

Professional's Award Winner 2012:

Moving beyond heterosexism? The good, the bad and the indifferent in accounts of others' reactions to important life events

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Latterly the psychology of sexualities has diversified. There has been increased engagement with queer theory and a heightened focus on sexual practices alongside continued interrogation of heteronormativity via analyses of talk-in-interaction. In this article, I offer an argument for juxtaposing the incongruent in order to further interrogate manifestations of heterosexism in lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people's lives. In this case, accounts of others' reactions to a happy event and to a sad experience. By drawing on two contrasting data corpuses – 124 people planning or in a civil partnership and 60 women who had experienced pregnancy loss – there is increased potential for understanding variation in 'normative' and/or heteronormative interpretations of LGBTQ lives. I suggest that, despite significant legal and structural gains for LGBTQ communities in a number of Western countries in recent years, and lively internal debates within the psychology of sexualities field, critical examination of manifestations of heterosexism should remain a central focus.

Keywords: *LGBTQ psychology; qualitative methods; pregnancy loss; miscarriage; civil partnership; marriage; heterosexism; heteronormativity.*

IN RECENT YEARS there have been moves towards 'queering' the psychology of sexualities and LGBTQ psychology (Clarke & Peel, 2007; Hegarty, 2011; Moon, 2008). While other disciplines across the social sciences, arts and humanities have been quicker to embrace queer theory, the intellectual potential of the psychology of sexualities has been invigorated through engagement with the theoretical opportunities offered by Foucault (1978) and Butler (1990), amongst others (Minton, 1997). There has also been a concomitant shift to research on sexual practices and behaviours – partly reflected in the change of the British Psychological Society Section name from Lesbian and Gay Psychology to Psychology of Sexualities in 2009 (e.g. Barker & Langdrige, 2010). These developments are very important, not least because they have facilitated the explicit widening of the field

beyond lesbian and gay identities to include bisexual, trans, intersex, cisgender, asexual and heterosexual individuals and groups as well as psychologies which reject heteronormative conceptions of sex/gender and sexuality¹. Many within, and outside, psychology's disciplinary bounds have used Foucault's conceptualisation of power to theorise resistance to heteronormativity (e.g. Harding, 2011).

A second trend within the field has been a sustained focus on examining the operations of heterosexism and heteronormativity at the more 'mundane' or everyday level of ordinary discourse, or, as conversation analysts refer to it, talk-in-interaction (e.g. Kitzinger, 2005; Kitzinger & Peel, 2005; Land & Kitzinger, 2005, 2007; Peel, 2001; Speer & Potter, 2000). One of the interesting, and important, contributions of this body of work is its capacity to capture the subtle, and

¹ Although the inclusion of diverse communities was always implicit, if not previously visible, in the original Section name of Lesbian and Gay Psychology (Kitzinger et al., 1998).

problematic, aspects of prejudiced talk, *despite* the positive structural and legal change which has occurred in some countries and jurisdictions over the last decade or so. Sociologists have theorised both the 'world we have won' (Weeks, 2007) and, more circumspectly, the 'world *some* have won' (McDermott, 2011). Weeks argued that the social landscape in Britain since the 1940s has irrevocably changed through the decline of traditional authorities and the growth of new technologies, whilst McDermott's analysis of young LGBT people's post-compulsory schooling choices highlights that inequalities arising from the intersection of sexuality and social class endure. Psychologists working in the sexualities field have much to continue contributing at both the more 'macro' and more 'micro' levels of analysis. Positive change must remain a key focus of the field. Mainstream psychology, by and large, remains resolutely heteronormative, if not out and out heterosexist (Clarke et al., 2010, p.20; Barker, 2007) – and inroads here need to be extended and consolidated. Psychological practice warrants ongoing scrutiny and, no doubt, improvements in many specialities and services: the recently published BPS guidelines for those working therapeutically with sexual and gender minority clients are a welcome contribution (Shaw et al., 2012). Working towards a world which is free from prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of sexual and gender identity remains as pressing now as ever.

