Power, inequality and identification: Exploring diversity and intersectionality amongst older LGB adults

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Abstract

This paper explores how theories of diversity and intersectionality can improve our understandings of the lives of older lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) adults. In so doing, it argues that theories of diversity help us to understand both the structural constraints and the advantages that may arise from being an older LGB adult. However, these theories are unable to fully account for differences that may exist within this social group. In order to address this omission, we argue that we need to move beyond a focus on diversity per se, to incorporate the multiplicity of identities suggested by intersectionality theory. We conclude by assessing the implications of this debate for policy and research. Throughout the paper we draw on existing research as well as our own empirical studies with older LGB adults.

Keywords: Ageing, Diversity, Intersectionality, Sexuality

Introduction

The consensus amongst scholars, policy makers and the voluntary sector is that it is no longer appropriate (if indeed it ever was) to talk about the existence of a 'gay community', or even a 'lesbian and gay community'. Such terms have been replaced by a range of identity-based acronyms: LGB (lesbian, gay and bisexual), LGBT (plus transgender) LGBTQ (plus queer), LGBTQQ (plus questioning), LGBTQQU (plus unsure) and LGBTQQUI (plus Intersex). However unwieldy the use of such acronyms may feel on occasion, they represent a genuine attempt to move beyond the homogenous and essentialist assumptions, which underpin the term 'gay community'. Identity-based acronyms are intended to both acknowledge and, depending on context, celebrate the diversity of social identities of those who stand outside of the heteronormative sexual order. The extent to which they actually

achieve these two aims, without reference to the intersection of other salient identities is, as we reflect upon in this paper, debatable.

Increasing attention is being paid to individual and social diversity within the human and social sciences. This is underpinned by a theoretical shift that recognises identities as unstable, multiple and contextually produced. Key examples of this shift include intersectionality theory in feminist studies (Davis, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006), social diversity theories in both race and ethnicity studies (Hartmann and Gerteis, 2005) and the study of later life (Calasanti, et al., 2006; Daatland and Biggs, 2004), and queer theory in sexuality studies (Green, 2007; Seidman, 1995).

In this paper, we argue that there is a similar case to be made in relation to the simplistic identity category of 'older LGB'. Its very complexity is demonstrated in attempts to produce accurate statistical data on the older non-heterosexual population. Based on the government estimate that 6.5% of the UK population is 'exclusively homosexual', Age Concern (2002) predict that 1 in 15 of their service users will be lesbian or gay. While recognising the limitations of basing estimates on such a nebulous category as 'exclusively homosexual', Age Concern, and other organizations (for example, Mind, the Alzheimer's Society), together with academics (for example Heaphy, 2007; Price, 2005) are beginning to challenge the traditional invisibility or misrepresentation of older LGB adults. Furthermore, policy makers and service providers are slowly beginning to take greater notice of the needs of this group of adults. This increases the imperative for academics to accurately reflect the complex and multifarious range of experiences and needs of this diverse group.

Despite biographical diversity, older LGB adults are frequently represented as having a largely stable, fixed and taken-for-granted identification (King and Cronin, 2010). While research has traditionally focused on the differences that exist between homosexual and heterosexual adults in later life, recent research has begun to address the differences that exist between older LGB adults (see Cronin and King, 2010). It is not our intention in this paper to either dispute or discredit this existing research. However, it is our contention that an intersectional analysis affords a greater understanding of the complex biographies that such identifications obscure,

whilst still retaining a concern with wider dynamics of power. Therefore, our paper has two objectives: firstly, to contribute to the growing body of work that utilises intersectionality in the sociology of sexualities, explicitly extending this to older LGB adults; and secondly, to raise awareness of the complexity of older LGB adults' lives amongst sociologists of the life course.

Throughout the paper we draw on the integrated findings from two qualitative studies we conducted with older LGB adults. The first study focused on older lesbian-identified women and was exploratory in nature. The second study, funded by an inner city local authority, investigated the experiences and needs of its older LGB residents.

