

1

Overview of the historical and contemporary discourses influencing social work with lesbians and gay men



Introduction



Social work is by its very nature a politically and socially constructed activity. When considering social work with lesbians and gay men it is therefore necessary to locate it within its historical, political and social context as social work tends to reflect the ideological moment. Because social work is a practice dependent on the use of language as one of its key activities/skills in engaging with people, thought needs to be given to how different discourses relating to sexuality have impacted upon social work theory and practice. In this chapter we therefore discuss the historical, social and political context and discourses and ideas that we think are significant to this area of social work practice before we look at the detail of social work with lesbians and gay men.

The meaning of 'sexuality' has changed over time. In this chapter we give an overview of lesbian and gay history relevant to understanding the position of lesbians and gay men in the UK. We also examine a number of different theoretical perspectives from psychoanalysis, social constructionism and post-modernism that we argue have been and are currently relevant to social work practice with lesbians and gay men.

Historically, some of these ideas have been used as tools to 'liberate' and 'oppress' lesbians and gay men and therefore a closer analysis is required. The influence of this social, political and theoretical history is then considered in terms of current discourses and the impact of this on social work practice.

A brief overview of lesbian and gay history relevant to social work



Others have recorded the details of lesbian and gay history in the UK (Blasius and Phelan, 1997; Stryker and Whittle, 2006; Cook et al., 2007; Jennings, 2007) and offer a full and interesting commentary. It is not our intention to attempt to replicate such endeavours but rather to note key moments that have impacted on social work (Brown, 1998a).

Chapter 2 notes the development of both criminalising and oppressive legislation towards lesbians and gay men and the development of equalities legislation since the turn of the century. Legislation and social policy initiatives are dependent on their historical context and this is clearly illustrated in this arena.

A key moment in the history of lesbian and gay rights was the event known as 'Stonewall' in 1969. Although this took place in Greenwich Village, New York, it had international ramifications. 'Stonewall' refers to three days of rioting that resulted from a police raid on a club in Greenwich Village. These raids were commonplace at the time but the resistance that the New York police encountered on this particular occasion was not. This event was important symbolically as it signified the 'beginning' of gay pride and lesbian and gay resistance. A subsequent meeting at the London School of Economics arranged by Aubrey Walker and Bob Mellors, both of whom had been influenced by events in America, signalled the birth and development of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the UK. The GLF had an explicit 'left' agenda and incorporated both socialist and feminist ideas.

If Stonewall is associated with the radical politicisation of lesbians and gay men and the development of the GLF in the UK in the 1960s, the publication of the Wolfenden Report in 1957 (Wolfenden, 1957) is associated with the development of 'liberal reformist' lesbian and gay politics in the UK. This report was the outcome of a Home Office committee's findings on homosexuality and prostitution. After three years of deliberations the Report recommended the decriminalisation of consensual sex between men over 21. It took another ten years before this

was enacted in the Sexual Offences Act 1967 which made sex between consenting men in private legal. The Homosexual Law Reform Society was formed in 1958 to agitate for reform to enable the Wolfenden recommendations to be realised. Another such group, the Committee for Homosexual Equality, was formed in 1969 (changing its name from Committee to Campaign (CHE) in 1971) and was a predominately gay male organisation arguing for equality. Mills et al. describe the CHE as being more 'respectable' than the GLF with a tighter structure and a broader political base (2007: 183). The main difference between the CHE and the GLF was that the CHE was both a social and liberal campaigning organisation using more traditional methods whilst the GLF was an organisation associated with left liberation politics:

Within lesbian and gay activist politics, there has always been and there still remains the polarised binary positions of reformism versus liberation; lobbying versus 'in your face' direct action; reasoned passion versus raw passion. In Britain, these different positions were held in the 1970s by the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) representing reasoned lobbying, while the Gay Liberation front (GLF) held the mantle of passionate direct action. (Brown, 1998a: 31)

A similar pattern emerged in the 1990s in the UK with the organisation 'Outrage' associated with transformationalist politics, and the political lobbying group Stonewall associated with reformist politics. Brown has argued elsewhere that 'this is just a particular construction of a set of complex realities' (1998a: 31). However:

Crudely, the 'reformist' position argued for equal rights for lesbians and gay men and access to the same rights as heterosexuals, while the 'transformationists' argued for the deconstruction of notions of gender and sexuality. (1998a: 31)

We would argue that with the exception of Hicks (2000; 2005a) much of the writing about social work with lesbians and gay men has been within the 'reformist' tradition, arguing for equitable treatment rather than the transformation of the accepted orthodoxies associated with sexuality, relationships and the construction of the family. We maintain that for the realisation of social and political change both the radical and liberal positions are necessary.

Outrage was symbolically important as it signified a particular quality of resistance and celebratory politics (reminiscent of some of the GLF activities), responding to a specific historical moment associated with a

number of factors. Firstly, a Conservative Government came to power in 1979 and focused attention through a number of social policy debates on lesbians and gay men as symbols of 'the decay of civilisation' (see Chapter 2). Secondly, Outrage responded to the homophobia unleashed by the association of HIV/AIDS with gay male sexuality. Thirdly, Outrage represented a practical interpretation and application of Queer politics. Queer theory/politics has been influential in gender and sexualities studies within higher education from the late 1980s. The reclamation of the term 'Queer' was linked to Queer theory and is associated more generally with post-modernism. Whilst post-modernism has had some impact on social work knowledge (Healy, 2000; 2005; Fook, 2002; Hicks, 2005a), Queer politics has mostly passed social work by.