So far I have told a story of both development and progress, and one of continued oppression and adversity. Both of these are necessary and contingent for the field to attract new scholars and ongoing research, guard against either the wholesale 'ghettoising' of the Psychology of Sexualities or,

equally problematic but for different reasons, 'mainstreaming' of the field. I am mindful of a discussion that I collected and analysed in a sexuality diversity training session (then known as lesbian and gay awareness training) with clinical psychologists whereby a participant articulated her decision for voting against the establishment of the original BPS Lesbian and Gay Psychology Section in 1998. She asked 'why should they be marginalised' and voiced that the Section 'robbed the general group of the richness of experience and knowledge that we need' (Peel, 2001). As we know, the original establishment of this Section received the largest 'anti' vote than ever before recorded in any parallel BPS ballot. It is crucial not to forget this history, or what a precious and hard won space this field is in the UK and elsewhere.

Pursuing research and scholarship which speaks to, and engages, 'insiders' and 'outsiders' whomever they be, is critical for the continued vigour of the field. In the spirit of this, in what follows, I offer an argument for juxtaposing the incongruent² in order to continue interrogating manifestations of heterosexism in lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) people's lives: in this case, accounts of others' reactions to a happy event and to a sad experience. By drawing on two contrasting data corpuses – 124 LGBT people planning or in a civil partnership and 60 LBQ women who have experienced pregnancy loss – there is increased potential for understanding variation in 'normative' and/or heteronormative interpretations of LGBTQ lives. What is conceptually interesting about juxtaposing accounts of these two, very different, forms of experience is their broader cultural (normative) meaning. It is not simply that marriage-like relationship celebration is

² I use the term incongruent here to mean – in its straightforward sense – things which are not alike, so two different data-sets focusing on divergent topics. But I also use the term to signal a lack of harmony or inkeepingness when adopting this approach. In other words, if we bring together and explore contrasting data-sets (in this case data about 'happy' and 'sad' events) there may be enhanced potential to generate insights that may challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about sexualities and the operations of heteronormativity and heterosexism, for instance, as well as offering a novel approach in psychology of sexualities research.

'happy' or 'positive'³ and pregnancy loss is 'sad' or 'negative', it is that the former demands, or there is a cultural expectation of, a reaction from others (Ingraham, 1999); whereas the latter is shrouded in cultural silence (Layne, 2003). The broad question I ask of these two, divergent, data-sets is – what are other's reactions? In considering other's reactions I conceive of other in its usual sense (family, friends, people at large) and also Other and 'Othering' in the feminist sense⁴ (e.g. Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). In the following section I outline details of these studies in terms of their aims and those who participated in them, before moving on to analyse accounts of how LGBTQ people's news was received by others.

The Studies: Civil Partnership and Pregnancy Loss

Following University ethical approval, in both studies, like most LGBTQ psychological research strategic opportunistic and snowballing sampling were used to recruit participants; the majority of whom were white, middle class and well-educated (Clarke et al., 2010). The first study explored same-sex couples' views and experiences of British civil partnership (Peel, 2009a; Peel & Jowett, 2006; Jowett & Peel, 2010). The aims were to understand: (1) couples' views about the legal recognition of same-sex relationships; (2) how civil partnership ceremonies are undertaken; and (3) the impact of civil partnership on same-sex relationships and families. One-hundred-and-twenty-four lesbian, gay or bisexual people participated in the study from October 2005 to January 2008. Fifty-two of these were interviewees,

72 were questionnaire respondents. There were 12 pre- and 18 post-civil partnership interviews and seven pre- and 29 post-civil partnership questionnaires⁵. Therefore, there were data on 19 couples before and 48 couples after civil partnership. The participants had experienced, in total, 47 civil partnerships (conducted between December 2005 and December 2007). These ceremonies took place close to the introduction of Civil Partnership in 2005: 14.9 per cent (seven) in 2005, 72.3 per cent (34) in 2006, and 12.8 per cent (six) in 2007. Table 1 provides more information about these participants.