It is common practice within gerontological research to distinguish between the 'young-old' (50-64 years), the 'old' (65-74 years) and the 'old-old' (75+ years). Awareness of these distinctions, combined with existing research with older LGB adults, in particular Rosenfeld's (2002) construction of two age-related identity cohorts, lead us to define older as 50 years of age and over. Rosenfeld's cohorts, while based on the above age groups, are modified to incorporate an understanding of the relationship between a participant's biography and the broader socio-sexual order of society. As Rosenfeld notes, while the 'old-old' reached adulthood prior to the Gay Liberation Movement, this was not the case for 'young old' (incorporating the 'old') who did so during the birth of the movement or in the period directly following it. Either way, she suggests that this impacted on the personal construction and lived experience of their sexual identities. While the 'old-old' were more likely to have drawn on the culturally dominant construction of homosexuality as deviant when constructing their own self-image, the remaining two age groups had greater access to alternative, more celebratory and hence positive, representations. This, as Rosenfeld states, makes it more likely that the 'old-old' will have adopted life long survival strategies such as secrecy and passing, making it difficult to recruit from this group. Indeed, this was reflected in our own studies and we had just one participant over the age of 75 (a man aged 78). In contrast, the 'young-old' and the 'old' are more visible, more likely to belong to LGB social networks and communities, lobby for services, and hence easier to recruit. Again, this was reflected in our own studies,

accounting for a sample predominantly consisting of those in the 'young-old' and 'old' categories. Finally, we need to be mindful that some men and women may have adopted a non-heterosexual identity and/or lifestyle in later life. They may form a third identity cohort, which cuts across age boundaries (Cronin, 2004).

We interviewed 36 adults, 12 men and 24 women, aged between 50-78 years, across the two studies. The majority of the participants, 12 men and 13 women, lived in the South-East of England. The remaining 11 women lived in the USA. All participants identified as White, apart from one man who identified as Mixed White/Black African-Caribbean. Participants represented a range of socio-economic statuses. Half of the women and two of the men had been married, but were now divorced. Of these, all had children except one woman and one man.

In both studies snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Initial contacts were asked to either suggest other women and men to take part in the research, or to publicise the research amongst members of their social networks. In addition to making personal contact with relevant organisations, leaflets, posters and letters advertising the research were sent to a diverse range of LGBT organisations and websites. In the case of the second study, organisations working specifically with older people, as well as health centres and other public organisations in our chosen location were also targeted.

The interview schedule in both studies used open-ended questions to explore individual biography, 'coming out' experiences, understanding of identity, attitudes towards ageing, participation in lesbian and gay social networks and communities, and use of the Internet. All UK participants except two were interviewed face-to-face; the remaining two were, at their request, interviewed by email. The interviews with women living in the USA were conducted via email. We acknowledge that the theory and method of interviewing by email is the subject of debate (Mann and Stewart, 2000), but given the focus of this particular paper we do not propose to enter into this debate here. Suffice to say we found advantages (for example, more heterogeneous and geographically diverse group) and disadvantages (for example, time consuming and frustrating) in using this method.

The paper begins with an overview of intersectionality theory and the challenge it brings to the sociological study of sexualities. It then moves to a discussion of diversity theories and how they can be applied to the findings of existing older LGB research. We then return to intersectionality, discussing its methodological application, before undertaking an intersectional narrative analysis of older LGB adults' stories to illustrate its relevance to older LGB research.

The Challenge of Intersectionality Theory

As is well documented, intersectionality theory examines the social divisions, identifications and power relations that structure people's lives, particularly those people deemed to be marginalised (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Introduced into feminist scholarship in the context of black feminism and its critique of mainstream feminist and anti-racist theories (Crenshaw, 1993), intersectionality has become a 'buzzword' (Davis, 2008) for the exploration of differences within, as much as between, social groups. Despite the existence of different strands of intersectionality (McCall, 2009), overall these are critical of approaches which examine people's identities and corresponding inequalities from an additive perspective; that is, inequalities are added up to produce a greater degree of marginalisation and disempowerment. For example, an additive approach would posit that an individual older LGB adult could experience a double or triple inequality related to ageism, heterosexism and in the case of lesbian and bisexual women, sexism. While not denying the existence of such inequalities, such a perspective fails to address the meshing together of these or any other inequalities within everyday life and wider social and political structures. Unwittingly, such additive approaches may reinscribe inequalities by obscuring differences (Krekula, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Intersectionality theory has opened up new critical space in the sociology of sexualities, offering a way to reconsider and possibly reconcile tensions that exist between feminist and queer theories (Fish, 2008; Jackson, 2006; Richardson, 2007). Moreover, it has made important contributions to exploring the relationship between class and sexuality (Skeggs, 1997; Taylor, 2008; 2009) and between

