AN EXPLORATION OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

(VOLUME 1)

BY

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Abstract

There has been a recent focus on outcomes for all children. However, the needs of sexual minority young people (SMYP) have remained a low priority in education. This thesis aims to open dialogue on this historically silenced subject. It was submitted as part of the Doctoral training in Educational Psychology. Volume One is comprised of four chapters: Chapter One outlines an overview of the research. In addition, it provides the rationale for the study and relevant contextual information. Chapter Two evaluates the existing literature contributing to an understanding of the relationship between sexuality and educational settings. Chapter Three presents the findings from an empirical study undertaken with seven educational psychologists (EPs). Data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using discursive psychology to provide understanding of how EPs construct sexuality and their role in the sexuality diversity agenda. Chapter Four reports on conclusions and reflections stemming from the research study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1. The New Route of Doctoral Training in Educational Psychology

In 2006, the three year Doctorate route replaced the Masters training in educational psychology and this thesis was produced as part of the requirement for the full-time Doctoral training. I was one of 12 trainees in the second cohort at the University of Birmingham. The course required trainees to attend university on a full-time basis for the first year and secure employment as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) employed by a local authority in the second and third years.

Volume One is part of a two volume thesis which meets the written requirement for the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctoral qualification. Volume one contains a literature review related to a small scale research project. The research was guided by university requirements, the national equality context, support from the educational psychology service in terms of relevance and my own interest in equality issues. Volume two is comprised of five professional practice reports which centre on topics relating to educational psychology practice.

2. Overview of Volume One

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview contextualises the research and provides a link between the literature review and research through outlining further information than the specifications allowed by both reports. This chapter outlines the background and focus of the research. It also highlights the design features and the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen epistemology and methodology. This will allow the reader to understand and evaluate the underpinning ethical and methodological decisions involved in the research process.

Chapter 2: Sexuality Diversity - A Review of the Literature evaluates research undertaken in the area of sexuality. It explores relevant historical themes and theories of sexuality contributing to the low prioritisation of the needs of sexual minority young people (SMYP) today. The chapter presents definitions of terminology associated with sexuality equality. It also evaluates educational psychologists' contributions to the sexuality diversity agenda and identifies gaps in research to date.

Chapter 3: An Investigation of Educational Psychologists' Constructions of Sexuality and the Implications for Practice. This chapter describes the research orientation, design and methods employed in the empirical study. It also reports on the findings from discourse analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews with a small sample of educational psychologists. The limitations of the study are discussed and the implications of the findings for educational psychology practice are considered.

Chapter 4: Conclusion. This chapter considers the implications of the findings from the research study in terms of effects on the author's practice, the participants and at a service level. It also provides reflections on personal learning gained from undertaking the research.

3. Research focus and rationale

Recently, educational psychologists (EPs) have widened their client group beyond the special educational needs (SEN) population (Baxter and Frederickson 2005) in response to new legislation and guidance (e.g. Every Child Matters DfES 2003).

This has meant a new focus on outcomes for all children. However, the needs of sexual minority young people (SMYP) have largely been ignored in education and by the educational psychology profession. This is attributed to historically based constructions of children and sexuality (Foucault 1978, Epstein and Johnson 1998). As a result, SMYP have been positioned as a vulnerable group with many professionals largely unaware of their additional needs due to the silence surrounding sexuality (Sedgwick 1990).

Although educational psychologists often act as advocates for children, the profession has demonstrated little interest in prioritising the needs of SMYP. To date, much of the (sparse) educational psychology literature in the area of sexual equality has focused on understanding the needs of SMYP rather than the needs of those around them (e.g. Robertson and Monsen 2001, Rivers 2001). Research from other caring professions (e.g. Brownlee et al 2005, McCann 2001) has repositioned the concern at a social level through the adoption of the term 'heterosexism'. This is defined as a societal bias which suggests heterosexism as 'normal' and non-heterosexuality as 'inferior' (Fish 2008). Such research provides understanding of how social environments may facilitate or constrain opportunities for sexual minorities. However, this previous research was undertaken utilising positivist measures such as attitude scales which may be considered as presenting individual views as simplistic. It is considered that qualitative analyses of such a complex subject as sexuality would enrich understanding in this area.

4. Research Aims and questions

This research seeks to explore educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality in order to improve and prioritise practice in the area of sexuality diversity. This concurs with recommendations by Robertson and Monsen (2001), Williams (2008) and McIntyre (2009) who advocate the need for EPs to reflect on their own practice and support schools in creating safe and supportive environments for SMYP. This also meets recent government proposals for the new Equality Bill (House of Commons 2009) which should come fully into force by 2011, legislating that public bodies should consider the needs of all diverse groups within their organisations and instigate positive action in service delivery to meet their needs.

The research also aims to provide information about EPs' constructions of sexuality and children, sexuality and schools and their own experience and understandings of their role in sexuality diversity. This research developed with an emancipatory function contextualised by a continued silence around sexuality diversity in education. Whilst wider societal changes have been observed through policy and attitude change, research in schools has suggested that sexual minority young people are socially excluded (Crowley et al 2001, Stonewall 2008).

