

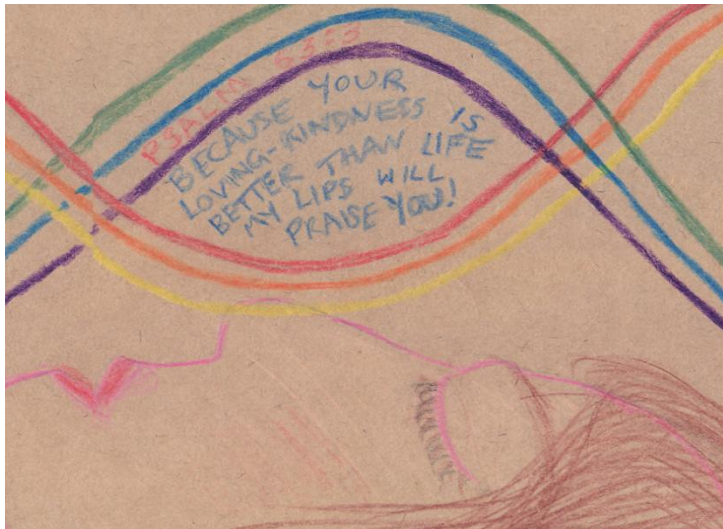
April-May 2012, Issue 2

Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth

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Young Persons Diary (Image 1) Psalm 63: 3 Because your loving kindness is better than life my lips will praise you!

Some Finding and Thoughts

Young, Religious, LGBTQ?...

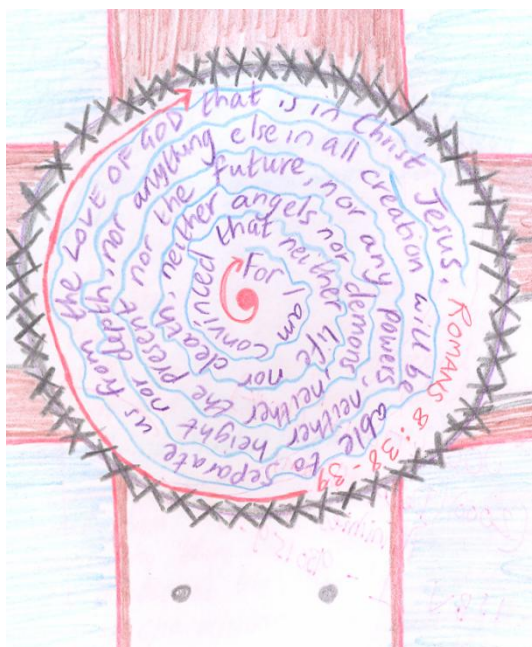
This Economic and Social Research Council project began in September 2011 and the first phase of research has been completed: participants aged between 16-25 years old in Newcastle and Durham who identify as LGBT Christians have been interviewed, completed social identities mapping exercises, and personal diaries (see images). We are now **interviewing participants from Edinburgh and Manchester: please be in touch** with Yvette (taylor@lsbu.ac.uk) or Ria (snowdonr@lsbu.ac.uk) to participate! We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Many participants have so far spoke about **'coming-out' before God**, as a religious act, an act of conscience and care, of being true to oneself, one's family and a larger community. This gave many respondents comforts but also caused some tensions, even when these were quite subtle '...Because they haven't preached any homophobia, it doesn't lead

me to believe that they are pro homosexuals. Just because you don't say anything bad about someone, doesn't mean you are necessarily pro them...', Mark, 21.

There were expressed worries about **acceptance and forgiveness**, with some respondents quoting from Scripture as well as querying these statements. For example, Andrew (24) expressed concerns about Church debates and anxieties about sexuality, reconciling this in his belief that he, too, was '**created by God**'. These sentiments of being 'born this way' whether as an act of God, or a biological fixity, have been long debated within and outside LGBT community: clearly these debates still resonate for a younger population. **Forgiveness and compassion** were strong emotions addressed by young respondents, many of whom spoke of living their religion as a practice beyond Sunday service, to be integrated into practices and everyday life as a '**Fabulous**' and '**Beautiful**' act, quoting from Metropolitan Community Church (Newcastle) key phrases in providing LGBT Christian space.

