



SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND THE PLACE OF PSYCHOLOGY: SIDE-LINED, SIDE-TRACKED OR SHOULD THAT BE SIDE-SWIPED?

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Abstract

Since the early twentieth century, there has been considerable change in the level and quality of psychology's involvement in the area of sexual orientation development and homosexuality. Previously, psychoanalysis drew attention away from the notion of inherited biological factors as being able to account for homosexuality, and placed the focus on psychological factors. Although continuing to adopt a pathological position, it gave psychology a significant voice in the issue of causation of homosexuality. As the influence of psychoanalysis waned, behaviourism took its place, continuing psychology's involvement in the discussion until the 'homophile' movement of the 1960s began a radical campaign of criticism against the psychiatric and psychological 'propaganda' on homosexuality. This campaign was a significant factor in bringing about the changes that led to removal of homosexuality from the DSM in 1974, and to psychology's loss of influence in the area of sexual orientation development. Psychology's place was soon filled with the voices of biologists, and to a lesser extent, sociologists. However, the approach of each of these disciplines takes a superficial approach to understanding human behaviour, ignoring the depth of existing psychological knowledge. Unfortunately, modern psychologists have not found a suitable critical voice to identify the contribution their discipline could make. Some suggestions are made in regard to what a psychological approach would look like if such a voice were to be found. Social constructionist psychology is discussed as a suitable basis upon which to develop such an approach.

Introduction

One of the advantages of having worked in a discipline such as psychology for many years is that one has a chance to watch the changes that can occur over time. One such trend has increasingly occupied my attention, namely

the shrinking significance of psychology in the study of sexual orientation, and in particular, the understanding of how sexual orientation may develop.

In the 1970s and 80s I was a young clinical psychologist who was also a lesbian activist, educator of the general public on homosexuality and media face for the gay and lesbian communities of Perth. As such I was directly involved in the movement to improve the lot of lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals in the world at large and within my own profession of psychology. I came to this just as the DSM was being attacked by lesbian and gay activists in America for including homosexuality within its classification system of mental illnesses. It was both a frustrating and exciting time for a fledgling psychologist.

While I wasn't in America at the time, I received newspapers such as *The Advocate* and a lesbian one, the name of which I can't recall, and in them read of the debates between psychoanalysts, Bieber and Socarides (whom we saw as the arch enemies for their psychoanalytically-based opposition to homosexuals), and the new breed of activist psychiatrists who showed enormous bravery in coming out to their conservative colleagues. On the other side of the world, I lived the American battle as if it were my own, for my experiences with the narrow homophobia of psychology and psychiatry were identical and the frustration, despair and rage I felt equally overwhelming.

On several occasions, for example, I had to work with individuals who had been traumatised by extreme homophobic reactions from fellow psychologists. To be fair, my colleagues had mostly been educated on a diet of homophobic psychology manuals which drew upon the DSM's perspective.

At this time, a few books began to appear that suggested alternative approaches to homosexuality. I recall buying books by Dr Hendrik Ruitenbeek titled, *'Homosexuality A Changing Picture'* (1973) and *'The New*

Sexuality (1974), purchased from the Dr Duncan Revolution Bookshop for \$7.50 and \$4.95 respectively. These books were life-savers to anyone drowning in the negative views of traditional psychology and psychiatry.

By current standards, Ruitenbeek was still conventional, as evidenced by chapter headings such as 'A more positive view of perversions'; 'Overt homosexuals in continued group and individual treatment'; 'My homosexuality and my psychotherapy'; 'The experience of intimacy in group psychotherapy with male homosexuals' (one dare not think too deeply about what exactly went on in those groups); and 'The accursed race', from which I'd like to offer the following quote:

The experts continue to prove that the homosexual is "sick", "regressed", "immature", "polymorphous perverse", "orally fixated", and forever doomed by his "passive feminine identification". With all this, it is a wonder that the poor fellow can make it to the nearest bar. (Seidenberg, in Ruitenbeek, 1973, p. 159).

There was also Evelyn Hooker's 1957 paper, *The adjustment of the male overt homosexual*. I was fortunate enough to meet Evelyn on several occasions. I last saw her in the mid-eighties, in her apartment in Los Angeles, as I recall aged somewhere in her seventies, smoking, as she always did, like a chimney, the floor around her covered by columns (they could not accurately be called 'piles') of books and articles waiting to be read.