The other study was an online questionnaire examining non-heterosexual women's experiences of pregnancy loss (that is miscarriage, still birth and neonatal death). The aims were: (1) to find out how birth (biological) mothers and social (non-biological) mothers experience pregnancy loss; (2) to gain lesbians' and bisexual women's views about health care provision, attitudes/behaviour of health professionals, and support provided by health professionals; and (3) to explore the support and information needs of lesbians and bisexual women following pregnancy loss. Sixty women from four different Western countries completed the questionnaire between November 2008 and March 2009. Table 2 provides more information about these participants.

The majority of the losses participants' experienced were early miscarriages (up to 13 weeks gestation, 76 per cent, 32). Others experienced late miscarriage (14 to 24 weeks gestation, 12 per cent, five), stillbirth (24 weeks+, 10 per cent, four), or the neonatal death of their baby (five per cent, two). Most

³ Of course, whether same-sex marriage or marriage-like frameworks are positive or desirable for diverse LGBTQ communities has been a source of much academic debate (see, for example, Clarke et al., 2004; Peel & Harding, 2004, 2008).

⁴ Simply put the capital 'O' is used to indicate that there are larger forces at work, usually connected to particular identity categories and axes of marginality and privilege. Harmful asymmetries between groups are signalled through the use of Other and Othering. So, for example, women are Other in a male-dominated culture.

⁵ A small minority of these data were paired pre- and post-civil partnership interviews with the same couple.

Table 1: Civil Partnership Study Demographic Information.

Gender	41% (50) men, 59% (72) women (including 1 trans woman).
Sexuality	100% of the men identified as gay, 94% of women identified as lesbian.
Age	Average age 42.6 years (range 20 to 83 years).
Ethnicity	99% (121) White, 1 Thai Chinese.
Class	85% (95) self-identified as middle class, 15% (17) as working class.
Disability	96% (115) not disabled.
Religion/Belief	49% (19) Christian, 44% (17) non-religious, 8% (3) 'spiritual'.
Children	76%(88) had no children, 24% (28) had children.
Relationship status	Average relationship length 11 years 4 months (range 1 year 6 months to 36 years); 98% (61) co-habiting.
Education	75% (72) University level education, 9% (9) A-level, 6% (6) GCSE or equivalent.
Employment status	78% (97) employed, 12% (15) retired, 4% (5) student, 2% (2) unemployed.

Table 2: Pregnancy Loss Study Demographic Information.

Sexuality	Lesbian (77%, 46), Bisexual (15%, 9), other (8%, 5) e.g. queer, butch dyke
Age	Average age 35 years (range 22 to 55 years).
Ethnicity	92% (55) white, 5% (3) Black, 1 white/Hispanic, 1 Sri Lankan.
Class	78% (47) self-identified as middle class, 15% (9) working class, 7% (4) other.
Disability	95% (57) not disabled.
Children	55% (33) had children, whose mean age was 4.5 years (range 4 days to 17 years).
Relationship status	82% (49) in relationships with women – 45% (22) of which were legally recognised, 8% (5) were single, 5% (3) were in polyamorous relationships, 3% (2) were married to men, 1 in a relationship with a transman.
Location	Britain (43%, 26), the USA (28%, 17), Canada (18%, 11) and Australia (10%, 6).

had been pregnant themselves (78 per cent, 47), while 13 (22 per cent) participants had experienced loss as the non-pregnant expectant parent. In the analysis that follows I take a broadly discursive psychological approach to these data (Edwards & Potter, 1992), being mindful of the types of actions (i.e. justifying, complaining) participants are accomplishing as well as the topical focus of their discourse.