sexuality, gender and ageing (Krekula, 2007; Ward, et al., 2008). Although the foci of these studies are somewhat different, cumulatively they identify the problems with difference per se, whilst emphasising the need to examine *differences within and between groups*: for example, the categorisation 'older LGB adults'.

Taylor (2009), for instance, illustrates the significant differences related to class in her study of working-class lesbians. She reports that for these women, class and sexuality intersect to produce multiple inequalities: for example, some felt excluded from LGB 'scene' spaces because of their class, whilst they were also marginalised within their working-class communities because of their sexuality. Meanwhile, other studies have illustrated the intersection of multiple factors that impact upon the life chances of older LGB people, including: age, gender, class, ethnicity and health status (Fish, 2008; Heaphy, et al., 2004). These studies suggest that experiences are complex and again indicate that homogenous categorisations need to be disaggregated.

These findings and suggestions resonate with our own studies wherein older LGB adults also reported a range of intersecting inequalities related to their age, class and gender. By utilising intersectionality, we illustrate the complex interrelationship between biographical diversity and social context that the identification 'older LGB adult' can obscure. However, like Krekula (2007), in her study of narratives of ageing and gender, we have sought to illustrate empowerment as well as inequalities and exclusion. Before examining how we have used intersectionality theory to extend our understanding of the experiences of older LGB adults, it is necessary to examine the theoretical framework currently used to explore difference in later life.

Diversity theories and older LGB adults

Diversity theories have become central to academic research, as well as to social and political policy and service provision. Reflecting a wide range of applications, the diversity literature is itself diverse and multidisciplinary (see for example, Calasanti, et al., 2006; Daatland and Biggs, 2004; Hartmann and Gerteis, 2005; Niezen, 2003). Within later life studies, diversity theories have prioritised the relationship between individual agency and social structure to explore both social inequality and cultural

difference in later life. As such, they represent a departure from earlier theoretical approaches that utilised a 'normal model' of ageing from which inequalities (or deviations) are measured. Such an approach is methodologically flawed because, as Calasanti (1996) notes, it is used as a reference point in order to measure and compare patterns of difference. It is, therefore, incapable of exploring existing hierarchies of power and can end up reinforcing inequalities and normative understandings of ageing (Cronin, 2004).

Social Diversity

In contrast, social diversity approaches attend to the numerous ways in which both cumulative and newly emergent inequalities experienced over the life course will lead to multiple, different realities in old age (Dannefer, 1996). This has resulted in a greater awareness of how gender, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity, alongside other forms of social and cultural diversity, impact on the lives of older people (Arber and Ginn, 1991; Conway-Turner, 1999; Evandrou, 2000; McFadden, 2001). Sexuality has been largely absent from mainstream social gerontological consideration of social diversity, which in turn has implications for social policy and practice (Heaphy and Yip, 2006; Price, 2005). Although this is now beginning to be addressed in research, an over emphasis on either the physiological aspects of sexuality or assumptions of heterosexuality only serves to reinforce heteronormative thinking and practice. Older LGB adults are thus rendered invisible. While older LGB adults will have much in common with older heterosexual adults, the social organisation of sexuality means that this group may experience later life differently from their heterosexual counterparts. Despite this absence it is possible to detect strands of social diversity thinking within existing research on older LGB adults: for example, in their experiences of health and social care.