On this occasion we were talking about how she had come to do her famous study which provided the first psychological data to show that gay men could not be identified as any more psychologically disordered than heterosexual men: apparently she was having dinner with some gay male friends who, upset with outlandish and homophobic statements made in the media by several psychiatrists, pleaded with her to do a study to show how wrong these so-called professionals were. Fortunately for us all, their pleas did not fall on deaf ears.

I remember Evelyn chuckling as she described the reactions of those psychologists and psychiatrists who did a blind rating of the study data, having no access to information on the subject's sexual orientation.

So convinced were they, she said, of being able to distinguish gay from straight, that on hearing that no difference was found, they begged her to show them the test results again, just in case they'd missed something. Of course, they had not, and I like to think that some of them were forced to change their views of lesbians and gay men on the strength of this.

The new thinking on homosexuality that was beginning to be evident in the 1970s could also be seen in the publication of Saghir and Robins, titled *Male and Female Homosexuality: A comprehensive investigation* (1973), an early psychological study of lesbians and gay men, which carried sub-headings such as "Sissiness, or the girl-like syndrome", "Peculiarities of physique", and "Who is the husband? Who is the wife?", a book which wavered precariously between the older notion of homosexuality as pathology and the emerging radical thought that it may *not* be pathology after all, settling uneasily in the mid-position of homosexuality *with* pathology.

With its array of tables and statistics on everything from attempted suicide and drug abuse to thoughts about growing old, it was both a blessing and a curse, providing useful information that I could draw upon while appearing as an 'expert witness' in the Family Court, while at the same time reinforcing existing prejudices by its attention to standard psychiatric and psychological 'problem areas'.

Many a time I was confronted in the court room by an opposition lawyer, *selectively* briefed on the findings of Saghir and Robins by fellow psychologists and psychiatrists, usually of psychoanalytic persuasion, who was hell-bent (this applies to both the lawyer and the psychologist) on proving the unfitness of a lesbian mother. Fortunately, with its jumble of statistics, it was not too difficult to choose *another* finding from the Saghir and Robins study to back up my argument. The only problem was that no-one was particularly interested in facts at that stage, since blind prejudice was the order of the day.

Nor was the situation improved by a certain professor of psychiatry whose only reference material was (a) an old psychiatric text dating back to the 1940s and, (b) his house cleaner, a psychologically tortured lesbian mother who

had never recovered from losing complete contact with her four children as a result of her sexual orientation.

I can still hear the judge today,

Are you telling me, Miss Cass [unfortunately I did not have a PhD in those days to elevate my status anywhere near that of 'professor'] that Professor X, a professor of psychiatry has provided information to this court that is outdated and incorrect?

What was he to do when my answer could only be, "Yes, your honour". His solution to this dilemma was to ignore the professional witnesses. His feedback to the lawyers was that he would make up his own mind on the pathology or otherwise of lesbians, since the professionals clearly could not agree. Needless to say, that mother did *not* retain custody of her children, despite the father being an unemployed alcoholic!

Fortunately the Saghir and Robins study was replaced by others, the most notable from my point of view as a reluctant 'expert witness' being the study by Alan Bell, Martin Weinberg and Sue Hammersmith, titled *Sexual Preference: Its development in men and women* (1981). Amazing to think that 'sexual preference' was the term used back then to refer to homosexuality, when 'orientation is now so embedded in our thinking. The debates amongst academics that accompanied the gradual replacement of preference with orientation were fascinating and intense, as one would expect when such a major conceptual shift is underway.

The areas of investigation in the Bell, Weinberg and Hammersmith study tells us a great deal about the focus of psychologists at that time: mother-son and father-son relationships, peer group relationships, dating experiences, gender conformity, parental attitudes, sibling sex play, birth order, puberty. These were, of course, traditional areas for psychological study, areas that underscored the concerns of mainstream, that is, homophobic, psychology, areas that had to be tackled first in order to lay to rest those prejudiced beliefs that psychology traditionally held about homosexuality.

The contrast between these areas and those I've recently reviewed for the *Journal of*

Homosexuality indicates the shift that has taken place. The papers I've reviewed cover topics such as 'Sexual dysfunction and relationship difficulties among lesbians', 'The effects of narrative therapy on gay men recovering from sexual abuse', 'The attitudes of lesbian mothers towards male role models', – clearly the modern psychology student (whose research topics drive many of these publications) does not feel compelled to prove the 'normality' of the homosexual, as did the early studies.

