EDITORIAL: ACCESSING QUEER DATA IN A MULTI-DISCIPLINARY WORLD: WHERE DO WE GO FROM QUEER?

GARETH J. TREHARNE & CHRIS BRICKELL

> If I am always constituted by norms that are not of my making, then I have to understand the ways that constitution takes place (Butler, 2004, p. 15).

A Starting Point and its Eventuation

When we proposed this special issue, our opening question was this: "What are the challenges in accessing queer data faced by researchers and members of the communities with whom we carry out our research?" This broad question suggests a number of more specific ones: "What is queer?", "What is/are queer data?" and "How are those involved in creating and accessing queer data positioned in different ways?"

Plummer (2011, p. 201) has mapped out the terrain of "queer theory". While this mode of thought is infamously difficult to pin down, he suggests a number of general concerns. "Queer theorists", he suggests, question the stability of categories of sex, gender and sexuality, and scrutinise the constitutive impulses of texts and discourses. They (we/you?) challenge the tendency to normalise heteronormative social arrangements, and to close off new possibilities. Most importantly, perhaps, queer theoretical approaches encourage researchers to critically analyse the (heteronormative) centre as well as the (queer) margins. At the same time, the post-structuralist roots of queer theory don't completely crowd out the seedlings of emancipatory politics growing in the same garden. We can still try to make the world a safer, more open and more diverse place. There are tensions here nevertheless. Not everyone who might be embraced by the term "queer" embraces it, and when the fluid-ity of "queer" starts to morph into a subjectivity of its own, it begins to congeal like yesterday's gravy.

Could "queer data" be any more stable? Browne and Nash (2010) make the point this way: "If, as queer thinking argues, subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming, how can we gather 'data' from these tenuous and fleeting subjects [...] What meanings can we draw from, and what use can we make of, such data when it is only momentarily fixed and certain?" (p. 1). This concern gives rise to others. Several articles in this special issue ask who decides what and who might be considered "queer" (or any other label that might group non-heterosexuals in some way other than as a deficiency of cisgendery heterosexualness). Who holds the power of definition here? Does queer data come from queer individuals, from queer communities or from queer practices? We might also consider how queer research further expands upon earlier "lesbian and gay affirmative research". These studies challenged the pathologising research common in recent decades — studies whose heteronormativity usually goes unnoticed (Herek, 2010). The possibility also exists that non-queer ("square"?) researchers might conduct queer research, and join in the challenge to that heteronormativity. Surely we must embrace our "allies" as much as — if not more than — we forgive our "foes".

In our call for papers we also asked how queer communities and stakeholders might be defined. Are these groups, in effect, a mob of stake-waving participants who wish to slay neat research or sadistic researchers? Several contributors to this special issue question the notion of "data" and the primacy of gathering

data from (objectified) others. Still, their critiques are tempered by suggestions for ways to work creatively with people and the traces they leave behind once they are gone, as Brickell for one demonstrates.

How does positionality differ between and among researchers and research participants? Undoubtedly, participants' voices are always mediated by researchers. They are measured, quoted and reported about, often in peer-reviewed (that is, re-mediated) books and journal articles. None of our contributors write as participants, although Treharne includes some examples of participating as part of his argument. Many academics could write such reflections if they looked to their own experience instead of representing *only* the lives of others. We are all potential participants in someone's study, in the same way that health professionals are all potential patients. Sometimes, indeed, we researchers are troublesome participants because we do not passively accept the limits and limitations of what is presented to us.

Who sets the research agenda, and what limits apply in queer research? The matrix of inside/outside is an important consideration here. To paraphrase Gill (1998), can only married white Kiwi gay men do research with white gay men in New Zealand about getting married? How do we manage biculturalism in the form of "mixed" heritage individuals and "mixed" heritage relationships in this example? If we follow through the logic of this insider matrix then we might conclude that we can only research ourselves, or others with whom we have shared specific experiences. The objectivists shudder at this concept and attempt to re-instigate a crisis of introspection, a method that, to some, seems frozen in the late nineteenth century. Still, this concern has transmogrified — at least in part — into the method of autoethnography (e.g., Adams, 2011; Ellis, 2004); reflexive research practices; and the reflective practice required for professional practitioners of psychology and other caring professions (e.g., Finlay & Gough, 2003; Walby, 2010).