Many spoke of seeking advice and doing their best to live out some felt **contradiction between religion and sexuality**: 'Sometimes I think, 'What if I'm wrong?' Then I think, 'Well, if I'm wrong and I get to heaven, again, does God care more about who I slept with or more about how I walked through the world and what I did to help other people?' And if God is loving and forgiving as Christianity teaches, then when I get up there, if I'm wrong and I'm sorry about it, God isn't going to be fling me into hell for something that I'm sorry about. So in good conscience, I think I can continue to live this life unless something proves me absolutely wrong', Claire, 24.



Young Peron's Diary (Image 2) For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 8: 38-39

All interviewees spoke of **negotiating Christian and 'Queer' identities**, speaking of changing strategies across time and place, depending on venue, audience and anticipated responses. The commercialised 'scene' space was sometimes depicted as a place of comfort and ease, while for others, this was an uneasy space where they wouldn't 'come out' as religious. There were different ways interviewees managed this but often this was about display and meanings - to themselves and to others as they sort to **balance and integrate** sexuality and religion in their lives: 'Probably gay dominates Christian quite a bit but that's just because it's easier to be gay than it is to be Christian, on an outwards appearance. I can walk round with a cross round my neck and if anyone asks me I'll say I'm a Christian, but you can kind of tell, people don't really need to ask that, you can tell, especially if you're holding hands with a girl, it's not like I can walk round holding hands with Jesus', Nicola, 21.

Several young people so far have spoken about '**queer**' beyond sexual identity— '.... Now, I am really happy to say that I am 'queer', non-sexually queer, like sort of in terms of what it means, just... I mean, like when I say 'queer' I actually

just mean normative, and normative is subjective, that's the whole point, but I mean 'my view' of normative, and part of it' straight but it's not all of it. Like, even music, which is a big think in my life, I love music of the Renaissance, like, how many 13 year olds like music of the Renaissance, like, 16th century polyphony? Like, why did I like that as a 13-year-old boy? I honestly don't know. So I suppose that's what I mean when I say 'queer', I was just always a little bit weird', John, 21).

We thank all respondents for sharing - and we welcome more participants!

Making Space for Queer Identifying Youth - Participate!



Queer Religious Youth?

- Are you LGBT & Christian?
- Do you live in Manchester or Edinburgh?
- Are you 16-25 years old?

If you have answered YES to all of the above and would like your experiences to be heard then you are invited to take part. Your participation is completely confidential. For further information, check out our facebook page under 'Queer Religious Youth'.

GET INVOLVED!

If you have any questions or would like to arrange an interview at your convenience, please

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Conference News

LGBT Lives in Dialogue, Newcastle University and [Weeks Centre for Social Policy](#), 24th Feb. 2012

On February 24th 2012 a dialogue day event was held between Newcastle University and the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, LSBU. The event signalled the successful end of the British Academy Small Research Grant held by Dr Mark Casey (Newcastle University) and Prof Yvette Taylor (LSBU). The grant entitled '*Bright Lights, Big City: Transformations and Transitions in Lesbian and Gay Socio-Spatial Sites in the NE of England*' was a small scale research

project that has focused upon the diverse lives of lesbians and gay men living in three distinct locations: Middlebrough, Newcastle and the wider county of Northumberland. The project investigated the connection between social class, gender, and gentrification and how these are negotiated in diverse socio-spatial settings. Investment in the 'gay as now' model in the re-branding of the cityscape has given increased visibility for a limited number of commercially attractive lesbian and gay identities. The project moved beyond the 'bright lights' of the commercial gay scene, examining how diverse lesbians and gay men negotiate gendered, sexualised and classed urban and rural spaces and sites.