Analysis

LGBTQ people have a complex relationship with marriage and marriage-like institutions (Harding & Peel, 2006; Harding, 2011; Rolfe & Peel, 2011) not least because of the heterosexism associated with weddings (Oswald, 2000) and the reification of the coupledness norm (Harding, 2008). Although civil partnership was widely referred to as marriage in the media when it

was first introduced in 2005 (Jowett & Peel, 2010), at the time of writing the Coalition Government initiated 'equal civil marriage' proposal for England and Wales is under consultation (Equalities Office, 2012). According to the Government, 46,000 civil partnerships (many more than they initially anticipated) have taken place to date, though this figure does not include foreign same-sex marriages recognised under British law as civil partnerships. Nevertheless, many members of LGBTQ communities greatly value the legitimacy and recognition afforded by marriage and/or marriage-like frameworks (Harding & Peel, 2006), and for those couples entering into a civil partnership this, invariably, constitutes a personally important event in their lives.

While research about LGBTQ parenting – especially lesbian mothers and the 'adjustment' of their children – has been a major focus in the psychology of sexualities (e.g. Patterson, 2000) this work has largely told a tale of successful parenting (Gartrell & Bos, 2010). By contrast, the loss of a pregnancy is a physically and psychologically distressing event which constitutes a form of (often socially unrecognised) bereavement that is 'amplified' in non-heterosexual contexts (Peel, 2010). Therefore, although these two types of experience (same-sex 'marriage' and pregnancy loss) constitute elements of same-sex relationships, the former is 'public' and positive; the latter is 'private' and painful.

Most (85 per cent) participants in the pregnancy loss study felt that their loss or losses had had a 'significant' or 'very significant' impact on their lives. Data on the personal significance of embarking on, or having, a civil partnership was not systematically collected, but as we will see in the analysis of the interview data below civil partnership was (unsurprisingly) constructed as a salient event by participants. When examining the participants' accounts of these two events what we see, however, is that reactions to the news of these events were varied and there were some explicit and implicit 'tensions' in the ways participants talked

about their family and friends' reactions, two of which I explore in detail here: (1) muted reactions; and (2) invoking heteronormativity. Many participants reported feeling that their civil partnership facilitated conversations that they would not have ordinarily had with their family and friends, and that often their reactions were more positive and supportive than they had anticipated. In the civil partnership study there was no attempt to quantify participants' views about other people's reactions to their civil partnership. In contrast, many participants (69 per cent) in the pregnancy loss study reported that their family and friends reactions to the news of their loss were 'supportive' or 'very supportive', although seven reported that other people's reactions were 'neutral' and three participants indicated that their reactions were 'unsupportive'. None of these participants claimed that friends and family were 'extremely unsupportive'.

In what follows I explore the ways that the issues of muted reactions and displays of heteronormativity are played out in these data. In considering these issues with respect to accounts of these two very different forms of experience we will see how both a sense of being treated differently is produced as problematic, but also how, in the case of pregnancy loss, being treated the same (as the implied heterosexual norm) is similarly produced as troublesome. I argue that it is in the nuances of the presentation of o/Other's reactions that we can see the continued operation of heteronormativity. In the final part of this paper I consider some of the implications of this analysis for continued consideration of manifestations of heterosexism and heteronormativity in the psychology of sexualities field.

Muted reactions

When we reflect on the marked enthusiasm and, to risk overstating the contrast, glee with which the news of different sex couple's impending nuptials are greeted by their nearest and dearest the implicit contrast in Ben and Martin's account below is thrown into relief.

Extract 1⁶

Interviewer: How did people react when you told them?

Martin: I think people were a bit unsure about how to react. And mainly what people said was 'congratulations' erm and then I think they thought – although honestly I don't know, but I think they thought 'Oh I don't know what the right thing to say is'. But it was a very positive, you know, reaction.

Ben: It will be interesting at some point, I don't know whether we want (to get) to it now or maybe later but it was interesting the response we got from family and friends. It raised some issues with us didn't it. Do you remember?

Martin: Did it?

Ben: Yeah. Telling Sally and Anita.

Martin: Oh your friends.

Ben: Yeah my friends. Do you want me to?

I: Yeah, yeah do.