This trip down memory lane highlights a trend which requires much more consideration than it has been given, that is, the changing and often conflicted place of psychology in the understanding of homosexuality. This trend is, I believe, just as relevant now as it was some years ago.

If I were a young, fresh-out-of-university psychologist looking at where psychology fits *now* into the study of sexual orientation as a whole, let alone homosexuality, I think I would be feeling despairing at my insignificance, my lack of voice, and at the relatively minor role allowed our discipline. Perhaps I am being overly pessimistic, but in scanning the last fifty years, it appears to me that psychology has been relegated to the side-lines of the main game.

By 'main game' I mean the strong and persistent research focus on trying to explain how a homosexual orientation evolves. Let me say that I am not suggesting that this necessarily *should* be the area that takes all our interest, nor that the primary question of the main game researchers (i.e., 'what is the cause of homosexuality') is even an appropriate question. And nor am I discounting the valuable research carried out in the myriad of other areas that have nothing to do with causation.

However, the fact is that the research world as well as the general community (not to mention the gay community) is fascinated with the question of causality, whether we like it or not. Media interest in this area is strong and will always ensure that it gets plenty of air-play and print coverage.

But where is psychology in all this? As I said before, we have been relegated to the side-

lines. Not only are we sitting on the benches, hopefully waiting our turn to play, we've actually become distracted by some B-grade games over on the next field, and are fooling ourselves into thinking that we'll get equally noticed by playing for the B-grade teams as we would playing for the A-grade.

I would like to use the remainder of my paper to elaborate on this point, my central thesis being that we have been effectively side-lined from the study of sexual orientation by the biological 'big-boys'. Being reduced to the level of a B-grade player, we have turned our gaze onto the small detail aspects of homosexuality and sexual orientation and allowed ourselves to be side-tracked away from the main game. Although, I believe, we have our own unique skills necessary to play the main game effectively, and, more importantly, to *improve* the way the main game is played, we have put up little argument for being considered for the A-grade team. Not surprisingly, therefore, our voice carries little weight. More importantly, by not fighting to be included in the A-grade team, we have unwittingly fed into a view of psychology as ineffective.

In effect, there is, at this time, almost no psychological input into the study of what leads individuals to develop persistent sexual-romantic attractions for others, whether these be persistent over a life-time or over a shorter period. Boosted by the force of the Human Genome Project, much of the literature is focused on genetic and other biological factors, despite research findings persistently revealing that biological factors are never enough on their own to explain homosexual orientation, and indeed, that studies proposing that they are, are highly suspect (Stein, 1999).

Whenever I read a research conclusion referring to the possibility of non-biological influences, I eagerly read on, wanting to see that the researcher understands psychology's deep understanding of behaviour and, heaven forbid, might even have read up on the impact culture has on our perceptions and behaviours. Alas, I always reach the last full-stop without detecting any such understanding. So, I then wait, with, I must say, diminishing anticipation, some response from academic psychologists, hoping they will bring the biologists to task on their narrow

view of human behaviour. I want someone to offer a proposal that will encourage researchers to consider the complex ways in which biological, psychological and cultural factors might all play a part in sexual orientation. Sadly, there has been no critical voice from psychology, and indeed it could be said that there has been no voice at all. Only a silence that tells me of the weak and ineffective position psychology now holds.

Yet, our position has not always been so bleak. When Freud proposed, in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, that homosexuality was the result of a combination of inherited factors and environmental influences, he drew attention to the psychological. Although the kernel of this idea had existed previously, Freud's detailed proposal, coupled with the rising strength of psychology as a profession and psychoanalysis as a sub-set of this profession, seemed to strengthen interest in the psychology of homosexuality.

A growing interest in familial relationships and upbringing soon gave psychoanalysts and psychologists plenty to get their professional teeth into, albeit teeth that were largely honed on the notion of homosexuality as pathology. While Freud himself did not perceive homosexuality as pathological, many of his followers did.