Langley's (2001) study of older LGB adults accessing social care, demonstrates the active strategies adopted by this group of adults who have an understandable reluctance to 'come out' to service providers. Yet the ability to 'come out' in a supportive and accepting environment would affect the quality of care received. As a result, Langley urges social workers, in the first instance, to become more adept at

picking up clues in order to provide an appropriate level of service to this group. While Lee (2007) has also highlighted the importance of service providers signalling their recognition of sexual diversity by creating 'gay-friendly' care settings. In a more radical stance, Harrison (2006) states that the institutional heteronormativity present in care services actively contributes to the invisibility of older LGB adults. Thus, it may not simply be a case of older LGB adults continuing with outdated and, by implication, unnecessary strategies of secrecy and passing; they may have a genuine fear that 'coming out' will have a detrimental effect on both the quality of care they receive and their ability to continue to engage in long term relationships and friendships.

Similar findings have been identified in research exploring the health care needs of LGB adults both in later life and across the life course (for example, Clover, 2006 Musingarimi, 2008, River, 2006). These studies suggest that health care staff work with heterosexist presumptions and are likely to view all clients as heterosexual unless informed otherwise. This leads to misunderstandings about the health care needs of LGB people (Hughes and Evans, 2003; Keogh, et al., 2004). In addition, LGB people are often viewed by medical professionals *as* their sexuality (Davies, et al., 2006). In this sense, health conditions are diagnosed in relation to medical professionals' assumptions about sexuality, rather than the whole person. Conversely, a lack of awareness amongst medical professionals of LGB lifestyles and health issues is also a problem, leading to potentially disastrous misdiagnoses (River, 2008). We found evidence to support these findings in our own research, with participants recounting experiences of homophobic and heterosexist attitudes from medical professionals.

The discussion so far would suggest that a social diversity approach has much to offer the future study of older LGB adults, since it makes the case that older LGB adults experience social inequalities. We are concerned, however, that the differences that exist between older LGB adults are being overlooked. Arguably, greater attention needs to be paid to the multiple different realities that exist amongst older LGB adults, otherwise we are in danger of reifying a socially constructed hetero/homo divide. Therefore, we must pay attention to the

intersection of sexuality with other salient social factors and identities. Furthermore, as we explore below in our application of intersectionality theory, we must be able to explain how individuals and groups, by virtue of their social location, may lack particular types of power, yet simultaneously hold other forms of power. This is no less the case with older LGB adults than any other group in society.

Cultural diversity

While not dismissing the presence of social inequalities, cultural diversity approaches are more concerned with the opportunities and possibilities for identity transformation and change afforded by the culturally rich and diverse world of late modernity (Daatland and Biggs, 2004). As social life and experiences become more heterogeneous, we become more aware of 'others' who are not like us and of the possibilities for our own transformation.

Assessing the implications of this, Daatland and Biggs (2004) urge that greater attention should be paid to different 'cultures of ageing'. The main focus for this argument is, quite appropriately, the need to take into account ethnic minority cultures and as such it links into debates on diversity in multicultural studies (Hartmann and Gerteis, 2005). Yet again, while unstated, it is arguable that this understanding of cultural diversity can be applied to much of the existing research on older LGB friendships, social networks and organizations. This provides evidence and analysis to suggest an LGB focused culture of ageing exists that is notably different from a heterosexual or heteronormative culture of ageing.

Evidence suggests that coping with 'coming out' and developing an 'affirmative' LGB identity enables individuals to develop strengths and strategies that can be used in later life (Baltes and Baltes, 1990; Berger and Kelly, 1986; Friend, 1991; Kimmel, 1978). Building on this, Dorfman et al (1995) dispute the traditional myth often perpetuated by both social service providers and social scientists (e.g. Kehoe, 1991; Walter and Simon, 1993) that older non-heterosexuals are likely to be socially depressed in later life due to an absence of social support. While accepting that older non-heterosexuals are less likely than heterosexuals to receive support from family members, they do receive high levels of social support from friends leading

Dorfman et al (1995) to coin the term 'friendship families'.