Another major factor in the development of lesbian and gay politics and organisation was the impact of the second wave of the women's movement from the 1960s onwards (Jennings, 2007). This movement brought together lesbian and feminist political discourses. It was within this area that much of the radical thinking about social work and feminism as well as social work with lesbians and gay men took place. The women and social work conferences held in the 1980s had a significant focus on lesbian and gay issues in social work. This was mirrored within the Lesbian and Gay NALGO conferences during the 1980s where much of the discussions had a specific feminist and socialist flavour. However, although conference discussions were concerned about such debates, this didn't always translate into social work publications of the time. Brown comments that 'recent feminist social work literature has had little, beyond generalities to say about lesbians' (1992: 204). In fact, some of the most sophisticated writing about social work with lesbians and gay men came out of the Radical Social Work tradition of the 1970s and early 1980s (Hart and Richardson, 1981; Hart, 1980).

The lesbian and gay NALGO conferences were important in that their content did not differentiate the position of worker and client but sought to emphasise their commonalities as lesbians and gay men. Healy comments:

Critical practice discourses frequently refer to 'workers' and 'service users' as though each identity group is homogeneous and entirely distinct, thus neglecting the differences within each category and the commonalities across them. (Healy, 2000: 40)

The 1980s NALGO conferences were an example of an exception to this.

From 1979 the 'New Right' Conservative Government placed great emphasis on trying to marginalise lesbians and gay men and this was acted out through various social policy debates and initiatives. This is covered in Chapter 2. During this time there were a number of positive developments within local government that were to impact on social work. Cooper (1994) has documented the rise of lesbian and gay political influence and organisation:

Municipal lesbian and gay work emerged at the intersection of several different processes: the growing size and confidence of Britain's lesbian and gay communities; the institutionalisation of the new urban left; identity politics; and the developing influence of feminism within local politics. More particularly, the policies were precipitated by the work of lesbian and gay activists in the Labour party, in local government employment, and as elected council members. (Cooper, 1994: 2)

Although these political and social processes were not a priority for many Local Authorities, those that did take on board the quality of employment and service delivery to lesbians and gay men did have an influence on both social work and social policy more generally. However, it was many years before some of these initiatives were translated into protective legislation in the form of the Equality Act 2006 and the Sexual Orientation Regulations 2007.

One of the most significant local government developments relevant to social work with lesbians and gay men in the 1980s were the initiatives taken by the Greater London Council (GLC). Under the leadership of Ken Livingstone, the GLC disseminated good practice guidelines for the delivery of public services to lesbians and gay men. Some of the comments made in these publications about the poor quality of social work with lesbians and gay men are as relevant today as they were when they were first published (GLC, 1986; GLC and the GLC Gay Working Party, 1985).

These municipal developments and the increasing visibility of lesbians and gay men in the trade union movement meant that the question of equitable treatment of lesbians and gay men started to be seriously addressed within some Local Authorities. This took place in the context of other communities also arguing for autonomous organisations within trade unions and within the Labour party.

Lesbians and gay men within the trade union movement began to make links with other groups' industrial actions which increased their visibility as well as enabled some degree of mainstreaming. This was best

demonstrated when 'miners and their families led the Gay Pride March in 1985, the biggest yet with over 15,000 participants. The same year, the TUC passed resolutions on gay and lesbian rights in the workplace' (Cook et al., 2007: 186). This period of activity meant that some Local Authorities started to include 'sexual orientation' within their equal opportunities policies. Post the Equality Act 2006 and the decriminalisation of all gay male sexual activities, this might not seem important. However, during the 1980s this was highly significant as it was the only protection that lesbian and gay employees, carers and clients were afforded. It also signified the advanced nature of Labour-led local authority thinking in this arena compared with the overt hostility that the Conservative Government exhibited.

The rising visibility of lesbians and gay men we refer to above is probably most obvious in their increasing presence within popular culture, entertainment and commerce. Although there is still some stereotyping of lesbians and gay men in media portrayals, the economic significance of lesbians and gay men has been demonstrated through commercial developments. This commercial presence, for example in Old Compton Street in London and Canal Street in Manchester, has meant that the public has been more exposed to lesbians and gay men, their varied and various lifestyles as well as their ordinariness. This commercial presence has ensured that lesbians and gay men have entered the public consciousness as more than two dimensional stereotypes.

Against the above backdrop, in 1997 the Labour Government utilised and built upon fertile ground already developed through lesbian and gay commercial, political and social activity that stretched back many decades. However, the impact was somewhat muted by the delays in legislative changes related to the rights of lesbians and gay men until some years after their election. The social policy and legislative changes initiated and realised by New Labour will be covered in Chapter 2. Broadly, this legal and policy framework specifically relevant to lesbians and gay men included: opportunities to parent and have that parenting protected and recognised; to have their intimate relationship commitments recognised and protected, and the decriminalisation of male same-sex sexual activities.