Ben: They obviously didn't know what to say either and it seemed to generate some mixed emotions so telling two of my very close friends didn't really say anything. They were obviously – well I don't know really what they were thinking

Martin: Well we think the expectation was that they thought you'd always be on your own.

Ben: Yes so I've been a very reliable close friend and the expectation is that you'll be around forever I think in that context and it was clearly, it was clearly a shock actually. Particularly Sally my closest friend, she couldn't really say very much at all which [...] And then my family on the main part, my parents were supportive but my brother didn't really say very much either. He was a bit like 'Oh okay', 'Oh that's good'.

Martin: But that's a whole other story let me tell you.

Ben: So erm it is interesting actually and I found that – that was a bit upsetting wasn't it about my friends in particular, I expected them to be really pleased.

We can see in this extract that, despite Martin's initial assessment that others' reactions were 'very positive', Ben constructs an account that positions the response of their significant others as one of a lack of certainty and ambiguity around the 'appropriate' response to their news ('a bit unsure about how to react') and uses active voicing and the surprise particle 'Oh' (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006) to bolster the lack of intelligibility of their impending marriage-like ceremony. Later in their account Ben similarly ventriloquises the muted reaction from his brother ('Oh okay', 'Oh that's good') in a way that implies that his brother merely receipted their exciting and happy news rather than upgrading it (for instance, by saying 'that's wonderful!') as would be expected as the preferred response in ordinary conversation (Pomerantz, 1984). Ben also provides an assessment of his emotional reaction to this sub-optimal and unexpected reaction from family and friends in a way that strengthens the 'upset' evident in his talk. He does so by cutting off at the word 'that' when saying 'I found that' to self-repair and make his talk stronger 'that was a bit upsetting' (Schegloff et al., 1977).

His account, therefore, is built to signal the gap between their expectation of others reactions ('really pleased') and the less than ideal reality. We know that gay men and straight women's relationship are interesting and complex (Shepperd et al., 2010) and it is interesting here too that Ben's 'closest friend' (a woman, who it is clear from elsewhere in their interview is heterosexual) is described as not saying 'very much at all'. Not merely because she 'didn't' or 'wouldn't' but because she 'couldn't'. Arguably the use of the word 'couldn't' suggests not simply a lack of will on her part, but something more pervasive and significant about a broader lack of intelligibility for the two men entering a marriage-like framework that, in effect, renders her without the

⁶ Much could be said about the dynamics of couple interviewing, or conversely what dyadic interviewing could reveal about intimate couple talk, but doing so is outside the scope of this article (Peel & Jowett, 2006).

ability to speak. Arguably, here we are encountering the realm of ‘unspeakability’ and ‘unthinkability’ in the Foucauldian sense (Foucault 1991; Lamble 2009).

In the pregnancy loss data, by contrast, participants often employed extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986), in this instance ‘everyone’, to highlight the universality and assert the strongest case regarding other’s appropriately sympathetic reaction to their loss: ‘Everyone was devastated. We received a lot of flowers and a lot of people came to the memorial we held for him a few weeks after his death (Lesbian, Australia, stillbirth); ‘Everyone was sorry for our loss and we received lots of cards and some flowers’ (Lesbian, US, miscarriage); ‘Everyone was gutted and very supportive’ (Bisexual, UK, miscarriage). However, in other extracts from these data there was evidence of the more normative cultural silence (Layne, 2003) and discomfort around pregnancy loss experiences: ‘They were supportive but quiet, in general.’ (Lesbian, Canada, miscarriage); ‘They were generally not that supportive. Some said nothing. People were very uncomfortable discussing the issue.’ (Lesbian, US, miscarriage). What is particularly interesting about the characterisation of intent behind others’ reactions here is that, in some cases, participants were orientating to an assumption of homophobia within a lack of reaction, or support. For instance, ‘Most of our families just didn’t really know what to say but they weren’t negative’ (Lesbian, US, miscarriage). We see here that the participant is explicitly rebuking any negativity in the not ‘really know[ing] what to say’ reaction from her and her partner’s family.