Focusing specifically on women, Aura (1985) argues that lesbians are more likely to depend on friends and partners than relatives for support, with many lesbians citing ex-partners amongst their closest friends. Endorsing these findings, Kitzinger and Perkins (1993) suggest that, unlike heterosexuals, lesbians are less likely to make a rigid distinction between a love relationship and a friendship relationship. Such findings lend support to the notion of 'families of choice' that has developed in the sociology of sexualities (Roseneil, 2004; Weeks, et al., 2001; Weston, 1991). Discussion of the existence of these relationships amongst the old, as well as the broader LGB focused culture, indicates that there is indeed an LGB centred culture of ageing. However, we challenge the assumption that: firstly, all older LGB adults have followed a similar life course path; and secondly, they have equal opportunity to participate in LGB-focused friendship groups and social networks. Research demonstrates that factors affecting social group membership includes: geographical location (Bell and Valentine, 1995); age related identity cohorts (Rosenfeld, 2002); and life-style choices (Cronin, 2004; Heaphy, 2009). For example, women and men who were either unable or did not wish to pursue a gay lifestyle when younger may not have the same access to social groups compared to adults who did. Therefore, it should be a point of investigation as to whether or not it is possible to talk about an LGB centred culture of ageing, 'friendship families' or indeed 'families of choice'. These concepts, as we discuss later, are intersected by other salient factors, such as class and gender.

Constraint and celebration

In our discussion thus far, we have illustrated that current research, our own included, is underpinned by the dual issues of constraint and celebration. Constraint exists in the form of social inequalities and discrimination, while celebration is represented by the positive recognition of cultural diversity. Existing research highlights the way in which the heteronormative organisation of sexuality affects the experiences of later life for LGB adults. However, we maintain our original conviction that the analysis of older LGB people's lives needs to go further still: to grapple with

and explain differences within the broader categorisation, older LGB adults. It is for this reason that we now return to our discussion of intersectionality and its usefulness in exploring the lives of older LGB adults. In doing so, we challenge the homogeneity that is, albeit unwittingly, present in existing accounts.

Applying Intersectionality to Older LGB Adults' Lives

Applying intersectionality theory can be problematic because decisions about which categories should be included are reflexive, selective tasks (Taylor 2009). McCall's (2009) classification of intersectional methodologies provides a useful way of making such decisions and, like Taylor (2009), we have chosen to focus on the intracategorical. We thereby started with a singular group, 'older LGB adults', and unravelled other intersecting identifications. To facilitate this we undertook an intersectional narrative analysis (Prins, 2006), whilst drawing upon the analysis of categories that participants themselves made relevant within their talk (King and Cronin, 2010). In the following section, we therefore focus on how sexuality intersects with age, gender, and socio-economic (financial) status, as these are related to issues of retirement, social networks and care. Overall, our analysis concurs with others who assert that whilst identifications, such as 'older LGB adult', might retain a degree of significance for policy makers (Fish, 2008; Heaphy and Yip, 2006), they are biographical oversimplifications that sociologists need to disentangle in order to fully understand and reflect diverse life experiences.

Finance and Retirement

One issue that illustrates the complexity of older LGB adults' lives is finance and retirement. The financial status of LGB adults remains a highly contested subject. Whilst some evidence suggests that they have economic advantages compared to heterosexual adults, other studies suggest the opposite (Carpenter, 2008; Elmslie and Tebaldi, 2007; Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004). Moreover, such studies may overlook significant differences between LGB adults themselves, particularly those associated with gender (Taylor 2009). This was the case with members of our sample and is illustrated here in the juxtaposition of the narratives of Geoff and Maz.