Some of these social policy and legislative developments have exposed, through public and policy debates, the nature and strength of continuing hostility and ambivalence towards lesbian and gay equality. Social work at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century is in a different position than it was 20 years ago. It could be argued that

social work in the 1980s was one of the professions at the forefront of arguing for lesbian and gay equality as demonstrated through social workers' involvement within trade union as well as labour and community activism (Brown, 1998a). Social work in 2011 sits within a changed legislative landscape which is unrecognisable from the one it occupied in the 1980s or indeed the 1990s. This changed landscape places social work in a fundamentally different position. Having been at the forefront of considerations of equitable treatment of lesbians and gay men, having historically been a major player in the oppression of them, we argue that social work is now in need of serious reflection on its practices to make it at least compliant with current legislative requirements. Creative, innovative and imaginative social work should enable the possibility of practice that addresses the individuality and specificity of every client and carer whilst acknowledging their cultural, racial, familial, social and political location.

Discourses on sexuality influencing social work practice with lesbians and gay men



Hicks (2005a: 151) argues that 'social work practitioners should think about a range of theories of sexuality ... and develop a reflexive approach' to their understanding of sexuality in practice. We present an overview of ideas about sexuality, including contributions from Queer theory, sexuality studies, sociology and psychology, which have influenced current understanding of social work with lesbians and gay men. We cover a variety of ideas and thinkers that we consider to have been influential on social work's conceptualisation of homosexuality. As well as considering some aspects of the work of Freud, Marx, Foucault and Butler, we also identify relevant discourses of the past 20 years, such as feminism, Queer theory and post-modernism and discuss how they have influenced the debate and development of ideas relating to sexuality and social work.

What is discourse?

Parton defines discourses as:

structures of knowledge, claims and practices through which we understand, explain and decide things ... they also define obligations and determine the distribution of responsibilities and authorities for different categories of

persons such as parents, children, social workers, doctors, lawyers and so on. They are impersonal forms, existing independently of any of these persons as individuals ... they are frameworks or grids of social organisations that make some social actions possible while precluding others. (1994: 13)

Foucault wrote that, 'there is no reality outside of discourse' (1981: 67). He identified four salient elements. Firstly, discourses are produced by specific conventions and procedures that exist within particular periods of time and cultural contexts. We contend that ideas are historically, geographically, politically and socially located and understanding the specificity of this is crucial to avoiding 'throwing the baby out with the bath water'. Ideas influence the language we use to describe situations, circumstances and people, and change over time; for example, it was commonplace to hear the term 'client' used 20 years ago whereas currently 'service user' is seen as the accepted term with little understanding of the different discourses surrounding the two expressions. Changing terminology does not in and of itself alter power relations (Ryan with Thomas, 1999; McLaughlin, 2009).

Secondly, discourses and power are interrelated, and therefore knowledge cannot ever be objective, or seen as 'truth', but is defined by power relations. An example of this is the importance that government agencies are placing on interventions underpinned by behavioural ideas, as they are seen to be 'evidenced based' and 'outcome focused'. Such application of 'knowledge' includes the embedded nature of social learning theories in aspects of the 'Care Matters' White Paper (DfES, 2007) such as the Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme.

Thirdly, discourses are irregular and incongruous, conflicting and opposing. Discourses are complex and contradictory. Foucault challenged the belief that development of ideas over time is progressive and linear. In terms of application to social work, Healy states that:

the discourses of social work or medicine a century ago bear little resemblance to their contemporary forms. Even so, social workers are not more 'free' now than they were in a previous historical epoch; rather, they have different possibilities for action. (2000: 41)

Fourthly, rather than seeking any hidden truth or deeper meaning from discourses separate from their practical manifestation, the tangible productions and effects of discourses are vitally important. It is in this practical manifestation, 'the principle of exteriority', that the structure and shape and limitations are exposed, including inherent power relationships (Healy, 2000: 40–1).

Healy (2005) identifies three key discourses within social work: 'dominant' discourses (including biomedicine, economics and the law); 'service' discourses (including discourses from psychology and sociology); and 'alternative service' discourses (including those from consumer rights movements, religion and spirituality). A number of psychological and sociological discourses pertaining to sexuality will be examined in this chapter. Chapters 2 and 5 address legal areas and religious issues relevant to social work and sexuality respectively.

The analysis of discourse is therefore concerned with highlighting the ways in which our use of language is constructed and how it reflects hidden ideologies in terms of how we acquire specific knowledge and the meaning we give to it. Discourses influence our understanding about who we are and our relationship with others. In terms of sexuality for example, heteronormativity (an assumption that heterosexuality is the norm) is a dominant discourse within our society, which permeates everything about language, the way our society is organised and what is given social value. However, there are other discourses which challenge heteronormativity as a given reality and present different views about the value of not being heterosexual, and indeed question the need for identity labels at all. We will explore these later in the chapter.