The claims I am making about these types of accounts of ‘mutedness’ in other’s reactions are somewhat different. In the civil partnership example the way that the ‘mutedness’ is produced by the participants displays an orientation to it being both inappropriate and (arguably) heterosexist. In the pregnancy loss data, however, first there was not always descriptions of muted reactions (quite the

reverse). When there were mentions of muted reactions from others they intimated a more generic discomfiture with responding to bad news rather than the relational context the loss occurred in – that is the same-sex relationship – being problematic (cf. Peel & Cain, 2012). We could see the civil partnership example as Othering but perhaps not the pregnancy loss examples. In the next analytic section I push this theme a little further by considering how, in the participants’ accounts, heteronormativity is made problematically relevant in different ways.

Invoking heteronormativity

In this section I focus on the ways in which participants allude to a heteronormative cultural framework when discussing others’ reactions to their news. Broadly speaking, we will see that in the civil partnership data it is the construction of difference from heterosexual relationship celebrations that creates a space where heteronormativity becomes visible, whereas in the pregnancy loss data the opposite occurs. In Extract 2 the interviewer directly asks Mary whether there was a ‘different’ parental reaction to the news of her brother’s heterosexual engagement from her announcement of her civil partnership to Jane.

Extract 2

Interviewer: Do you think your parents’ reaction was different to his?

Mary: I’m sure it was yeah. I’m sure. I mean it was – I dunno two to – two or three minute discussion on the phone and I’m sure it- Well there’s no sort – (It’s amazing) my mum didn’t actually ask where it would be did she. Maybe she knows. Maybe she knows I don’t know but there was no...

Jane: They’ve probably been on the internet.

Mary: Oh how lovely a church will it be you know obviously so erm I don’t know, I mean I was thinking that when I was telling her, I was thinking would we then be moving on to what we’ll be doing at the weekend so quickly if it was you know I were getting married to a man cos it’s difficult, I mean

there's certain things like, they always send us separate Christmas cards so there's certain things in their head that can't click over onto this joint thing.

Mary here provides certainty ('I'm sure') of the differential parental reactions and then offers an account which positions this difference as problematic. First, she constructs the ensuing telephone conversation with her mum as short ('two or three minute') and then lacking in the sorts of content that might be appropriate when a significant other receives important news (such as asking for more contextual information about the venue). She constructs the lack of asking as remarkable and highly significant through the phrase 'it's amazing' and the positioning of the word 'actually' in the phrase 'didn't actually ask', before signalling that her mum's lack of questioning engagement could, perhaps, be due to her already having that knowledge ('maybe she knows'). Mary also produces this account in a manner that suggests that she was aware that the conversation was in some way problematic when set against (hetero)normative expectation as it was unfolding ('when I was telling her, I was thinking'). Finally, she then broadens the 'difficulty' out to a more pervasive issue, constructing her parents as having a vague internal inability ('certain things in their head') to treat her and Jane as a couple ('joint thing'). So, while there is no direct imputation of parental heterosexism or prejudice in Mary's account (in fact Mary – and Jane – generously proffer that Mary's parents may already have sufficient information about their impending civil partnership thus further engagement with their plans is not required) we can see that heteronormativity is invoked. Similarly, in Nina's account of her mother's reaction to the news of her civil partnership, heteronormativity inhabits the space between her 'fluffy' and 'romantic' perspective and her mother's 'very practical' response.