As the influence and status of psychoanalysis began to wane in the 1950s and 60s, other schools of psychological thought stepped in to fill the gap. I vividly recall attending lectures in third and fourth year psychology in the late 60s and early 70s where aversive therapy, the behaviourist's replacement of the psychoanalytic couch as preferred method for converting homosexuals into heterosexuals, was described in detail. Just as psychoanalysts had filled their journals with lengthy articles on the pathology of homosexuality, so now, behaviourists began to fill theirs with the behavioural equivalent.

This was psychology's heyday. The study of homosexuality had seemingly been wrested from the biologists and was now claimed as psychological territory.

Of course, few psychologists of today are likely to see this claim as something to be

proud of, since psychology had simply adopted the historical stance of religion, the law and medicine in proclaiming homosexuality as 'faulty' psychological development. But, at least psychology was 'in there', actively involved in the study of homosexuality and assuming it had a 'right' to be there.

But, just as psychology was beginning to puff up its chest with importance at what it had to say about the causes of homosexuality, other forces were coming into play. The so-called 'homophile' movement, the early gay liberation movement was emerging during the 1960s, and by the late 60s was vigorously attacking the psychiatric and psychological position on homosexuality.

This attack was spearheaded by Frank Kameny, who was president of the gay liberation organisation, Mattachine Society, in Washington. Kameny pushed the (then) radical view that homosexuality was a normal variant of sexual behaviour. He criticised psychiatric and psychological research as being flawed on methodological grounds, identified the assumption of homosexual as pathology as nothing more than a 'theological position', stated that the scientific community had forfeited its right to speak on homosexuality, having shown itself to be incompetent and compromised by prejudiced value systems, and criticised therapists for upholding society's heterosexual bias in their claim to help homosexuals when the real purpose was to cure them of their homosexuality. Additionally, he criticised the stance taken by the homophile movement, at that time, of aligning itself with the scientific community in order to promote research on homosexuality aimed at showing that gay men and lesbians were not 'sick'. "Those who allege sickness", Kameny stated, "have created *their* need for *their* research. Let *them* do it." (1965, *The Ladder*, in Bayer, 1981).

Kameny's arguments soon led to increasing verbal and written attacks on psychologists, psychiatrists and psychotherapists over what was perceived to be their illegitimate power in the area of homosexuality. Political protests were also organised in the form of interruptions to conferences where proponents of the pathology model were speaking, and to

strident demands that homosexuals be invited to participate in panel discussions on homosexuality. Leaflets railed against 'psychiatric propaganda'. Psychology and medical courses that used unfavourable reference material were picketed until they adopted gay-affirmative material. Therapists who advocated homosexuality as sickness were boycotted.

The position taken by the gay liberation movement was that traditional psychiatry and psychology were no longer relevant in the way they depicted the homosexual. The intention was not, however, to simply side-line psychology and psychiatry from the discussion; rather it was to dismiss them totally from the job of trying to understand homosexuality. Traditional psychiatry and psychology were being told to butt out, to take their Rorschach and aversion bats and go play in someone else's backyard.

In 1970, first in San Francisco at an American Psychiatric conference, and then in Los Angeles, at the second annual Behaviour Modification Conference, homosexuals disrupted the showing of a film depicting aversive conditioning techniques (aimed at eliminating homosexual attractions) with cries of 'barbarism' and 'medieval torture'. Philip Feldman (the aversion therapist in the film) attempted to justify his work by arguing that he was simply responding to the needs of those who wanted to achieve a heterosexual 'adjustment'. He was shouted down. At the Los Angeles conference a demonstrator announced to a startled audience,

We are going to reconstitute this session into small groups with equal numbers of Gay Liberation Front members and members of your profession and we are going to talk as you have probably never talked with homosexuals before, as equals. We're going to talk about such things as homosexuality as an alternative life style. (In Bayer, 1981)

An account of these events was later recorded in *The Advocate* under the heading, 'Psychologists get gay lib therapy'!

Gradually the confrontation of psychiatric and psychological influence by the gay liberationists began to hit home, in some quarters at least. Individual psychiatrists and psychologists began to hear the message and

to rethink their views on the pathology model of homosexuality. Clearly, the militant actions I've described had been the opening salvo in what was to be a three-year battle that would eventually see psychiatry change its classification of homosexuality as a disorder, as indeed it did in 1973/1974.