Essentialism, social constructionism and post-modernism: Marx, Freud, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Butler and Weeks

We have already highlighted some of the difficulties in defining the term 'sexuality' in the introduction to this book. Developments in discourses about sexuality are not linear. Alongside the expansion of post-modernist thought, pockets of 'biological determinism' are still located in arguments over the causes of homosexuality. There are two positions that have been posited in relation to biological causation of homosexuality that remain influential: hormonal and neurological. Myers and Milner (2007) outline some of the research findings that both support and refute these positions. They argue that, 'biomedical understandings of sex and gender have tended to be dominant in Western thinking and these have influenced social work and social care practices' (2007: 15). The degree of certainty that such a position affords has proved to be attractive as it enables certainty in an area of ambiguity. These ideas have been attractive to conservative thinkers and policy makers but also to some lesbians and gay men. The argument is that if people's sexual orientation is biomedically determined and that lesbians and gay men are

a minority, then they should be afforded protection and rights accordingly. However attractive this certainty of 'we can't help being gay – we were born that way' might appear, there are limits to this position in terms of the political ground that is occupied by such attempts at biological unification. Seidman comments that 'many activists and intellectuals moved in the opposite direction, affirming a stronger thesis of the social construction of homosexuality that took the form of a radical politics of difference' (1996: 11).

Dualistic comparator terms, such as 'natural' and 'un-natural', continue to influence discourse. Social and cultural constructs now play a major role in the theorising of sexuality. This next section will highlight some of the important thinkers whose work has significantly influenced discussion and discourse in this area.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) Marx's work remains influential within social work (Mullaly, 1997; Jordan, 1990; Ferguson, 2008). Most renowned for his work critiquing capitalism, Marx's contribution to discourses about sexuality is linked to his views on the family. He saw the family as an important organisation in maintaining the means of production via reproduction of the proletariat to support manufacturing, and in reinforcing the continuation of power, influence and control by the bourgeoisie via heredity and blood lineage. Engels (1902) expanded these ideas by linking the patriarchal nature of industrial society to the family being viewed by the State as a private entity, the members of which were the property of men and where marriage between men and women legitimated sexual activity. Women supposedly gained respectability and stability from this arrangement. The family, gender and sexuality are closely linked and this has been commented on extensively by Marxist feminist scholars. Marxist criticisms of women's position in the family pointed to the inequality in terms of ownership, reproduction, sexual activity and the worth given to domestic labour (Wilson, 1977; Rowbotham, 1972; 1973).

Marxism was a cornerstone of the UK Radical Social Work movement in the 1970s (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Brake and Bailey, 1980), and these publications contained some of the first critical pieces about sexuality and social work (Milligan, 1975; Hart, 1980) before the UK publication of Hart and Richardson's book on homosexuality and social work (Hart and Richardson, 1981). This period of academic productivity in the area of social work and sexuality should be seen within the wider social and political context of increased

visibility and activity of lesbians and gay men covered earlier in this chapter.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) One of the major theoretical influences on social work knowledge has been psychoanalysis (Yelloly, 1980; Pearson et al., 1988; Bower, 2005). A comprehensive discussion about and critique of psychoanalysis and homosexuality is beyond the remit of this chapter (see O'Connor and Ryan, 1993; Dean and Lane, 2001; Weeks, 2003). Freud's discussion of pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages of psychosexual development and the development of individuation and separation from the mother are important in how we understand the role of gender and its development both at a conscious and unconscious level. Freud believed that, 'no self comes into being that is not gendered' (Beasley, 2005: 54). Freud's ideas about infant universal bisexuality at a pre-Oedipal stage are important in terms of explaining desire and pleasure for very young babies as a body experience often concentrated on the mouth and anus. This manifestation of desire and pleasure changes over time to focus on the genitals. Awareness of genitals begins to shape a baby's developing understanding of a sense of 'self' in relation to 'other' (most notably, babies' growing awareness of themselves as separate from their mothers), and in relation to gender. The Oedipal stage is where the role of what Freud termed the 'mother figure and father figure' often, but not necessarily (for Freud) the child's assumed parents, becomes important in terms of how children relate to each of them as separate individuals at unconscious as well as conscious levels (Beasley, 2005: 53). Freud argued that these gender differences of the two primary adult figures were key to the successful developmental processes of children, with children still finding their mother 'desirable' but moving away or rejecting her in order to move towards a sense of self/separateness. Freud argued that this process of separation from the mother is represented by the male or father figure, symbolised by the penis. To not have a penis is to be castrated, that is to be a woman; within a dualistic notion/framework of gender definitions. Being a woman was less powerful and had less status than being a man. The biological sex characteristics of boys and girls then determine the processes children go through in order to understand their gender assignment and how this links to their development accordingly. This is what Freud refers to as 'gendered positioning' (Dean and Lane, 2001; Beasley, 2005). Boys become competitors with their father figure for the attention of their mother, because they also have a penis like their father, whilst girls establish strong links with their

father because of desire towards the penis and envy because they do not have one. The process girls go through is more complicated in terms of not only a change of focus of (initially homosexual) desire from mother figure to father figure, but also creating a different body desire and pleasure based around the penis. Freud would say this is an effort of the girl/woman to obtain a penis. Creith comments that:

Whilst the inconsistencies and ambiguities in Freud's own thinking, as evidenced in his writing, have allowed for pathological interpretations of 'homosexuality', his emphasis on the delicate psychic construction of our sexualities and the role of the unconscious is invaluable. (Creith, 1996: 144)

Beasley suggests that Freud's work is not simply 'modernist' in perspective, in terms of seeking a fundamental 'truth' about the human psyche. There are elements of his ideas which appear 'post-modernist' in terms of how he understands the role of power and the identification of gender within the development of 'self':

The unconscious keeps leaking into the conscious such that you can never know yourself. Nor can the self ever be fully knowable, as the unconscious is largely lost to us, 'forgotten', repressed. What is post-modern here is Freud's view that there is no set or fixed essence, no original 'true' self. (Beasley, 2005: 63)

However, although noting the considerable influence of psychoanalysis on the ideas of later theorists such as Foucault and Butler, the historical relationship between psychoanalysis and homosexuality is not straightforward. O'Connor and Ryan describe it as:

one of the most problematic areas of psychoanalysis ... [it] has seen all homosexuality as various forms of pathology, perversity or immaturity. It provides no articulated conception within its own terms of an integrated, non-perverse, mature and manifest homosexuality, or of what is required to achieve this. (O'Connor and Ryan, 1993: 9)

The authors argue that as long as psychoanalysis remains within an ontological framework, it cannot allow for 'a theory of separation, of differences' (1993: 266). Within a discussion exploring the meaning of 'desire' and 'identity' which falls outside of the construction of 'normal' (hetero)sexual development, O'Connor and Ryan point towards the development of pluralism within psychoanalysis to reflect the theoretical and social changes within society more generally (1993: 271). Dean and Lane (2001) go on to suggest that this problematic relationship

between psychoanalysis and homosexuality does not stem from Freud's original work, but from the work of analysts after Freud, such as Jung and Adler, who:

helped formalise an institutional split between the Freudians who believed that homosexuality was an unconscious possibility in everyone, and those who accepted Jung and Adler's claims that homosexuality signalled a type of person with a fairly predictable relationship to the world. (Dean and Lane, 2001: 12)

Other more conservative psychoanalysts such as Rado, Bergler and Bieber wrote about an un-natural and pathological homosexuality that could be 'cured' (Dean and Lane, 2001). Llewellyn et al. (2008) argue that such conservative readings of Freud led to, 'a labelling of lesbians and gay men as deviant and historically led to interventions based on "curing people from homosexuality"' (2008: 166). Creith comments that:

Aware of the complex nature of unconscious desire, Freud's own view of homosexuality was one of non judgementalism as in his letter to the mother of a (male) homosexual: 'homosexuality is assuredly no advantage; but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a variation of the sexual function produced by a certain arrest of development. (1996: 145–6)

Creith goes on to point out that his use of the term 'arrested development' left the floodgates open for others then to pathologise homosexuality.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and homosexuality has also been heavily influenced by social factors, including the gay liberation and feminist movements in the USA and in Europe and by the work of academics from other disciplines. Dean and Lane comment that:

[I]t is telling that the most innovative recent psychoanalytic work on sexuality derives not from psychoanalytic institutions but from university departments of language and literature. This strange sociological circumstance confirms the persistent tension between psychoanalytic concepts and clinical institutions. (2001: 25)

With regard to sexuality, along with the work of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (whose work is also influential outside the field of psychoanalysis), the works of three other theorists are important in this regard: Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) Lacan is one of the most significant and influential psychoanalysts since Freud. He reinterpreted Freud's position on sexuality from being largely biologically determined to something located firmly within a social/cultural framework. 'Lacan sees gender difference as a psychosocial construction through positioning in language rather than responses to literal bodily forms' (Beasley, 2005: 55). Lacan's reframing of Freud's work on sexuality is somewhat more palatable for many feminists in terms of his use of symbolism and symbolic order. His comments about the acquisition and meaning of language and his explanations of the development of the unconscious are then used to explain his theories of desire and sexual difference. Lacan saw masculinity and femininity as constructs that could be accessible and apply to both men and women. Sexual difference is understood not through biology but through men and women's relationship to the 'phallus' – a psychosocial concept which represents social power and masculine authority (Beasley, 2005). He distinguished between 'having' and 'being' the phallus; masculinity 'involves the posture or pretence of having the phallus, whilst femininity involves the masquerade of being the phallus' (Homer, 2005: 95). Lacan comments:

in order to be the phallus, that is to say the signifier of the desire of the Other, [that] a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade. It is for that which she is not that she wishes to be desired as well as loved. (Lacan, 1977 [1958]: 289–90)

These are complex and revolutionary ideas in terms of challenging and building on Freud's perceptions of the development of sexuality. Lacan's work in language acquisition and the symbolic moved ideas about gender identification and sexuality away from mainly biological definitions to a process of 'becoming', which also recognised the influences of cultural and social processes. However, despite this identification, Lacan, like Freud, understood the gender hierarchy as inevitable (Beasley, 2005: 67).

Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) The French philosopher Jacques Derrida's work on deconstruction (describing and transforming) is also influential. Derrida criticises a use of language where 'truth' is seen outside time and change, stressing the 'variety of meanings, interpretations, ranges of reference ...' and '... analyses difference primarily in terms of language functioning' (O'Connor and Ryan, 1993: 19). For example, deconstruction within post-modern thinking (for example, the deconstruction of

such dichotomies as: man/woman; good/bad; heterosexual/homosexual; self/other; you/me; us/them; and north/south; east/west; black/white) can highlight and explain the existence of dualistic models and categories where hierarchy and power are also implicitly or explicitly present. Another example of a variety of meanings is the many influential commentators in the area of sexuality studies who have remarked on the problematic use of the term 'sexuality' (Foucault, 1978; Butler, 1990; Weeks, 2003; Hicks, 2005a) regarding definition, identity and power. Deconstruction doesn't necessarily lead to changing this directly but helps as a form of questioning, which can then influence understanding.

Michel Foucault (1926–1984) Michel Foucault's writing on a wide range of topics including the prison service and psychiatry showed how talented and influential this thinker was in his contributions to critical comment and developments in a number of broad and diverse areas. In terms of his views on sexuality, Foucault commented that 'sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct' (1978: 105). Foucault's ideas about the relationship between sex and power as a process through which sexual identity is created or constructed within societies transformed debates about sexuality. He believed that minority sexual identities that were marginalised by society were not just victims of power but were actually produced by power and are an intrinsic part of how societies organise themselves (Beasley, 2005: 165). This has ramifications for how we think about identity based politics and will be explored in Chapter 3.

In addition, Beasley comments on the efforts made by Foucault to describe people:

in terms of their social construction by power relations and hence as having no foundational essence or core ... he endorses the political project of remaking the self 'as a work of art' in ways which resist the forms of individuality ... hence reassembling the socially formed components in myriad ways. (2005: 109)

Cooper discusses Foucault's use of the concept of power, emphasising:

the structuring capacity of power rather than focusing solely on 'power over' or power as prohibition ... he makes room for people's complex relationship

to power in contrast to models which divide people into those who exercise power and those who have it exercised upon them. (2004: 78)

Cooper also comments that:

Liberal scholarship that emphasises the importance of formal equality between men and women, for instance, has often ignored the cultural, social and disciplinary factors that not only shape capacity, but also shape the conversion of capacity into action. (Cooper, 2004: 79)

Although hugely influential in the field of sexuality studies, Foucault's analysis of sexuality has been criticised by many feminists as 'gender-blind', although many writers have applied his ideas to gender studies (Beasley, 2005: 165–6).

Judith Butler (1956–) Judith Butler's work is influenced by Foucault and has been significant in the development of post-modern feminist discourses and studies about sexuality, as well as other areas. Stryker and Whittle comment that, 'Judith Butler's central tenet is that the hegemonic power of heteronormativity produces all forms of the body, sex and gender' (2006: 183). In terms of Butler's work on identity, Beasley states that, '[Butler] replaces the notion of a fixed essential identity with a disclaimer, with a resistance to identity by revealing it to be a fiction' (2005: 105). Butler believes that gender identity is 'performative', a 'fabrication', a 'truth effect', and she highlights the relationship between identity and power in terms of how 'identity is a product of power, not a means of overcoming it (no matter how many identity differences are embraced by identity politics)' (Beasley, 2005: 105). She is sympathetic to psychoanalysis in terms of its ability to explain how and why sexuality falls short of the social and cultural constructs through which it is most commonly understood and played out:

There is no better theory for grasping the workings of fantasy construed not as a set of projections on an internal screen but as part of human rationality itself. It is on the basis of this insight that we can come to understand how fantasy is essential to an experience of one's own body, or that of another, as gendered. (Butler, 2004: 14–15)

Butler also says that 'psychoanalysis has sometimes been used to shore up the notion of a primary sexual difference that forms the core of an individual's psychic life' (2004: 14). She points out that this is predicated

upon an assumption of heterosexual intercourse, and other psychoanalytic concepts such as the ‘primal scene’ and the ‘oedipal scenario’.

But if the egg or sperm comes from elsewhere, and is not attached to a person called ‘parent’, or if the parents who are making love are not heterosexual or not reproductive, then it would seem that a new psychic topography is required. (Butler, 2004: 14)

Her work has been criticised by feminists writing from other theoretical perspectives. Liberal feminist Martha Nussbaum accuses Butler of ‘playing at abstract rebellious transgression’ (Beasley, 2005: 41); and socialist pro feminist Bob Connell rejects Butler’s work because it has not accounted for the ‘material social aspects of gender such as child care, institutional life and work’ (Beasley, 2005: 226). However, in terms of revolutionising ideas around identity, Butler remains influential. Featherstone and Green (2009) offer a summary of Butler’s ideas and how they relate to social work.