Extract 3

My mother made me laugh because I wanted to tell her and I knew that she would be supportive because she is supportive of our relationship and she has been for a good few years, but she made me laugh cos I rang her up and told her and part of me actually wanted – felt a bit fluffy about it. Sorry I keep using the word fluffy, a bit romantic about it and wanted my mum to be really pleased and she was but she sort of said erm 'ooh I thought you might' – something along the lines of 'oh I thought you might be ringing to tell me that because I wondered when you'd get around to it. Because I've been reading all about it in *The Guardian* and I wondered when you'd get round to it, because yes it's a good idea isn't it'. I was like 'yes, that's good that's very practical' but there's going to be no tears and none of this 'my little girl's getting married' y'know. (Nina)

We can see here that Nina iterates and (re)iterates the general 'supportiveness' of her mother towards her relationship in a way that is reminiscent of the sorts of ubiquitous disclaimers (such as 'I'm not racist but...') that feature in contemporary race talk (Augoustinos & Every, 2007). Clearly, the function of Nina's disclaimer ('she is supportive of our relationship and she has been for a good few years, but...') is very different from those deployed in race talk, yet this discursive structure (alongside the signalling of light-heartedness – 'made me laugh') works to mitigate the 'trouble' in the account of her mother's response to her happy news that immediately follows. Nina delicately dances around the appropriateness of being invested in the trappings of heteronormative relationship celebration ('part of me actually wanted-') and then uses active voicing to present a rather unemotional and matter-of-fact response from her mother. The contrast Nina produces between her emotional investment in her news ('bit fluffy', 'bit romantic') and her mother's pragmatic engagement with it ('I wondered when you'd get around to it') signals heteronormativity, which Nina then directly, and somewhat

sardonically, invokes through the word 'tears' and the phrase 'my little girl's getting married'. In different ways in these two extracts, then, heteronormativity is displayed by reference to differential treatment from significant others. By contrast, in the pregnancy loss data heteronormativity is invoked by the problematic similarity in treatment by significant others.

Extracts 4

'Almost everyone said right after they were sorry that don't worry we can try again. It made us very upset.' (Lesbian, US, miscarriage)

'The ones with kids tried to normalise it: they said, 'don't worry, just relax and it will happen' or 'i had a miscarriage too...' (Lesbian, Canada, miscarriage)

'People were very kind. Close friends sent flowers. I did not want to talk about the loss with anyone except my partner and people were able to honor my request. My mother talked about losing "her grandchild". I know that hearing my mother take emotional possession over our child hurt my partner deeply.' (Bisexual, US, miscarriage)

In these examples, the (hetero)normative response from others to miscarriage, especially the notion of 'trying again', was produced as problematic in respondents replies to the question: Please describe how those you told about your pregnancy loss reacted to the news. (Include as much or as little detail as you wish. For example, What did they say? Did you receive cards/flowers? Did they say 'never mind you can always have another one'? etc.) In the first two examples, the implied lack of understanding of the relational and situational factors involved in 'trying again' for women who do not have easy access to sperm, signals problematic heteronormative assumptions. The 'upset' conveyed

in response to the – presumably well-meaning and empathetic - 'don't worry we can try again' displays a lack of contextual understanding. To 'try again' is markedly different in different-sex and same-sex relational contexts; for the former it is a euphemism for heterosex. For lesbians, and other women in same-sex relationship or single women, there are multiple and complex meanings attached to the, rather blasé, phrase 'try again'; none of which involve the pleasurable, and comparatively easy, experience of coitus. Admittedly, fertility problems arise in different-sex relationships, but they are not the norm and heterosexuals' 'unintended pregnancy rates linger at about 50 per cent' (Wojnar, 2007, p.483). A non-heteronormative journey to conception includes (re)negotiating access to semen either through a known donor, clinic or other supplier, transporting and/or storing the sperm, and/or having the financial resources to access assisted reproductive technologies such as intrauterine insemination (IUI), in vitro fertilisation (IVF) or gamete intra-fallopian transfer (GIFT) (Mamo, 2007). Similarly, the 'normalisation' referred to in the second example belies the heteronormativity and heterosexism embedded in the notion ('don't worry, just relax and it will happen') - the antithesis of the un-restful, un-calm, intense, often emotionally and financially challenging process achieving conception in this context is. In the third example, the unintelligibility of the non-biological mother and problematic claims about biological connection are signalled (Riggs, 2007) in the account that 'My mother talked about losing "her grandchild". I know that hearing my mother take emotional possession over our child hurt my partner deeply'. We see here that the (often precarious) role of 'the other mother' (Aizley, 2006) is created by the (hetero)normative claiming of grandparental status⁷.