Attending the dialogue day were academics, PhD students and those working in a number of NGO's and local government posts from across the UK. The event was designed to create an inclusive and open space to foster greater communication between those working with and in LGBT communities. Mark focussed upon lesbian and gay lives in Newcastle and the complex understandings of space and the place of the 'sexual other' in an increasingly gentrified landscape. Yvette's paper 'Queer Suicide: The Life and Death of Queer Futures and Failures' drew from her UK and US research, following her Fulbright award (Rutgers University, 2010-11). The audience was encouraged to break into small and informal groups to reflect upon the papers and the issues raised, but more importantly draw from their own research, professional and personal experiences in discussing current LGBT lives and the diverse lived realities and needs of LGBT communities.

Questions discussed included; 'what is dialogue and when do we need it?', 'how can we foster and improve dialogue to ensure it is inclusive?', 'the role of academic research in informing NGOs and wider LGBT communities' and 'what are understood as the key concerns for LGBT lives currently and in the near future'? It was agreed by a number of those in attendance that such basic questions and understandings needed clarity to allow the fostering of beneficial and inclusive working relationships between those working from different professional backgrounds within LGBT communities.

A particular question arose during the afternoon focussing around the accessibility of academic research and its worth to the research participants and the communities often involved. A key agreement from the dialogue day was a concern for the future funding of LGBT community groups and research attached in the current economic climate. Most participants celebrated the worth of events such as the cross-institutional Dialogue Day in facilitating good and inclusive working relationships in difficult economic times.

Civil partnership and the Importance of Dialogue

By Em Temple-Malt, Manchester University, **LGBT Dialogue Day** attendee

What does civil partnership mean to you? Does it give you a warm fuzzy feeling, or does it get you hot under the collar? Or are you perhaps a little indifferent and disinterested in the current media hype? Academic and political debates about gay marriage have been building since 1989 when the topic of gay marriage was 'theoretically' debated by American attorney's Stoddard and Ettlbrick. From this point it seems you are encouraged to take a side, and are given a series of reasons to either support or oppose gay marriage. For those in support, the availability of civil partnership symbolises that society appears more tolerant and accepting of same-sex relationships than it has been and indicates a shift in social status; such that gaining legal recognition for one's same-sex relationship would mean that gay relationships were to be seen *as* valuable and *as* legitimate as heterosexual relationships. It would some argue allow for better visibility of gay partnerships alleviating the assumption we're all straight unless we 'out' ourselves. Finally, it was imagined that having a civil partnership could strengthen relationships with members of family-of-origin.

For those in opposition, the arguments are decidedly more radical and the prospect of civil partnership was, and continues to be controversial. Those who desire and want to register their partnership are accused of lacking ambition

and wanting to become the same as heterosexual couples. This is because it is assumed that to qualify for a civil partnership, non-heterosexual couples are required to organise and structure their relational practices in the same way as heterosexual married couples. These concerns I hasten to add do have substance, civil partnership privileges the 'couple' relationship and does not offer legal and social protections to multiple-partners. Also the visibility of civil partnership is paradoxical, because it brings visibility and recognition to some relationships that might prefer to avoid state interference because it undermines their financial circumstances and threatens their individual entitlement to welfare.

It was these debates that first attracted me to the topic of civil partnership; I was curious about the motivations behind these claims. I was also struck by the fact that little acknowledgement had been given to the role that a person's age might have in shaping their experiences of having a civil partnership. These concerns led to me to develop a PhD project; *After the Act: Narratives of Display and the Significance of Civil Partnership*. The main aim of my project has been to explore the significance that civil partnership might have for a generation of people who would have formed and sustained intimate relationships without access to legal recognition. Doing this project has meant I've travelled all over England and Wales, speaking to couples in joint interviews and individual interviews (just one member of the couple), and I've been welcomed into people's homes and workplaces. The stories that people have shared have focused on a number of key areas of their life (i) what their life was like *before* civil partnership, (ii) what their civil partnership day was like; was it a big celebration or a formality, who came and how did they react to the couple and each other, and then (iii) life *afterwards*; has it altered relationships with family-of-origin, has it made their relationship more visible, or are there still places where their relationship is invisible.