As the implications of the "crisis of representation" trickle through to the mainstream, the artificial distinction between researcher and participant is being broken down. Let us consider how researchers might work with communities and individuals in order to *really* engage them in research, instead of regarding participants as mere repositories of "data" to be plundered. Might we all possibly become co-researchers (or co-participants?), or is that an aim that can never quite be realised? How can we researchers manage our subjectivity in the face of the realisation that we too are composed of variables, constituted by discourses and existing through our embodied experiences, just like our participants? Perhaps the very structure of the researcher–participant distinction is a vestige of both objectivism and the prevailing focus on the individual in psychological research. Let us ask how researchers conceptualise "data" and "representation" in making knowledge claims about what might be involved in being a member of diverse queer communities. If membership is required, how can we get a discount from our annual queer fee? Is there a family package?

Readers might be surprised to find a few dashes of humour throughout this special issue, along with narratives that are more personal in nurture [sic] than is expected of (hard) science. Let us not forget that psychology sits on the fence between (social) science and humanity. For some, psychology is the science of heterosexist evolutionary explanations (map-reading skills and fridge-raiding behaviours of Homo Modernus, to name but two examples). For others, psychology is about the humanity of self-awareness, a humanity that can bridge gaps between the particular and the ever-tentative general, the known self and the barely-knowable other, the internal mind and the inescapable sociality of being.

Other disciplines offer up their own interventions in this respect. Our call for papers emphasised the "multidisciplinary" character of research into queer identities and subjectivities, and our contributors likewise use insights

from sociology, history and education studies as well as psychology. Among education scholars, "liberatory pedagogy" — most famously articulated in Friere's book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Friere, 1972) — advocates justice, open dialogue, a questioning of truth claims and a real attempt to make a positive difference to those on society's margins. Feminist, lesbian, gay and labour historians have documented patterns of social domination and popular resistance to oppression, while many sociologists similarly question the status of "privileged knowledge" in the construction of social reality. Scholars in each of these areas insist upon the contingency — and ultimate changeability — of current social arrangements, and the forms of knowledge that buttress them.

So how do we position ourselves as researchers, maybe even as "queer" researchers? What do we tell our participants, our ethics committees and our colleagues — some of whom seem convinced we are married to the (opposite-sex) friends with whom we go for lunch? What do we tell our readers? The labels we, as researchers, might choose to apply to our sexualities (and other facets of our identities) can never rise above the locations and moments in which we research. We are not higher beings observing mere mortals. There are, however, consequences of the never-ending outing that continues precisely because the assumptions of heteronormativity never end — and also because words committed to ear and to (web)pages are hard to erase. But, like those of our participants, our own identities are in fact ongoing projects. We engage in these projects through a barely conscious repetition of simple acts, within a nexus of coincidences and constraints, as we do research.

Many of the contributors to this special issue share their sexualities with their readers and/or their participants. Some don't. Is it only fair that we share what we would request of our participants? How would we work with the assumptions this outing may instigate? (Why yes, we do like Kylie/interior design/tools/ soccer, but let's get back to talking about the research.) Identities, likings and relations are all more than a tick box, but there is also power in ticking a box — or crossing out the boxes and writing in your own box. Being a friend of Judy's is such fun.

A Table of Discontents

Our special issue opens with Brickell's tour of archived subjectivities. Records of male homoerotic desire, he suggests, can be used to help us imagine the lives of these posthumous participants. The purpose of these records is not to shed light on who was "gay", for that is a relatively recent creation, a modern packaging of a way of being. History is no less fluid than the queer present. Instead, Brickell provides us with archival examples of particular subjectivities and suggests how we might read the traces of these individuals' lives. We learn of these men's exploits and enjoyments, understandings and protestations. Brickell echoes Plummer's (2011) contention that an analysis of everyday life tells us something revealing about feelings, actions and bodies within "the constraints of history and a material world of inequalities and exclusions" (p. 198).

Ayling and Mewse slip back to the not-so-long-ago (originally typed as "now", but it is already "then"). They work with an innovative method of data collection: the face-to-face interview for the online era. Using chat software, they reconfigure the classic semi-structured interview — here, emoticons and LOLs replace glances and chuckles. The topic of barebacking is a controversial one for gay men, about gay men; there is no straight equivalent of barebacking (Flowers & Langdridge, 2007). (Until recently, of course, "bareback" meant to ride without a saddle, not without a condom.) Ayling and Mewse's use of online interviews with their six HIV-negative participants who bareback provides readers with a novel interpretive analysis of a lived phenomenon: sex that the men desire, but sex accompanied by intrapsychic conflicts that can be seen to be managed in avoidant and active ways.