Geoff was a fifty-nine year old partnered, middle-class gay man. Privately educated, he 'came out' about his sexuality as a young adult and had been actively involved in gay politics. When asked about early retirement, he described himself as 'buffeted by privilege':

> "Well by taking early retirement and embracing the risks of doing so. I could have carried on drawing a very reasonable salary until I was forced to retire. In some respects I am buffeted by privilege in so far as I am living with someone who is earning a full time salary and doesn't resent our money, well his money, being considered to be part of the common pot, as mine was when I was earning, […], and I do have a certain degree of financial independence, which many people are not in the same fortunate position as I am to benefit from… I want to see what life throws at me."(Geoff, 59)

Geoff was positive about retirement. His financial status, the outcome of professional employment and a stable partnership, provided him with a significant degree of agency. Several of the gay men in our sample were in a similar empowered position. In contrast, and demonstrating the significance of gender, Maz, a fifty-four year old single lesbian, explained that her dreams about retirement were overshadowed by financial commitments.

> "Oh I don't think about it, but I certainly dream about it. I'd love to have the time to spend in the garden and get the garden, you know, under control and enjoy being in it. I would like to be able to travel because I've not been in a position to do that. I've never had any money, and its only really since I've been working full time the last few years that I've had any money at all and what I have now is, you know, sort of split … for the mortgage and about a third for my pension … which I didn't have at all because it was with my husband and so that's all gone, so I have nothing, and about a third which is … living and … a big chunk towards saving things and pension and trying to save some so that I've got something to live on, because otherwise I'm going to have nothing, and a big chunk goes towards supporting the kids." (Maz, 54)

It is clear that Maz's life experience has had a significant impact on her financial status and therefore her possibilities for retirement. She has fewer choices than Geoff and more constraints. Her story was widespread amongst the older lesbians in our sample, many of who had previously been in heterosexual relationships and had children. For some, 'coming out' about their sexuality had occurred later in life. Like Maz, this had impacted on them financially. Thus, although older LGB adults may experience later life differently to their heterosexual counterparts, an intersectional analysis draws out the biographical complexity encapsulated within this statement. In this instance, gender inequalities appear to be more salient. However, other lesbians in our study were more financially solvent: Sandy, for example, who although not wealthy, pointed towards other factors, such as social networks, that had influenced her experience of ageing.

Social Networks and Care

Some participants talked about current partnerships and all envisaged that they would continue into the future, providing a mutual form of support for each other in later life. However, as we noted earlier in our discussion of a gay culture of ageing, when discussing wider forms of social support, in terms of social networks, differences amongst older LGB adults' experiences are important. Sandy, a sixty-four year old lesbian was not partnered and when interviewed was caring for her mother. She spoke about the isolation she felt at the loss of contact with her lesbian friends:

> "I'm finding it very difficult with friends because I do make friends but then one died, others are moving away. Everyone's sort of moving around. And there are others that are in relationships, they are having their life. So I'm not sure. I've got a lot of uncertainty. Things aren't clear to me […] All my old friends have dropped away, one way or another. I've got one ex-partner, we sort of keep in touch but not really 'cos to me there's too much history there. I've got a good friend up in [city]. But compared to how it was when I was younger it's totally, totally different. It's not what I'd have chosen." (Sandy, 64)

Sandy also explained that her attempts to integrate herself into other social networks had been problematic because she felt they were heterosexist in nature: "I went to a yoga class for the over sixties. Like there it's like heterosexuality is just presumed. I get so tired and they say 'have you got any grandchildren?'. 'No'. And the conversation just stops". Sandy's narrative could be read as a simple tale of marginalisation, indicative of the need for policy makers to engage in more diversity training to ensure community groups are inclusive. Whilst we do not eschew the importance of such training (Cronin and King, 2010), our research demonstrates that the equation, ageing plus sexuality equals social isolation is a misnomer without due consideration to a socially situated biographical context. An intersectional biographical analysis, such as that conducted here, enables us to tease out the complexities within such a claim that might otherwise be overlooked.

Peter, a fifty-eight year old bisexual man, is one such example. He recounted a story of a life spent largely 'in the closet', apparently vulnerable and isolated. He had been the principal carer for his mother, until her death three years previously. Since then he had begun to articulate his sexuality. He talked of his close friendship with two much younger gay men, feeling that they had given him the opportunity to develop a whole new social life that had not been available to him when younger:

> "So all these places [gay pubs] that I never knew when I was younger, they've introduced me to that and some while ago I had an operation on my foot and was on crutches and the younger one was fantastic, he was literally like a nurse or something, he was wonderful, both very caring." (Peter, 58)

Peter's narrative also indicates the significance of friends in providing support, particularly in terms of care. We noted earlier that care was a significant area of concern for older LGB adults, especially those not in long-term relationships. Again, sexuality, gender and age intersected in these narratives, complicating simplistic notions of empowerment and disempowerment. For example, some of our participants were particularly concerned about receiving care from people outside of their social network, commenting on a perceived loss of sexual identity or even the need to 'desexualise' their homes. For some, financial status would undoubtedly

enable them to overcome this problem, buying-in 'gay-friendly' carers; whilst for others, such as Peter, alternative solutions, particularly informal networks, were identified. In this respect, although socio-economic status appears to be a mediating factor, the assumption that receiving care as an older LGB adult is problematic or indicative of social isolation is an oversimplification.

Arguably, this brief intersectional analysis of our data illustrates that what it means to be an older LGB adult is not only highly variable, but is intersected by gender, social class and other social factors. In turn, these affect and are affected by retirement, social networks and care. Unlike diversity theories, which take identities as central categories of belonging, intersectionality emphasises biographical diversity and complexity; it fractures simplistic identifications and understandings. Whilst diversity theories can illustrate some of the problems older LGB adults, as a group, may face in certain contexts e.g. care homes, doctor's surgeries etc, we contend that they do not address the intersections of people's biographies with those contexts. It is for this reason that intersectionality is a significant approach and deepens our understandings of older LGB adults' lives.

Conclusions

This paper has outlined how theories of diversity and intersectionality can be applied to the lives of older LGB adults. It began with a list of acronyms or identity categories, including 'older LGB adults'. However, as sociologists, we are concerned that not enough attention is being given to the diversity of experiences that such categorisations encompass. In this conclusion we consider the key ramifications of our discussion thus far, particularly what this means for policy and research.

As noted, many research studies of older LGB adults' lives draw upon, sometimes tacitly, theories of social and cultural diversity. Those using social diversity tend to emphasise constraint and inequalities. For instance, whilst sharing similarities with older heterosexual adults, older LGB adults experience unique problems and difficulties because of the social regulation of sexuality and the normal model of ageing. On the other hand, studies which emphasise cultural diversity suggest that older LGB adults are well-placed to cope with the stresses and tribulations of later

life. Because of marginality and inequality, some older LGB adults have developed their own cultures of ageing. Ultimately, as we have argued and illustrated, the use of such diversity theories can only take us some of the way in examining the complexity of people's lives, identities and situations. Therefore, we have utilised intersectionality theory, as both a broad theoretical approach and as a form of narrative analysis in order to examine this complexity.

Our use of intersectionality demonstrates that older LGB adults are positioned at the intersection of multiple identifications, the effects of which will change depending on context. Hence, in combination with theories of diversity, which offers a broad approach to the analysis of people's lives, intersectionality enables a more fine-grained analysis of difference. Sometimes these differences, as we have demonstrated, will result in disempowerment; whilst sometimes ageing, sexuality and socio-economic (financial) status intersect to empower. Rahman (2009: 360) argues that intersectionality calls into question the viability of identity categories and whether it is possible to use these to identify and remedy inequalities:

> 'intersectionality demands a qualitatively different understanding of dominant, unitary categories... and therefore implies potentially differentiated policies in remedying inequalities based on the categories... [and] ultimately, the implication of differential outcomes in terms of what constitutes "equality"'.

Like others (Fish, 2008), we recognise the significance of using such identity categories, but contend that it is the task of sociologists to tease apart the intersections of power, inequality and identification that such categories gloss. To ignore this task would, in our opinion, be to affirm existing inequalities under the guise of incorporating diversity; to reinforce, albeit unintentionally, heteronormative assumptions in the sociology of later life and social policies related to older LGB adults. Our paper adds to the small but growing body of work in this field. Tracing out the interrelationship between power, inequality and identification at a macro-structural level and as they are intersected in people's everyday lives remains a key objective of future research.

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