Stories shared have been varied; the age of participants and duration of their relationship appears to affect the kinds of significance that civil partnership has. Where family-of-origin relationships are concerned civil partnership can strengthen these relationships but equally, civil partnership can have a negligible effect in bridging estranged family ties but this largely depends on the existing quality of the relationship. What civil partnership does though, is to ensure that the couple feel they have a protective veneer around their relationship and this protects the couple's existing commitments from the interference and unwelcome intrusion from family members and others who might not otherwise respect or recognise the couple's relationship. In times of bereavement or ill health, having a civil partnership with this protective veneer is hugely significant and brings psychological security.

One of the most overwhelming and satisfying privileges of this project has been talking about my project to others (family members, friends, fellow academics, acquaintances, and service providers). I am struck by the power that civil partnership has to invite other stories and create a space for dialogue. Three examples suffice, I was chuffed to meet receptive people at the recent *LGBT Lives in Dialogue day* in Newcastle (February 2012), and touched by the fact that some people were willing to share stories about future plans and reasons for entering into a civil partnership, and others justified why they were not in a civil partnership, finishing the day with a pint among new friends down at one of the first gay pubs in Newcastle was perfect. Within my Sociology department I have been struck by the stories that my (heterosexually) married colleagues share that are surprisingly similar to those shared by civilly partnered couples – the wedding being expanded to accommodate guest's expectations and small deviations from conventional wedding attire such as wearing DM boots under the traditional white meringue dress! Finally, I had occasion to take these stories to the recent BSA conference in Leeds (April 2012) and share some of the ways that civil partnership was significant, with audiences who wouldn't ordinarily hear these stories. I felt these people left with a real appreciation and understanding of the potential significance that civil partnership can have.

Sexuality, Gender Identity and Faith Conference

Monday 11th June 2012, 10.30am – 6pm Joachim Room, St. Hild & Bede College, Durham University

This one day event funded and hosted by Gender & Law at Durham (GLAD) brings together academic and non-academic speakers to offer new insights into the lived experiences of LGBT people of faith, and the issues involved in fostering greater cohesion between LGBT and faith communities. It bring together investigators from two major empirical projects in this area. Professor Yvette Taylor and Dr. Ria Snowdon will present findings from their ESRC funded project “Making Space for Queer Identifying Religious Youth” (2011-2013) and Dr. Sarah-Jane Page (Aston University) will draw on research from the AHRC/ESRC funded project “Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-faith Exploration” (2009-11).

Feature: Queer Identifying Religious Youth Advisory Group Member, Prof Andrew Yip: Researching Religion and Sexuality

Professor Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip, University of Nottingham

May 2012

Religion and sexuality has been the key area of my research career in the past two decades. One of the main rewards of this journey is that I have the opportunity to listen to fascinating – and sometimes heart-breaking - stories of people of different sexual orientations, from diverse religious backgrounds. These stories are about how they try their best to make a meaningful life as people of religious faith as well as sexual beings. In other words, they want to live a life that recognises and appreciates the importance of their religious faith and sexuality – and these two aspects should become part of who they are; their humanity.

In 2011, together with two colleagues, I completed a research project which explores the sexual and religious identities of 693 young people of different sexual orientations, from a host of religious faiths. These young people, aged between 18 and 25, kindly gave us their time in completing an online questionnaire. We also interviewed 61 of them across the UK, and out of these, 24 of them completed a video diary over a period of approximately one week. This large project has generated a lot of very interesting data, which we are still in the process of analysing. Contrary to the general perception that young people are not interested in religion, the young people we studied consider their religion of paramount importance. They argue that their religious faith offer a crucial anchor in their lives as they negotiate different challenges in a complex world. Importantly, many of them argue that religion is much more than just a set of teachings, beliefs and rituals. Rather, it should also be action-based, in terms of bringing about social justice and change.