Sexuality studies: Jeffrey Weeks (1945–) Another critical area contributing to the development of knowledge about sexuality has been sexuality studies. The rise of sexuality studies is related to the political activism of the 1960s and 1970s and the resulting impact on the academy. Although historically sexuality studies has been biased towards gay men, issues for lesbians, transsexuals, transvestites, transgender and intersex people have also been covered to a lesser extent. Considerable debate occurs within the field about definitions of sexuality and identities contained therein, and, as with most areas of academic study there are a variety of theoretical positions covered within the literature. These range from liberal and assimilationist positions to more radical forms of thinking which reject any attempt to define identity, whether it be sexuality or gender.

One of the well-known academics within sexuality studies is Jeffrey Weeks. His work is located within a social constructionist position. He argues that ‘the meanings we give to “sexuality” are socially organised, sustained by a variety of languages, which seek to tell us what sex is, what it ought to be – and what it could be’ (2003: 7). In response to the ‘essentialist’ (a single, basic, uniform pattern ordained by nature itself) (Singer, 1973, cited in Weeks, 2003: 7), ‘reductionist’ (reducing the complexity of something to ‘the imagined simplicities of its constituent unit’) (2003: 7) and ‘deterministic’ (humans are controlled by inner drives – genes, hormones, instincts or the unconscious) (2003: 7) approach to

sex, Weeks argues for the development of a non-essentialist theory of sexuality. This acknowledges the complexity of sexuality within a framework of 'radical pluralism' (2003: 122) which challenges 'absolutes without falling into the trap of saying no values are possible "anything goes"' (Weeks, 2003: 9), and is based on an appreciation of diversity.

Moral pluralism begins with a different belief: that sex in itself is neither good nor bad, but is rather a field of possibilities and potentialities, all of which must be judged by the context in which they occur. It opens the way then, to acceptance of diversity as the norm of our culture and the appropriate means of thinking about sexuality. (Weeks, 2003: 122)

Weeks has been critical of Queer theory. His writing supports a qualified use of 'identity' within its 'social fixity', 'he attends to social location, materiality, social structure and stability in identities' (Beasley, 2005: 148) as opposed to its deconstruction, which is the position of queer theorists. This position is not assimilationist nor radically transformative, but instead argues coherently for the middle ground, where advancement in thinking and transformation of people's lives via governmental and legislative processes, are not necessarily at odds with each other.

Weeks' work has also been criticised by feminist writers as not taking gender issues into account in his analysis (Beasley, 2005: 148–9), and this remains a criticism of sexuality studies more generally.

Queer theory

The term 'queer' is an example of how language use can change negative meanings and associations of given words. Until the 1990s, 'queer' was a derogatory term used to describe gay men and to a lesser extent lesbians. This word has been 'reclaimed' by activists, such as Outrage and others, and is now used commonly as a quick-hand way of referring to LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex). However, its use is also connected with post-modern perspectives within sexuality studies. Queer theory is associated with more radical positions concerning sexual and any other form of identity, opposing any fixed categorisation of identity whether gender based or based on sexual practice, and instead viewing these categorisations as socially constructed. Queer theory argues for a fluid, constant redefinition of people's sexual/gender choices and argues that this process is continuous, transgressive and also potentially rebellious. Queer theory is heavily influenced by the work of Foucault, Butler – specifically her work *Gender Trouble* (1990), and

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose work *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) was considered groundbreaking, and is still read widely.

Epistemology of the Closet, originally published in 1990, is seen as a seminal text in the rise of queer theory alongside another text, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, which was published in the same year. These texts effectively put into discourse questions about a medley of cultural and political epistemes: on identity, on actions, on performance, and on language ... *Epistemology* is a profound study on how we live our life in culture, and how our actions, identities, and ethics are symptomatic effects of various networks of power at work in society. (Bianco, 2008)

Feminism

The connection between sexuality studies and the second wave of feminism is important to acknowledge, as is the link between Queer theory and the third wave of feminism. Feminism, unlike sexuality studies, has a long history that offers many different perspectives on the emancipation of women and gender/sex constructions, relationships and connections. It is beyond the remit of this book to provide a critical summary and commentary of the history of feminism, including a discussion about how sexuality has been understood and debated within this history. However, the alliances forged between various groups defined through identity have not been easy at times. The politics surrounding identity has played a role within these alliances (or lack of alliances). Some of the issues around the use of the term 'identity' are discussed in Chapter 3.

There are three 'waves' of feminism acknowledged within the literature (Kempe and Squires, 1998; Beasley, 1999; 2005). The first wave refers to nineteenth and early twentieth century activity associated with the suffragette movement and their endeavours to gain the vote for women. There was also political struggle to change other laws of the time which gave men 'ownership' of women and children via marriage. The second wave of feminism refers to women's political activity from the 1960s through to the 1980s, which was intent on ending sex discrimination and creating equality for women. The third wave of feminism brought post-structural interpretations of gender and sexuality to feminism, moving beyond universal and essentialist definitions of women which were considered to favour white middle-class heterosexual women. These new ideas embraced contradictions and conflict, and accommodated diversity as part of the lived experience of women.

The fluidity of our understandings of gender, the power and use of language, and the restrictions of identity labels have all been part of this re-interpretation of feminism.