⁷ Of course, the 'precariousness' of the non-biological parent in planned lesbian families is dependent on the broader social and legal context. In this particular example the participant resides in the US, which has less progressive regulatory frameworks for same-sex families than elsewhere in North America and Europe. This means that often the non-birth mother has to apply to adopt her own children – a lengthy and financially and emotionally costly process. For some families who live in states that do not allow same-sex second parent

Concluding remarks

This article contributes to the small, but growing, literatures pertaining to Civil Partnership since it has become a reality in British society (Goodwin & Butler, 2009; Mitchell et al., 2009) and non-heterosexual peoples' experiences of pregnancy loss (Craven & Peel, in press; Peel, 2010; Wojnar, 2007). It also contributes to sexualities work on 'intergroup relations' (Peel, 2009b) through focusing on 'sexual minority' constructions of other groups, and the heteronormative mainstream. Leaving aside implicit differences in epistemic position, I would agree with Rostosky and colleagues that: 'Exploring the often tenuous and ambivalent nature of familial support as perceived by same-sex couples emphasises the powerful impact that families of origin relationships continue to have on same-sex couples... same-sex couples' conversations about family support illustrate the complex nature of this important interacting social context' (Rostosky et al., 2004, p.52).

In offering this analysis focusing on LGBTQ people's accounts of o/Others' reactions to two forms of important event in their lives I have made two key points. First, that if we combine data-sets we can generate empirical analyses that can highlight (potentially) new and novel ways of understanding LGBTQ experiences. Second, that in so doing, we should continue to interrogate the construction, operation and fracturing of heteronormativity and heterosexist discourses and practices. Furthermore, by offering this analysis I have drawn attention to some (enduring) heteronormative dichotomies: marriage as normative/intelligible and civil partnership as unintelligible/queer; and (hetero)normative parenthood as normal/natural; assisted reproduction as unintelligible/different. The psychology of sexualities has yet to comprehensively map

the shifting terrain of the language of heterosexism (to borrow from Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and I would like to see a renewed focus on this important project as part of the diverse field that is the psychology of sexualities. I end with some observations about the field and some suggestions for the future.

First, could we radically re-envision 'mainstream' psychology by placing the theories, concepts, and empirical insights generated by the psychology of sexualities at the heart of the discipline? What would the psychological landscape look like if it genuinely encompassed a diverse range of experiences, rather than simply 'adding-in' LGBTQ people and leaving the heteronormative framework of mainstream psychology intact? Second, LGBTQ-specific research and comparative research should continue to be generated and valued. In other words, there should be the continued promotion of LGBTQ-specific research that explores the lives of LGBTQ people on their own terms. However, the benefit of comparative research which avoids treating heterosexual people as the benchmark, and seeks to identify and explain differences between groups needs to be acknowledged (e.g. the disparities between LGBTQ and heterosexual and cisgender people on key health indicators). Interrogating multiple and intersecting axes of marginalisation and privilege (das Nair & Butler, 2012) should become a more central component of research in this field. Finally, and importantly, the sexualities field should concentrate on embedding impact in research. While there is prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of sexuality and gender there is pressing need for us to think creatively about maximising positive social change outcomes from our research – combining data-sets and conducting secondary analyses could form a useful component of this bigger picture.

adoption, this can sometimes involve moving to another state or country to attain legal parental status (Kilar, 2011). In Britain by contrast, since 2009 a non-birth mother is automatically entitled to be listed on the child's birth certificate as 'parent' if the couple are in a civil partnership or received assisted reproduction services at a clinic. Therefore, it makes sense that the assertion of grandparental status (which is 'next of kin' to a child after her/his parents) could be deeply hurtful when the status of one of the parents is tenuous or non-existent.

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