

Queer Methods and Queer Practices: Re-examining the Identities of Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Adults

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Introduction

The relationship between ageing and sexuality is contentious; older people are frequently represented as either being sexually inactive or not having a sexual identity. Aside from the issue of ageism, such a representation also occludes the lives of those who have been defined by their sexuality: people who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual¹. Until recently, the lives of this group of older people had received little serious study (Cronin 2004, Heaphy 2007). This is despite the finding that they comprise an estimated 1 in 15 of the users of one of the UK's largest charities for older people (Age Concern 2002). Research has now begun to develop across different regions of the UK (see for example Communities Scotland 2005, Davies, et al. 2006, Heaphy and Yip 2006, Stonewall Cymru and Triangle Wales 2006) demonstrating that despite similarities with older heterosexuals, older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults do have specific needs and issues, some of which will be discussed in this chapter. However, much of this literature represents 'older lesbian, gay and bisexual' as a largely stable, fixed, taken-for-granted identification. This appears to be at odds with other perspectives within the humanities and social sciences that contend that

1 Whilst the identities of older transgendered people is important and certainly something we intend to examine in future research, the material we discuss in this chapter is focused on older people normatively gendered into male and female who identify themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual – bearing in mind that trans people can also identify as lesbian, gay and bisexual.

identities are unstable, multiple and produced contextually. In this chapter we consider this tension and its implications for methodology. Overall, we argue that developing and using methodologies to examine how older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities are produced or accomplished is important if we are to continue developing thinking that moves away from essentialism and avoids reinforcing existing heteronormative understandings of older age.

The first section of the chapter begins by discussing the representation of older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities that emerges in previous research; a category of people who are similar yet different from older heterosexuals. In the second section we trouble, or queer, this identification, considering insights from queer theory, the post-structuralist feminism of Judith Butler, together with the sociological perspectives of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. We then outline how we are developing a methodology in our own research that adopts these insights and that uses both membership categorisation analysis and narrative analysis, although for reasons of brevity we focus our discussion in this chapter on our use of the former. We outline and give examples of this work before discussing its advantages and disadvantages. Finally, we discuss the impact that taking the notion of ‘queering’ seriously has had on our own methodological practice and its potential for a wider application.

Older Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Adults – Queer, but not Necessarily Queered

While the sociological study of sexuality can be traced back some forty years, sociological studies and considerations of older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults did not appear until the early 1980s (Quam and Whitford 1992). Additionally, there has been a ‘queer absence’ (Cronin 2004) in studies of old age and particularly in social gerontology. As we noted earlier, this omission has begun to be addressed and slowly a representation of older

lesbian, gay and bisexual adults has begun to emerge, which indicates certain similarities as well as differences in their lives as older people when compared to heterosexual people from the same age group. For instance, statistical evidence reviewed by Lee-Badget (1997) shows that gay men, like heterosexual men, are more likely to have material advantages in older age; the likely result of a lifetime of gender discrimination in pay. Hence, older gay and bisexual men are more likely to have better pension provision than older lesbians and bisexual women, who have more in common with heterosexual women in terms of financial status. Gay men are also more likely to be living alone (Hubbard and Rossington 1995) due in part to bereavements and because they are less likely to have dependent children. Conversely gay men are more likely to be caring for older relatives than their heterosexual or lesbian counterparts (MetLife 2006). More generally, several studies report that older lesbian, gay and bisexual people are more likely to either experience, or expect to experience, discrimination from health care practitioners (Hunt and Minsky 2005, Keogh, et al. 2004, MetLife 2006). In addition, their concerns about residential care are based not only on a loss of independence, but also a fear of homophobia (Tolley and Ranzijn 2006).

The above is a short exegesis of the literature looking at older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults. What is interesting about this research is how the identity category of 'older lesbian, gay and bisexual' is represented as a determining factor in people's experiences. In effect, it indicates that because people are lesbian, gay or bisexual they experience a different older age to heterosexuals. Much of the research on older lesbian, gay and bisexual people's experiences has been conducted for and by policy makers and practitioners (notable exceptions include Cronin 2004, Harrison 2006, Heaphy 2007, Heaphy and Yip 2006, Kurdek 2005). However, Heaphy (2007: 194) suggests that this research suffers from an epistemological problem: 'a problem that stems from the

conceptual significance afforded sexual identity as the key determining factor of lesbian and gay experience. A more sophisticated understanding is required of social constraints and possibilities as they relate to non-heterosexual living and ageing.' What Heaphy is pointing to, and something that we would emphasise, is that much of the research intended for policy makers and practitioners perpetuates a view of identity, of the subject, as fixed, stable and by implication, essential. This, it seems to us, occludes much of the important work that has emerged from the sociological study of sexuality that views sexual identity as both socially constructed and highly situated or contextual (Seidman 1996, Weeks 1989, 2003). In essence, whilst not eschewing the significance of the aforementioned studies for developing affirmative policies relevant to people who identify as older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, such studies may unwittingly, by quickly translating or 'black-boxing' (Latour 2005) subject positions, occlude the processes by which they are produced. Furthermore, such a position risks the charge of reinforcing heteronormativity because it does not adequately analyse or disrupt its production. It is our contention that we need a more sophisticated understanding and indeed methodology to examine how and why the identifications 'older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults' are produced in certain contexts and it is for this reason that we have turned to ideas in the humanities and social sciences that trouble the notion of stable, fixed and essential categories of identification.

Queering Older Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Adults

The troubling of stable, essential identity categories has emerged from a range of approaches within the humanities and social sciences, but for us, most notably in queer theory, the post-structuralist feminism of Judith Butler, and within sociology from ethnomethodology, conversation analysis, and narrative analysis. What distinguishes these approaches from others within LGBT studies is their focus on the active production of

categories of identity in relation to wider social and cultural norms, such as heteronormativity.

Queer theory is a diverse and sometimes contradictory body of work that takes the deconstruction of categories of identity and knowledge as its central analytic task (Fuss 1991, Green 2007, Seidman 1995). Queer theorists maintain that adopting taken-for-granted categories of identity, whether they are considered the product of an essential biology or a process of social construction, has the effect of obscuring differential experiences and re-affirming existing inequalities. Queer theorists seek to demonstrate that identities are unstable, fluidic fictions that are the effects of regimes of power/knowledge, which regulate bodies and desires (Jagose 1996, Seidman 1996, 1997). Indeed, Sullivan (2003: vi) argues that *to queer* is 'to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimise, to camp up - heteronormative knowledge and institutions'. Queer theory, certainly in its radical deconstructionist guise (Green 2007), maintains that heteronormativity is a discourse that normalises and governs the identities that it brings into being. Thus,

[t]he language and law that regulates the establishment of heterosexuality as both an identity and an institution, both a practice and a system, is the language and law of defence and protection: heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality. (Fuss 1991: 2)

Because heteronormativity is the ideology of sex/gender that permeates Western societies (Rubin 1993, Sedgwick 1993) the approach adopted in many studies of older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, that equality is a fundamental goal which is attainable through negotiation and conflict resolution around identity categories, would be problematic for queer theorists. This is because that approach pays too little attention to

the disciplinary power of heteronormativity. It is, therefore, important that a methodology that utilises queer theory to consider how ‘older lesbian, gay and bisexual’ in ways that relate to and draw upon heteronormative presumptions is produced. What is needed is a methodology that is itself ‘queered’; that is, attuned to uncovering heteronormative presumptions in empirical data. However, queer theory does not encompass a methodological programme *per se*, although it is clear that those seeking to adopt its central tenets will seek to question, or trouble, taken-for-granted understandings and ways of knowing (Dilley 1999, Seidman 1996); in particular, to question the notion of a stable, objective, fixed and essential subject of research. This deconstruction is something that is also central to the work of the post-structuralist queer feminist theorist, Judith Butler.

Explicitly drawing upon the writings of Foucault, Derrida and Austin, Butler contends that discourses, or bodies of knowledge, constitute subjects (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997, 1999, 2004b). To this end, she asserts that categories of identity are performative: they are brought into being through discursive practices that constitute what they name. Butler’s famous example is how biomedical (and heteronormative) conceptions of gender produce a subject position from which a subjectivity is constituted. As Butler (1993: 232) suggests,

[gender] is thus not the product of choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no ‘one’ who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a ‘one’, to become viable as a ‘one’, where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms.

Like Queer Theory more generally, this position stands in marked contrast to the notion of older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults that we discussed in the previous section of this

chapter. In effect, it helps us to recognise that the citation of ‘older lesbian, gay and bisexual’ is performative, bringing those identifications into being in specific ways for specific purposes. Furthermore, recently Butler has examined how performativity actively de-subjectivises selves and she has applied her analysis of such linguistic and symbolic violence to topics as diverse as Gender Identity Disorder and the so-called War on Terror (Butler 2004a, 2004b). Considering the ways in which discourse constitutes the management of identity, she demonstrates how discourses and discursive practices can be both constraining *and* enabling. In essence, their citation may constitute subjects but this is never complete and also agency, difference and resistance emerge through performative enactment. Thus, using this perspective, we can view older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities as multiple and complex, always beyond attempts to fix or stabilise them.

In spite of her assertions and corrections (Butler 1993, 1999, 2004b), Butler’s conception of discourse has been criticised for being too deterministic (see for example Benhabib 1995, Hood-Williams and Cealey-Harrison 1998). Indeed, her work has been criticised for ignoring materiality and employing an approach that is ‘merely linguistic’ (Benhabib 1995, Hood-Williams and Cealey-Harrison 1998, McNay 2004). However, for us, the value of Butler’s work is her demonstration that identities are inherently political; to elaborate on their performativity is to establish ‘as political the very terms through which identity is articulated’ (Butler 1990: 148). With respect to older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, this would mean treating these identifications as political, as identities that because of heteronormativity both reproduce and transgress existing norms.

One problem with Butler’s work is its tendency to be theoretical and abstract and therefore for it to be useful in social research more generally it has been suggested that it needs to be grounded in a methodological programme attuned to examining how people

accomplish identities in specific settings (Fenstermaker and West 2002, McIlvenny 2002a, 2002b, Moloney and Fenstermaker 2002, Speer 2005, Speer and Potter 2002). For instance, McIlvenny (2002b: 9) refers to the effect of queer theory and Butler on the study of identity as 'more a manifesto' than an empirical programme. Indeed, the suggestion made by McIlvenny and others here is that the sociological approaches of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis may have considerable purchase in this enterprise.

Ethnomethodology is a branch of sociology that studies the methods that the members of any particular social situation or context use to make sense of and order their understandings of it (Garfinkel 1984, Heritage 1984). In so doing it examines how these members draw upon their tacit knowledge of 'how the world should be'. Moreover, it asserts that in outlining 'how the world should be' members offer accounts: descriptions of something or someone that is tied to the situation in which it is uttered (Heritage 1984). This means that understandings are both indexical, tied to the context of their use, and yet form part of members' background expectations about the social world, a 'natural attitude' that reflects wider social and cultural norms.

To demonstrate how members account for and order their social realities in this manner, ethnomethodological studies have attended to members' sense making procedures: for example, in his study of Agnes, a male to female transsexual, Garfinkel observed how Agnes had to learn to 'pass' as a woman, despite being socialised as male (Garfinkel 1984). In a series of interviews with Agnes, Garfinkel (1984: 130) noted how she selectively glossed her biography to make it appear to others that she was a 'normal natural female'. Although Garfinkel's study has been subject to criticism (for a useful discussion see Speer 2005), not least because Garfinkel's own gendered understandings influenced Agnes' interactions with him, his study of Agnes does demonstrate how taken-for-granted

categories of identity and the meanings attached to them are produced and utilised in social actions and settings, including research settings themselves.

A concern with how identities and meanings are produced in specific settings is also central to conversation analysis. This methodology was developed by Harvey Sacks, who was himself influenced by the ethnomethodological programme of Harold Garfinkel and the micro-sociologist Erving Goffman (Silverman 1998). Conversation analysis has since become a broad research programme that focuses on various aspects of naturally occurring talk, or talk-in-interaction, including turn-taking, overlaps and pauses, and categories and their associated attributes and activities (Silverman 1998). For some, this approach is overly descriptive, politically naïve and so concerned with the minutiae of social interactions that it fails to account for wider issues of structure and power (Billig 1999, Coser 1975, Hilbert 1990, Kitzinger 2000, Pollner 1991, Speer 2002). However, like Garfinkel, Sacks noted that much sociological research proceeded on the basis of applying ‘undescribed categories’. That is, researchers tend to use categories such as age, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity etc as resources to analyse social problems, such as social change or the effects of power, rather than treating them as topics in and of themselves (Zimmerman and Pollner 1990 [1970]). From the latter perspective, social research methodologies should be attuned to the artful practices used by people to construct the aforementioned ‘undescribed categories’, rather than eliciting ‘facts’ that are the outcomes of being members of these categories. In relation to older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, this would mean treating these categories of identity as accomplishments, exploring how they are constituted by people themselves in specific settings and how they are interrelated with other aspects of self that they make relevant in their talk.

So far we have argued that much of the research that has been conducted into the lives of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people has implicitly relied on a conception of research that can be described as ‘fact eliciting’. Arguably, adopting such an approach has produced useful and interesting findings that have informed policy and legal debates as we noted earlier. However, we are concerned to examine how and why the categories of identity and knowledge related to older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults are accomplished by members, considering how and why certain discourses are drawn upon, utilised, challenged and transformed in their talk. We have sought, therefore, to queer the categorisation of ‘older lesbian, gay and bisexual’, rather than viewing these categories as *a priori* social facts. In attempting to undertake this task, methodologically, we are drawing here upon membership categorisation analysis.

Queering our Practices, Taking Membership Categorisation Seriously

Membership categorisation analysis ‘pays attention to the situated and reflexive use of categories in everyday and institutional interaction, as well as interview, media and other textual data’ (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 38). Enabling the investigation of ‘culture-in-action’ (Baker 2000: 112), membership categorisation analysis shows how cultural understandings are carried by discourse and are reproduced and transformed in their use. It can be used to analyse specific instances of the categorisation of people, places and events, but it is also attuned to detailing how these instances link to wider discursive norms and practices. In short, it is attuned to both micro and macro levels of analysis.

Membership categorisation analysis has been used to analyse gender, crime, organisational structures and stigmatised identities, amongst other topics (Eglin and Hester 2003, Llewellyn 2004, McKinlay and Dunnett 1998, Nikander 2000, Stokoe 2003a, Stokoe

2004). Stokoe (2004), for instance, demonstrated how gender categories became interactionally relevant in a student workgroup, rather than simply determining the interaction in advance. She showed how the categories used by the students in their talk resulted in the positioning of the only female member of the workgroup as the scribe. In effect, through the talk-in-interaction the group reproduced normative gender roles, although not without a degree of argument and re-categorisation. Stokoe argued that this reveals the critical nature of membership categorisation analysis; it shows the micro-political dynamics of categorisations in talk and uncovers how power structures are manifested and contested in local settings.

Membership categorisation analysis examines how categories are grouped into certain collections, called membership categorisation devices, and how they are bound to specific activities or attributes, referred to as predicates. The combination of membership categories, membership categorisation devices and associated predicates in a narrative or account is artful; that is, people do not passively reproduce normative combinations of these, rather they deploy them in specific situations to do specific things. Hence, the male students in Stokoe's study (2004) used them in a series of interactions to reproduce gender roles in their workgroup, while trying to appear to be egalitarian. In addition to reproducing or transgressing norms and roles, categories can be combined to establish moral and behavioural precedents. Sacks (1995) demonstrated, for example, how a navy fighter pilot artfully used categorisations in an account of a bombing raid in order to justify the killing of other people involved in the conflict. Similarly, McKinlay and Dunnett (1998) examined how gun owners constructed their identities as 'average' in opposition to a discourse that positioned them as dangerous.

We have sought to utilise membership categorisation analysis (both on its own and in combination with narrative analysis) in our own research in order to examine how heteronormative presumptions about ageing and sexuality are reproduced, challenged and transgressed in the narrative accounts of people who identify themselves as older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults. We conducted policy-based research, interviewing 20 older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults who we recruited via newspaper adverts, flyers in public settings, including those in the LGBT community, and online LGBT forums. Analysing the accounts of these people with membership categorisation analysis presented us with a means of exploring how they categorised themselves and their social worlds, given that they have already been categorised by participating in the research as older and lesbian, gay or bisexual. Later in the chapter we will point to the queer move associated with undertaking this analysis on the policy-based data we generated.

Membership categorisation analysis has however been criticised, even by those who are adherents of conversation analysis (Eglin and Hester 2003, Horton-Salway 2004, Housley and Fitzgerald 2002, Stokoe 2003a, 2003b). One problem noted is that membership categorisation analysis can become overly concerned with the content of categories, neglecting to attend to their sequential organisation (Housley and Fitzgerald 2002, Schegloff 2007). People develop the meanings of categories and their associated attributes during the course of an account. Without attending to this level of analysis, membership categorisation analysis is not very different from thematic and grounded forms of analysis that are more traditional in qualitative research. Ways of avoiding this have been detailed elsewhere (King forthcoming, Stokoe 2003a, Watson 1997), but we contend that narrative analysis (Earthy and Cronin 2008, Riessman 2008) is particularly useful here since it is attuned to examining narratives as a whole, their sequential

exposition, rather than isolating certain features. In order to demonstrate some of these points, we now turn to an example drawn from our own empirical data.

The extracts outlined below come from an interview conducted with a 73 year old man who we will call Ernest. The interview began with a question concerning sexuality.

Interviewer: We all use different terms to describe our sexuality so it would be helpful for me if you could tell me how you describe your sexual identity?

Ernest: Right er well I feel it's a very important issue, well it is for me. I'm a gay man but my gayness is not what I would call my primary characteristic. My primary characteristic is that I'm male and er I would do everything that I would expect an ordinary male to do except that when it comes to sex then I'm going to prefer to have sex with other men but that's the only way I consider myself to be gay.

Here the interviewer's question makes the membership categorisation device 'sexuality' a relevant resource for Ernest to categorise himself. This does not mean that Ernest will always categorise himself according to this device; indeed in his response he makes it clear that his understanding of this identification is more complex, what we might describe as 'doing' rather than 'being'. Initially he categorises himself as a 'gay man'; a category that is consistent with the membership categorisation device, 'sexuality'. However, rather than ending his description at this point, Ernest then turns this categorisation into a predicate, 'gayness' and in so doing makes his membership of this category something of note. Ernest then emphasises the other device that 'gay man' belongs to: gender. He asserts that 'male' is his 'primary characteristic'. What distinguishes Ernest from being an 'ordinary male' is something he 'does': he 'has sex with other men'. It appears, to an extent, that the categorisation work that Ernest is undertaking uses heteronormative understandings/assumptions at this point – heterosexual men, men who don't have sex

with other men, are 'ordinary'; conversely, gay is not ordinary. This appears to be confirmed when he provides an account of why 'gay' is not his primary characteristic:

I've never lived erm I've always been around other gay people but I've never lived in an exclusively gay community. I've never been in an exclusively gay relationship although I've had quite a few fairly long-term gay relationships but er I wouldn't consider anything like a civil partnership or anything in a formalised way. I have been married but that was purely for erm immigration purposes while I lived briefly in America and that didn't succeed at all (laughs) it wasn't a very rewarding experience.

In this section Ernest is outlining what he associates with being gay and problematises his own membership of this category by dissociating himself from certain attributes that he considers mark membership of this categorisation: membership of a gay community, an exclusively gay relationship and civil partnerships. However, it is not possible to simply classify Ernest as 'closeted' from this statement since he makes it clear he has always associated with gay people and has had 'long-term' gay relationships. Moreover, he makes it clear that his attachment to the heteronormative activity, 'marriage', was both instrumental and unrewarding.

Previous research has indicated that older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults, like Ernest, who grew up in an era before homosexuality was decriminalised, are more likely to attempt to 'pass' as straight than those older lesbian, gay and bisexual adults who grew up after decriminalisation (Rosenfeld 2002). Other forms of thematic analysis might well categorise or code this section of Ernest's account as an example of passing. However, we contend that the categorisation work evident in these sections of Ernest's account indicates a more complex representation. In effect, Ernest subtly and artfully situates himself as 'gay', but not 'typically' gay. Whilst this can be viewed as heteronormative, since he appears to

suggest he passes as ‘straight’, it also can be viewed as ‘queer’: Ernest is actively rejecting existing categorisations and situating himself as different. This may well be the result of a lifetime of passing, *but* it may also be a more subtle practice of transgression that having spent a lifetime of avoiding being categorised (and in some cases pathologized) and is indicative of how Ernest views his sexuality - as something he does rather than something he is. Any researcher or practitioner who simply categorises Ernest as ‘gay’, or for that matter as a ‘man who have sex with men’, would miss this more complex understanding.

This complexity is also evident in a latter extract from Ernest’s interview where the topic of age was made relevant. In a discussion that follows a question where he is positioned as ‘someone who can comment on services for older people’, Ernest refuses to let himself be categorised as ‘older’:

Interviewer: What about service provision for older people do you think?

Ernest: There again I have very rarely got myself involved and not classifying myself as gay I don’t classify myself as er old I just don’t think in terms of age ... so that’s [his voluntary work] brought me much more in to focus on the needs of older people and what older people talk about er which is mainly sitting around chatting about the old days (laughs) it’s not really my scene but you know you listen and you try and be as helpful as you can.

Ernest’s response explicitly makes clear that the category ‘old’ is not applicable to him. Nonetheless, his voluntary work has made him ‘think’ about what older people need and their behaviours: their talk, ‘chatting about the old days’. He also dissociates himself from their ‘scene’; an interesting attribution since it *implicitly* references the ‘gay scene’ which he has already made clear is not relevant to him. Whilst we cannot assume that Ernest does not want to talk about the old days because they hold memories that are painful, his suggestion that his role was to ‘listen’ and ‘be helpful’ again dissociates him from

membership of the category 'older person': they talk, he listens. Ernest, who we might categorise as 'older' according to normative models of ageing, artfully positions himself as different. Again, this has implications for researchers and practitioners who might be attempting to recruit older people for research projects or who wish to provide services specifically aimed at the category, 'older' people. In essence, therefore, categorical membership matters and how people chose, at certain times and not others, to categorise themselves matters more.

We do not wish to generalise or proselytise from one account; whilst Ernest's account was different from others in our corpus, it certainly had similarities: a desire not to be easily classified; to be similar yet different from other LGBT people; a desire not be classified as 'old'. Our use of Ernest's account in this chapter is simply to demonstrate the use of our methodology in considering the complexity of older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. We have, therefore, sought to take the notion of queering seriously, something that we will now consider in more detail.

Qualifying Queer Practices: Some Observations and Conclusions

We contend that analysing people's categorisations of themselves and others, of people and events, represent a first step in demonstrating the instability and the performativity of older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities. We have argued that this is because we did not feel that the extant literature related to older lesbian, gay and bisexual people considered the unstable, complex and fluidic nature of identity that is apparent from work in the humanities and social sciences, particularly in queer theory, the post-structuralism of Judith Butler, together with ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. In developing a methodology to take account of these insights, we have drawn on membership

categorisation analysis and narrative analysis. We think that these are particularly useful in this respect as they take the notion of queering seriously. In this chapter we have attempted to demonstrate how this can be done and why it is important. We believe that the methodological approach we suggest can help to extend previous research examining the production of older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities *in situ*. In future, this form of analysis could be used in other, more naturalistic, settings, such as care homes, day centres or public meetings. In these instances, research could attend to the conditions of possibility that these settings afford, or deny, to members in how they accomplish their older lesbian, gay and bisexual identities.

Our methodology also attempts to queer the categorisation ‘older lesbian, gay and bisexual’ itself: to explore the discursive resources that people use when they are asked to identify with these categories. This is what Baker (2000: 112) refers to as the exploration of ‘culture-in-action’, asserting that attending to membership categorisation involves considering ‘how discourses are called on and how they are invoked in the mundane activities of talking, hearing, reading and writing’. Our methodology is designed to show how people use and transgress heteronormative models of sexuality and ageing, producing complex representations of themselves and their life course. Thus, we contend that this troubles, or queers, simplistic notions and equations of age and sexuality with exclusion, marginalisation or isolation. While these will be factors in some people’s lives, they will not be applicable to all. Attending to how people construct their selves represents a first step in exploring these complex issues.

Finally, in this chapter we have also queered the data we originally collected and the reason why it was collected, which was primarily to inform the development of local government policies and to ascertain the needs of older lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

Our analysis and discussion here queers, or troubles, its original purpose. Indeed, our argument is that any qualitative data can be re-analysed using queer methods. Overall, therefore, we have sought to avoid generalisations and fact production, focusing instead on the processes by which certainties (and uncertainties) are produced. Whilst we consider that we are still developing our methodology, we hope that others will consider utilising some of the insights we have provided here in different contexts. Taking a queer turn in approaching methods and methodological practices is important if we are to avoid replicating (hetero)normative understandings, power relationships and occlusions in our research.

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