The categorisation of the different strands of feminism remains contested (Cooper, 1995; Kempe and Squires, 1998; Beasley, 1999; 2005). For the purposes of this publication we identify five main feminist perspectives which illustrate the diversity within the term 'feminism'. Liberal feminism was concerned with inequalities in opportunity between men and women and how change can occur within existing political, social and economic structures. Socialist feminism focused on women's oppression as part of wider social inequalities in a class-based capitalist social structure. Radical feminism was concerned with patriarchy and believed that full equality cannot exist between men and women without a complete change to the patriarchal system. Black feminism focused on the diversity and value of black women's experience, which was by far the majority of the world's female population. Post-modern feminism focused on the cultural and social discourses in society that organise understandings of and constraints placed on both women and men. Judith Butler's work is associated with post-modern feminism.

Relevance to social work



Why is the material we have covered in this chapter relevant to social work with lesbians and gay men? History and ideas are relevant to social work practice today. A common criticism of social workers is that they are sometimes both atheoretical and ahistorical and concerned only with the specificity of their day-to-day practice rather than the development of ideas and knowledge that will improve their practice. This is problematic. Social work, unlike many other professions such as medicine, lacks a distinct and discrete body of knowledge. Social work's relationship with theory and different discourses has at best been tenuous and at worst, in this area of practice, been misapplied to the detriment of lesbians and gay men. Stanley comments:

Social work's relationship to theory has always been problematic and the translation of psychological theory into social work practice has at times entailed crude appropriation rather than informed applications of complex theoretical models. (Stanley, 1999: 20)

In this chapter, we have covered a number of theorists that we argue have influenced social work with lesbians and gay men. This list is not exhaustive. How their influence has been interpreted and experienced is difficult to quantify. For example, Freudian ideas have become absorbed by society in an implicit rather than an explicit fashion and their use and misuse can be seen in accounts of 1960s social casework (Wilson, 1977). Part of the misapplication of some ideas that we have covered above has been to do with a lack of tenacity on behalf of social work as a profession to understand, apply and develop complex ideas drawn from philosophy, sociology and psychology. For example, Judith Butler's ideas about the construction of gender through language rather than biology challenge how we understand and explain sexuality. This requires a fundamental reappraisal of many of the norms that social work takes for granted about sexuality and relationships. Similarly, Sedgwick's views about the binary homo/hetero sexuality are also helpful in re-evaluating how normative understandings of heterosexuality are insidious within Western culture, and oversimplify complex processes:

[A] person can never embody an identity, instead, it functions as a container of sorts that is imposed upon the person by society. Thus the implicit sarcasm of Sedgwick's first axiom: 'People are different from each other.' This axiom may seem obvious, but it is fascinating, Sedgwick maintains, how methodologically and linguistically we are unable to account for difference: 'A tiny number of inconceivably coarse axes of categorization have been painstakingly inscribed in current critical and political thought: gender, race, class, nationality, sexual orientation are pretty much the available distinctions. They, with the associated demonstrations of the mechanisms by which they are constructed and reproduced, are indispensable, and they may indeed override all or some other forms of difference and similarity'. (Bianco, 2008)

Effective social work practitioners have to engage with many of these theoretical ideas to better understand how sexuality is viewed, how labels affect people and the consequential social and political positioning of lesbians and gay men. In examining the writings of the theorists above, we have attempted to re-frame or re-interpret some of the perceived truths that permeate social work's unquestioning understandings of sexuality, which are commonly heteronormative.

Not having a distinct knowledge base of its own, social work has absorbed ideas and discourses from other disciplines, including psychology, sociology and philosophy, which have themselves been influenced by their location within particular social, historical and political contexts. This is

relevant to historical and contemporary understandings of homosexuality and practices with lesbians and gay men. The challenge for social workers is to remain abreast of debates, ideas and developments within other disciplines, such as the ones discussed in this chapter that can inform our practice. One of the problematic unforeseen consequences of the emphasis on evidence based practice focusing on social work interventions is that we can lose the 'bigger picture', informed by ideas from philosophy, politics, social geography, history, art, and literature. These ideas will in turn benefit our understandings of both the potentiality and fallibility of human beings and the complexity of their interactions with others. We argue that this breadth of knowledge will ultimately improve the quality and effectiveness of social work interventions.

Post-modernism has been influential within theories about gender and sexuality studies. As a profession, social work's engagement with this in terms of how it thinks about sexuality has been limited. Myers and Milner (2007) and Hicks' (2005a) work are examples of the social work academy's acknowledgement of post-modernism's relevance to sexuality. Within social work generally, other social work theorists have looked at post-modernism. For example, Parton and O'Byrne (2000), Parton (2006), Healy (2000; 2005), Garrett (2003) Pease and Fook (1999), Fook (2002) and McCarthy (1999) have been raising and discussing social constructionist and post-modern perspectives for some time, identifying the relevance of these ideas for social work in general. This is exciting in terms of thinking about theoretical approaches which acknowledge the multi-faceted realities of lived experience and relationships and how social work engages with this material. Borrowing from the wealth of material available from other disciplines can also be a strength in terms of using a breadth of critical thinking that can inform sophisticated debate and dialogue. In this book we draw on these ideas when looking at social work practice with lesbians and gay men.