A similar change was occurring in psychology, leading to a shift in research attention away from causation and onto areas related to the way gay men and lesbians dealt with their sexual orientation. Homophobia, identity, parenting, stigma management, isolation, gay-affirmative therapy and so on were the new areas for research interest, replacing concerns with early childhood experiences, family dynamics and childhood gender roles. Actually, the reality was that these new areas for research interest were largely being examined among the growing numbers of openly lesbian and gay psychologists. Let's not fool ourselves into thinking that mainstream psychology suddenly saw the error of its ways and decided to place 'understanding the modern homosexual' on its list of 'must-do' research.

As one of those openly lesbian psychologists, I vividly recall this period as one of transition, of conflicting views and reactions. For example, despite positive support from other young clinical psychologists, I spent two years at one university in Western Australia in the late 70s trying to get a PhD proposal on gay and lesbian identity formation accepted (amid comments such as "it's pretentious for the student to think she can develop a model"), until my supervisor suggested I try another university that had just been established. However, despite being welcomed into this new university, when it came time to submit my thesis, my supervisor carefully selected, as thesis markers, three individuals whose relevance to my thesis appeared to almost non-existent, an attempt to protect his and the university's reputation. And the academic career I had looked forward to: well, as a feminist therapist, teaching in sexual therapy and with a PhD on homosexuality, I was clearly whistling in the wind with that one.

The new research areas that began to take the place of pathology research in psychological journals proved to be both a blessing and a curse. While psychology

researchers turned their attention to the newer issues such as identity and discrimination, providing some valuable insights into the way the modern gay man and lesbian lived their lives, researchers from the biological sciences began to reassert themselves in the study of causation issues. This was often done in dramatic ways, with claims of gay genes and the like dominating media and community attention.

Often the researchers had come from an entirely different background, lured, I would suggest, by research money and fame. I recall a meeting in 1995 with one researcher, now well-known, who, having received considerable research funding in a way he hadn't been able to before turning to the study of homosexuality, appeared to revel in the sensationalist media attention he received following publication of his results. I might add, he also proudly told me he'd read a book on psychology in the course of doing his research. I cannot tell you how despairing I felt, knowing how his ignorance of psychology, and hence, human behaviour, was being fed into his blinkered view of sexual orientation and, hence, his research.

With the biological taking centre-stage, old psychological theories of sexual orientation quickly became unpopular. In no time, psychology had not only been side-lined from the action, but was also attacked for fuelling the arguments of right wing groups who latched onto the non-biological accounts to push their position that individuals 'choose' homosexuality. In the wake of dramatic accounts of 'gay genes', 'gay fingerprints' and 'lesbian ears', psychology was essentially discredited.

The question is, how did this happen? How did *we* let it happen? Where were our protests at this development? Aside from Daryl Bem's theory of sexual orientation development (1996), known, unfortunately, as 'the exotic becomes erotic' theory, which was soon criticised for its poor understanding of female sexuality, there has been almost nothing of note.

How could this be, considering that, we, of all people, understand the complexities of human behaviour; we, of all disciplines know that human behaviour, especially behaviour as

richly faceted as sexual orientation, cannot be explained in simple, single-causation and reductionist terms. Was it intimidation in the face of the arrogance of biology? Was it an inability on our part to make the transition from pathological notions of causation to something more positive? Or was it that we simply did not have the theoretical direction for taking up the task? I would suggest that an element of all three has been present.

In marked contrast to psychology, sociologists seemed to readily throw off the mantle of 'sexual deviance' that characterised their discipline's approach to sexual orientation, stridently countering the biological 'take-over' with the voice of constructionism. Emphasising cultural and anthropological data, sociology proposed that sexual orientations are socially constructed entities and that sexual orientation behaviours are shaped by culture, rather than being natural and universal. For many, this theoretical perspective provided a compelling and empowering argument against biological determinism. In no time, it seemed to fill the gap left by psychology.

But, while the sociologists were expressing their frustration with the narrow biological approach, imagine what we psychologists were feeling. For now we were faced with the unenviable position of being *spectators*, much like an audience watching a tennis match, as sociologists and biologists hit their opposing viewpoints backwards and forwards in the so-called constructionist versus essentialist debate of the 1990s. The Essentialists believed that everyone, regardless of culture, has a sexual orientation that is an inner quality possessed by individuals. Sexual orientations are considered natural *things* and the terms homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual simply describe these realities. The Constructionists, on the other hand, believed that sexual orientation categories have been created from the cultural environment and people behave in accordance with these types.

