

Lesbian Gay

Trans & Queer Psychology

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**Book 1: The research: From the illumination of LGBT psychology
to the future**

Imagine the reaction you would receive if you told your friends, colleagues and lecturers that you had interviewed eight extraterrestrials and submitted the results for publication in a psychology journal. That is a bit what the field of lesbian and gay studies was like when I first began conducting research. Once in a while, an article would appear in a psychology journal based on a few case studies of gay men and sometimes an even smaller number of lesbians (there was little research on bisexuals). The authors were psychologists who had

come across these individuals in their therapy practices and exoticised and pathologised their personalities. In short, the first wave of LGB samples was not so much science as science fiction.

My own research has focused on research methods and challenges when studying LGBT individuals. I have compared LGB people to their heterosexual siblings (e.g., Rothblum *et al.*, 2006), and compared transgendered people to their conventionally gendered siblings (Factor and Rothblum, 2008). I've shown that when it comes to preoccupation with weight and dieting, it is people who are sexually involved with men (heterosexual women and gay men) who are more affected than people who are sexually involved with women (heterosexual men and lesbians; Rothblum, 2002). I've argued that focusing research on members of LGBTQ communities is important, and different from large population studies of people that include small numbers of individuals who have same-sex sexual partners and who may not identify as LGB (Rothblum, 2007). From these findings there are three key areas that I believe need ongoing consideration in the future of LGBTQ psychology:

Language and identity. In the future, researchers will have to take into account the ever-changing language about sexuality and gender identity over time and across cultures. Thus, old terms like 'invert' and new terms like 'queer' complicate research on sexuality and gender identity because inclusion criteria differ across place and time. People who are bisexual are less inclined to use labels for self-identity (Rust, 2000), possibly explaining the relatively small numbers of bisexuals found in research. New theory and writing from the trans movement will increase our understanding about the intersection of gender identity with sexuality.

New research methods. I would encourage researchers to write about (and journal editors to accept for publication) theoretical issues in the application of research methods for use with LGBTQ samples. Too often researchers are forced into a specific methodology (by their supervisors/academic advisors, funding bodies, and manuscript reviewers) simply because such methods are the status quo among the general population. Similarly, publishing anecdotal articles, pilot studies or results of a few interviews with LGBTQ people on new topic areas can be extremely useful in generating discussion among mental health practitioners, policy makers and researchers. Sometimes the most interesting parts of large, standardised, questionnaire studies are to be found in the comments written in by participants at the end of the questionnaire. Such qualitative impressions should be written up, and luckily there are now a number of LGBTQ journals across academic disciplines for submission of qualitative research.

End of homophobia and transphobia. Finally, a time may come when LGBTQ people are so assimilated into mainstream society that it will be difficult to conceptualise sexuality and gender identity as distinct categories. This will necessitate new methods for a new age.