Rolfe takes us deeper into relational territory. She reflects on the process of finding lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer participants who were willing to be interviewed as a couple about *not* wanting a civil partnership. Her research is historically framed by the changes to British law that made such formalisation of romantic relationships possible. (The equivalents to civil partnerships are also big business in New York right now.) Rolfe discusses a typology of concerns that participants may have when invited to contribute to research on a sensitive topic. She expands this typology with the notions of ambivalence and contradiction. Couples may struggle with these notions when interviewed even more than they do in "real life". Maybe it's time for another non-honeymoon?

Cripps describes the context of notoriety that can be generated by studies seeking queer data. Cripps's data address discrimination against lesbians and gay men by Christians who, as a group, are stereotypically imagined to be "sexually prejudiced" towards a multitude of individuals who come under the queer umbrella. Cripps reflects on her role as a researcher called to manage the "context of notoriety" that arose around her study. This context is not merely an experimental confound that can be controlled for; researchers cannot decontextualise participants even when exposing these participants to experimental manipulations. Cripps discusses some observations of participants' reactions, along with qualitative data that are secondary to the study's primary experimental outcomes, but which contextualise those findings. Her analysis demonstrates how research may impose a homogeneity on "meaningful groups", and suggests that members may interpret this homogeneity as a form of prejudice in itself.

As categories, sex/gender and sexuality are often taken-for-granted in social research projects. Treharne troubles this taken-for-grantedness and discusses options for working with the dilemma of grouping. He suggests that we need to critically reconsider how we sample populations in ways that more accurately reflect sexual and gendered lives — and

the changes in these lives over time. By re-thinking the labels we use for categories and the order in which we use them, and by questioning the prevailing assumptions that there are two sexes/genders and that heterosexuality is primary, researchers can positively influence the terms of the debate. We can resist the casual [sic] reinscription of categories, challenge existing regimes of power and better meet the needs of those we involve in our (queer) research.

Allen picks up the question "Do you have to identify as 'queer' in order to conduct 'queer research'"? She reflects on her research in secondary schools, in which she attempts — through a photo-elicitation project and a survey with multiple answer options — to "queer" the heteronormative spaces of the school. While the structure of the classroom and the formal apparatus of ethics processes work against the queering of educational spaces both in this case and in general, Allen suggests that a degree of transgression can still take place. The possibility of subversion can never be entirely foreclosed. In a similar way, the fluidity and epistemological challenges of queer theory open a space for "straight" researchers.

Nic Giolla Easpaig and Fryer remind us to critique our research tools and our carefully, but almost invisibly, scaffolded disciplinary norms. Purportedly "comprehensive" contemporary research is critiqued as reasserting heterosexist realities of violence as gendered oppression (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The authors raise three inter-related problems in research on violence: "psychologisation"; pathologising explanations; and the disconnection of power-knowledge from violence. They offer a joint perspective from post-structural feminism and community critical psychology that might be used to uncover, prevent and reduce violence or its (legal) defence. These authors also provide a welcome challenge to the reliance on "queer" and "data" in our call for papers in which we, in part, reasserted a singular multidisciplinary "world". Challenge lays the foundation for re-

flection, and we learnt much in the process of reviewing all these articles. We hope to hear more challenges to our "world" following the publication of this special issue. What's next for queer theory and queer data?

Vous n'êtes jamais seuls. Vous savez ce qu'il faut faire (Minogue, Chambers, & Williams, 2000)

Gareth's Acknowledgements

Thanks to Chris for making this special issue multidisciplinary and thanks to Jose for the walks.

Chris's Acknowledgements

Gareth's suggestion we embark on this special issue has opened up an exciting new interdisciplinary collaboration, and walks with Jeffrey dragged me away from the keyboard periodically.

Joint Acknowledgements

Thanks to Damien for the invitation to guest edit this special issue. Thanks also to the contributors, to Margaret Finney for her copy-editing, and to all our reviewers (see Appendix 1).

Author Note

Gareth and Chris both work at the University of Otago, Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand, where Gareth lecturers in the Department of Psychology and Chris co-ordinates the Gender Studies Programme. Both contributed equally to the conception of this special issue and the writing of this guest editorial. Email: gtreharne@psy.otago.ac.nz (for Gareth) or chris.brickell@otago.ac.nz (for Chris).

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