A couple of sharp-witted theorists referred to both these approaches as the 'fax' model of human behaviour (D'Andrade, 1992; Strauss, 1992), where one supposedly became a lesbian, heterosexual or whatever simply because either the culture taught this or biology directed it.

Throughout the 1990s, we psychologists watched the debate as the opponents, sociocultural determinism and biological determinism batted their balls backwards and forwards. But the problem for me was that both positions made me extremely uncomfortable.

Whichever way I looked at it, psychology was still being side-lined. Little attempt was made by either side of the debate to address psychological aspects of behaviour. The way sexual orientation was taken into the private functioning of the individual, into people's thoughts, actions, feelings, sexual arousal patterns and social interactions, was ignored. It seemed to me that even a biological or cultural predisposition could not account for the development of patterns of sexual-romantic attractions without drawing upon the areas of cognition, needs, emotion, motivations, social influence and so on. It was as if the weight of theory and research that was the foundation of *my* discipline did not exist.

And as a feminist and sexuality specialist, I was equally uneasy with the focus on what I saw as an essentially male view of sexuality. Without the female or lesbian voice in the discussion, notions of fixed and unwavering sexual desires seemed to rule the research agenda. While some of my clients experienced their sexual orientation in this way, others clearly did not.

I began to wonder what a psychological perspective of the development of sexual orientation would look like. Clearly, it could not rest upon an assumption of pathology. And, heterosexuality, similarly, should not be the starting point against which other patterns of sexual-romantic attractions would be judged. Nevertheless, throughout history and cultures, attractions for the opposite sex predominate, and this fact must be acknowledged and explained.

I knew I would also feel more comfortable if a psychological position focused its gaze, not on labels, but on the behaviour which is considered at the core of sexual orientations, that is, the attractions, desires and emotional connections experienced by individuals towards each other. However, the sexual orientation labels we use so readily, and the

identities that arise from these, cannot be ignored either, since they are a significant part of our psychological reality.

And we need to stop feeling defensive, as many of us seem to be, about possible biological and cultural influences on the development of sexual-romantic attractions. Surely we can find a theoretical model that will accommodate these possibilities while at the same time giving weight to psychological influences. In doing this, we need to try and explain, not only persistent patterns of sexual-romantic attractions that occur over a lifetime, but also intermittent and varying patterns that may occur.

I feel the literature on *social constructionist psychology* is the most suitable starting point (e.g., Bond 1988; D'Andrade & Strauss 1992; Gergen, 1977; 1984; 1985; Sampson 1977; Semin & Gergen 1990; Shotter 1989; 1991; Shweder & LeVine 1992; Shweder & Sullivan 1993). While this does not give me the specific model for understanding sexual-romantic attractions, it certainly provides a significant foundation upon which I can build my own ideas.

Social constructionist psychology, as a theoretical approach, does not ask me to decide between constructionist and essentialist ideas. The essentialist beliefs and experiences of many of my clients who felt strongly that their homosexual orientation was a natural part of themselves, can be acknowledged, as can the notion that culture plays a big part in the way we conceptualise sexuality. Most importantly, it gives psychology a place in the development of behaviour.

While there is no space in this paper to give you a detailed outline of this theoretical perspective (though see Cass, 1996; 2005), I would like to briefly summarise some areas where it offers psychology the chance to play a relevant part in the study of sexual orientation.

Firstly, social constructionist psychology proposes that human sexual behaviour, including sexual orientation behaviour, is the product of a complex process engaged in between individuals (including their biological and psychological capacities and experiences)

and their sociocultural environments (including their indigenous psychologies) (Gergen, 1985).

These three variables – biological capacities and experiences, psychological capacities and experiences, and sociocultural environment – are seen to interact with each other in a reciprocal way. By this I mean individuals and their environments simultaneously influence and are influenced by the other (Berger & Luckmann, 1975) in a seamless relationship.

In this sense, persistent sexual-romantic attractions are considered an outcome of these reciprocal interactional processes. Several people have used the analogy of baking a cake to depict what I've outlined so far – that is, several different ingredients are mixed together, and a process of cooking blends these into a new entity, the cake, in this case, the sexual orientation. However, the cake analogy is too simplistic to be applied to any behaviour as complex as sexual behaviour, especially when we recognise that each of the 'ingredients' in the reciprocal interaction process has several levels of complexity, any of which can become engaged in the interaction process.