In terms of sexuality, these young people have different stories to tell. Many, particularly those who are gay, lesbian and bisexual, express disappointment with the lack of understanding and acceptance within their religious communities. Even amongst heterosexual young people, there is a strong sense that sexuality is still very much a taboo subject in religious spaces. Therefore, it is not surprising that only 1% of the 693 young people we study consider religious leaders the most important source of information and influence in terms of their sexual values and behaviour. On the other hand, we have also come across stories of peaceful accommodation of sexuality and religion, which are often an outcome of the young people’s continuous effort rather than that of religious leaders. Much more information about the key findings could be found in a report we published, mainly for non-academic users, entitled *Religion, Youth and Sexuality: Selected Key Findings from a Multi-faith Exploration*, which can be downloaded from the project website: www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/rys.

In the same year, I also completed another project with a team of European researchers, which studies homophobia in Italy, Hungary, Slovenia, and the UK. In each of these countries, we undertook a legal study (i.e. the provision and nature of sexual equality legislation), as well as a sociological study (i.e. how heterosexual people understand

homophobia and what factors inform their understandings; and how lesbian and gay people understand and experience homophobia). Focusing on the sociological studies here, our research shows that religion is featured prominently in our respondents' understandings of homophobia. Indeed, conservative religious teachings that do not affirm homosexuality – often strengthened by conservative cultural values that emphasise heterosexual marriage and family – are the key factor that underpins some respondents' opposition to homosexuality, especially in relation to same-sex family and children. The various case studies of this project are published in a book entitled *Confronting Homophobia in Europe: Legal and Sociological Perspectives*, which can be downloaded on the project website: www.citidive.eu.

These two projects remind me of the important fact that, while much progress has been made in terms of social policy and academic research, there is still much more work to be done in promoting a better and inclusive understanding of sexuality and of religion – and their relationship to each other.



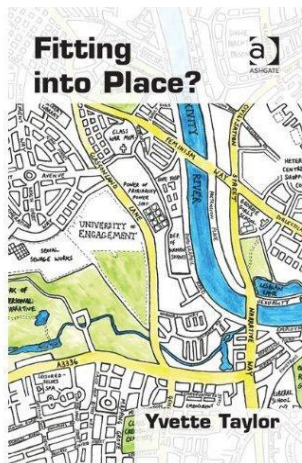
Other News

MA Gender and Sexuality

An MA in Gender and Sexuality has been introduced by Yvette Taylor as Head of the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, at London South Bank University from September 2012.

Yvette states that the course 'promises to be truly interdisciplinary' with modules delivered by experts in the field of Sociology, Social Policy, Cultural Studies, History, and Human Geography. Ria Snowdon will on 'Understanding Sexuality and Gender Across Time and Place'. This degree will be offered 1 year full time and 2 years part time. Interested students can contact Yvette for information (taylor@lsbu.ac.uk)

Book Launch [Fitting Into Place: Class and Gender Geographies and Temporalities](#), Ashgate,



'Fitting into Place? is a major contribution to our understanding of gender and social class inequalities in the twenty-first century. Strongly theorised, yet powerfully grounded in a range of voices across social difference, its rich tapestry of qualitative research weaves together space and place with actions, attitudes and the affective. The book is "a must-read" for anyone interested in contemporary class and gender formation.' Diane Reay, University of Cambridge, UK

Yvette Taylor's extraordinary book brings out into the open the structural violence of social class in Britain. It is much more than just a trenchant analysis. Through her profound attentiveness to the lives of working class women in the north east we access a deep sense of how the complexities of de-industrialisation furnish the cultural landscapes of class and gender. The result is an expansive and textured account of working class life beyond anything that Orwell and Hoggart could have achieved. This is a book that needs to be read urgently by politicians and policy makers but also by theorists of urban life who rarely get close to the experiences documented in this book and what it means to live with the structure forces that fit people in to place.' Les Back, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK