) experiences of being parented, rather than a sense of queer joy in living a life unfettered by parenthood. More worrying still is how in other studies (e.g. Goldberg, Downing & Moyer, 2012), those gay men not embracing parenthood are being cast as 'selfish' and 'immature' by those opting for parenthood. Very little psychological research on issues like marriage and parenthood has approached the phenomena with a similarly critical gaze, in which the political is critically and directly engaged within the research process itself. Instead, much mainstream psychological research on LGBTQ parenthood, marriage and sexual identity alike has continued without any attempt to consciously work with or beyond an individualistic liberal ideology.

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The queers that embrace difference and otherness have no place in this work and are not even relegated to the outside (Fuss, 1991) anymore but are instead erased from existence entirely. The anti-social queer that has obsessed over their difference, grown angry at injustice and sees no place for hetero-normative constructs like marriage is nowhere to be seen. It appears that the 'compulsory' nature of heterosexuality in certain Western States (Rich, 1980) no longer relies on the presence of the 'homo' other as a symbol of lack (cf. Fuss, 1991) but has instead written that other out of existence entirely. This Western sexually liberal 'inside' has a new 'outside' it seems and that is the outside of the sexually illiberal foreign *Other*, exemplified in the image of the savage (middle)-Eastern terrorist (Puar, 2007). As Puar (2007) argues, we are now witnessing the rise of 'homonationalism', with the inclusion of certain queer subjects into the nation-state, to aid and abet the production of Orientalized terrorist others. Here, post 9/11, sexuality plays the role of identifying 'the uncivilised', under the guise of protecting us from 'the terrorist'. Acceptance of LGBQ claims for rights act as the marker of civilised society and become a key element of the growth in new (or perhaps, never ending) strategies of Western imperialism. I might add, as a caveat, that this boundary work is not without qualification however, for the Western 'civilised society' at stake here is accepting of those who are LGBQ only so long as they fit the broad bounds of normal (heterosexual) society, most often in the form of monogamous marriage and/or a two parent family unit.

So, looking forward, what might a queer psychology that is resistant to the pernicious effects of benevolent heterosexism actually look like? Well, it would need

to be a psychology that engaged with a critique of ideology in which the researchers work through a process of critique concerning their own value assumptions as they might affect the subject (and subjects) of their research. A questioning stance must surely be at the heart of any psychology that is professed to be concerned with social justice. It is not good enough to be driven by good intentions to open up space for sexual minorities if those intentions have unintended consequences that simultaneously close down possibilities for others, unless this is being conducted through a self-aware critical stance. There are good examples already available to us in the UK and North America, as well as many other territories, from the quantitative work of Hegarty & Massey (2006) and Massey (2009, 2010) to the qualitative research of Kitzinger (1987), Hammack (2005; Hammack & Cohler, 2009, 2011; Hammack, Thompson & Pilecki, 2009), and Clarke and Peel (e.g. Peel, Clarke & Drescher, 2007; Clarke and Peel, 2007). This work, along with attempts to explore the value of queer theory for psychology (Hostetler & Herdt, 1998; Hegarty, Barker & Langdridge, 2011; Riggs, 2011 etc.), offers up insight into how we might better shape the sub-discipline of LBGQ psychology to advance social justice without losing sight of our reflexive role as researchers in shaping the findings we produce.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to prosecute an argument concerning the dangers of a liberal psychology that is ostensibly concerned with social justice and the need to subject our own disciplinary assumptions to critical scrutiny. That is,

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whilst the liberal political spirit underpinning much of the most important work on the psychology of sexuality has led to considerable gains for many people who are LGB or Q, this is not without some cost. The cost concerns the risk of a gradual and pernicious assimilation, through an expanded notion of benevolent heterosexism, into a conservative status quo and loss of the potent affect that is needed to motivate political action and effect social change. Indeed, at its worst it involves the loss of the queer entirely, with no space for sexual difference or otherness. I have argued that the work of Savin-Williams (2011), like that of Cass (1979), assumes a particular kind of 'less-than-queer' subject as its end point, reflecting a dangerously conservative inflection of a liberal political sensibility. With Dixon et al (2012), I believe that the answer lies in us engaging in psychological work on social justice in which we are fully aware of our political position and the implications of our work for effecting social change (or not). It is not good enough to engage in 'bad faith' (Sartre, 1957) here and hide behind the veil of the scientist's white coat in a refusal to think through the political in our work. What we need is a new generation of psychological research in which there is recognition of the inextricable nature of the personal and the political, the scientist and social world and, most importantly, the researcher and the reality of the lived experience of the people they wish to claim the privilege to study. Key to all of this is a critical stance towards our own disciplinary assumptions and an awareness of politics and the flows of power within the practice of psychology itself. This should result in a research position where we are alert to the dangers of hostile and benevolent heterosexism, for instance, and instead search for the widest possible variety of people's lived experience through a

stance that is genuinely open to hearing stories of struggle and success, oppression and emancipation in equal measure.

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