Nevertheless, the model is significant because it treats all elements of the interaction process equally, and hence offers psychologists the chance to contribute to our understanding of sexual orientation. There is no longer a place for one discipline taking the high ground about its ability to explain homosexuality or any other expression of sexual-romantic attractions.

Now the question is not whether sexual orientation can be explained by biological *or* cultural *or* psychological factors, but rather, to what degree, and in what way, each of these plays a part in the process of reciprocal interaction to produce sexual-romantic attractions. With little effort, we can imagine countless different combinations of the three variables which could work to produce either quite different sexual orientation behaviours or apparently similar ones.

Another aspect of the social constructionist psychology approach which will appeal to psychologists is its focus on the idea that human beings *actively and intentionally*

participate in the construction of their psychological, and hence sexual, realities. Human beings, as we know very well, are not passive creatures who simply react to their environment or submit to their biology. Rather, they have the capacity to monitor, attend to, select, organise, ignore, or in some way act upon their environmental and biological givens (Gergen & Semin, 1990; Shweder, 1992), and do so quite readily at all times. In fact, both individuals and environments can be said to have intentionality; they can act with purpose towards each other. How this can happen in the area of sexual-romantic attractions should be fertile ground for psychology researchers.

A key concept for social constructionist psychology is the indigenous psychology that serves as a foundation stone of each sociocultural environment. As I mentioned earlier, it is one element of the environment factor which feeds into the reciprocal interaction process.

An indigenous psychology can be described as a network or body of psychological knowledge that exists within each sociocultural world (Heelas & Lock, 1981; Smith & Bond, 1993). It includes all the information that each sociocultural environment takes to be the truth about human 'nature' or psychology, and covers everything from psychological concepts and processes to the reasons why people act the way they do and the problems they will experience. In other words, the indigenous psychology defines the psychological reality for those living within each culture.

The concept of sexual orientation is part of our own Western indigenous psychology, leading us to assume without question the existence of something called 'sexual orientation'. In our minds, we just 'know' what it is, the behaviours which define it, how it develops, and what people with specific orientations will do, think and feel. Without realising it, we're 'set' to see sexual orientation in our world.

Here is another possibility for psychological theorising and research. The question that comes to mind is: how do individuals acquire, manage, influence and become influenced by the knowledge of their indigenous psychology? I've touched on this in a previous publication

(Cass, 1996) in regard to the acquisition of identity, suggesting that my theory of gay and lesbian identity formation is an attempt to document the constructed nature of identity, specifically how people translate our indigenous, everyday understanding of lesbian and gay identity and identity acquisition into self-knowledge, behaviours, beliefs and experiences via the reciprocal interaction process.

However, for some years now I've also been keen to try and account for the development of persistent patterns of sexual-romantic attractions (that is, so-called sexual orientations) by exploring what happens in the reciprocal interactional process. I am firmly of the belief that psychological theory and research knowledge has something important to offer in our understanding of this process. In fact, I would go so far to say that without psychology's input here, drawing on areas as diverse as language acquisition, cognitive schemas and interpersonal interactions, we can never fully understand the development of sexual-romantic attractions.

In saying this, I am not trying to simply make us more relevant by staking out psychology's 'territory'. Yes, we have been side-lined and our discipline's integrity has been questioned. And, yes, we have been decidedly unassertive in the situation, and need to take a stronger stance about the part psychology can play in understanding sexual orientation development.

But, I don't want us striving to become relevant simply to promote 'egos' or provide interesting PhD topics. My point is that psychology actually has a rich knowledge base that needs to be employed if we are to fully understand sexual orientation.

However, the initiative must be taken by ourselves to get back into the main game, an initiative that should include attempts to theorise the part psychology might play in the processes of sexual orientation development. This won't be easy. Because of psychology's past history in this area, we cannot piggyback on early thinking. Instead we must start from scratch. How refreshing! A clean slate upon which to place new ideas. A chance to think outside the existing square. An opportunity to reverse the superficiality of existing

perspectives on human sexual behaviour. Surely we can do that. Indeed, we must do it if we truly believe that psychology has something important to say.

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