The research is therefore intended to represent a voice for a silenced 'other' but further than this, it is based upon the social constructionist premise that the acknowledgement of multiple realities can reconstruct alternatives. It seeks to provide knowledge and recommendations for action (Willig 2001) towards creating sexually diverse and safe school environments for children. Thus, it is conceived that it will contribute new knowledge and recommendations for EP practice, develop

awareness of sexuality equality issues in the profession, and open dialogue about a subject which has invariably been silenced due to historical connotations. The following questions will be addressed:
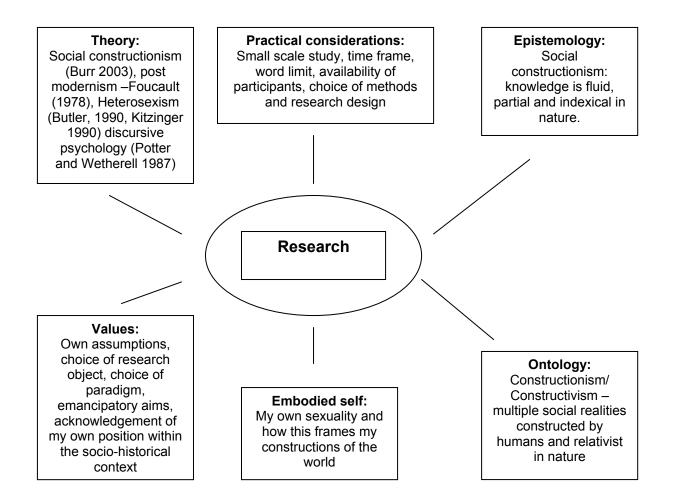
- How do EPs construct sexuality, sexuality and children and school cultures and sexuality?

- How do EPs construct their role in relation to the area of sexuality diversity?

- What functions do these constructions serve?

- How do these constructions contribute to current practice in this area and what are the implications for future practice?

5. Reflections on the chosen design and methodology

> 'No human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all …' Burr 2003 p152

There is an explicit acknowledgement of the subjective nature of this research. Indeed, writing in such a qualitative mode is viewed as a strength of the research as the researcher can channel their idiosyncratic experiences and constructions of the world into their research, producing a value-driven form of episteme. Thus, the resulting research design for the study had multiple influences. These are outlined in Figure 1 below and will be discussed further in the following sections.

Figure 1: Influences on social research adapted from Bryman (2004) p21

Theory:
Social constructionism (Burr 2003), post modernism –Foucault (1978), Heterosexism (Butler, 1990, Kitzinger 1990) discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987)

Practical considerations:
Small scale study, time frame, word limit, availability of participants, choice of methods and research design

Epistemology:
Social constructionism: knowledge is fluid, partial and indexical in nature.

Research

Values:
Own assumptions, choice of research object, choice of paradigm, emancipatory aims, acknowledgement of my own position within the socio-historical context

Embodied self:
My own sexuality and how this frames my constructions of the world

Ontology:
Constructionism/ Constructivism – multiple social realities constructed by humans and relativist in nature

6. Position as a researcher : *Epistemology and ontology*

This research has an underlying post modern paradigm which questions the status quo and hones in on the complexities of sexuality diversity which may be below the level of awareness of many (McKenzie et al 1997). It focuses on the exploration of language which is not considered to be a 'transparent vehicle' (Burr 2003) but action-oriented. Thus, underlying this research is the principle that the research process is a mutual an interactive process between the researcher and the researched. The resultant knowledge gained reflects the embedded and embodied self as it has been

carried out, interpreted, composed and read by human action. This point is conceptualised by Burr's (1998) comment,

> 'Since we cannot ever step outside our own culturally and historically located value systems, perhaps we must (and can only) make such judgements from within this system and defend them regardless of their inevitable relativism. '

> Burr (1998), p24.

6.1 Own sexuality

It is acknowledged that there is an underlying autobiographical aspect to research as sexuality is considered as an organising feature of world (Sedgwick 1990, Burr 2003) and so the author's own sexuality frames the resultant rhetoric. My own experiences of schooling and life have been influenced by an 'othered' position. In writing, my own sexuality is explicitly referenced to achieve greater saliency. However, reference to this in the research interview was avoided. This has effects on the data generated, as revealing this may have influenced the discourse but also its omission would also have effects (McCracken 1988). My own sexuality also influenced the choice of term for labelling an 'othered' group. This caused conflict in not wishing to perpetuate a dichotomy of normal and 'othered' but also recognised the need to provide a label for a group which has clearly been a historically created minority. The term sexual minority young person was chosen from many alternatives as the 'best fit' label.

6.2 Critique of the social constructionist paradigm

Macrolevel social constructionsim has previously been criticised for its reliance on a false dichotomy between determinism and agency suggesting that we are human

puppets (Burr 2003) lacking in autonomous action. However, the findings from this research reflect the belief that individuals co-construct realities in relation to context, thus the constructions of sexuality reported are multiple and fluid in nature.

Discursive psychology has been criticised for its apolitical stance (Willig 2003). However, it is acknowledged that this research has an underlying emancipatory aim and thus the author acknowledges an underpinning rhetoric aimed at achieving a social effect (Billig 1987). The concept of heterosexism largely influences the narrative with an anti-essentialist (the relinquishing of pathological notions of sexuality) stance explicitly referenced to avoid a historically established binary distinction between heterosexual and non-heterosexual experience. This social constructionist and explicitly critical position is intended to deconstruct established discourses of sexuality and construct new ones.

7. Negotiating the research, sampling methods and the challenges of research into sexuality

The research was undertaken within the author's EP service (whilst working as a trainee educational psychologist) ensuring ease in access to participants through purposive sampling. Participants were fully informed of the rationale and purpose of the study via email and the initial response provided enough participants for a small qualitative study. However, the author acknowledges that this method produced limited choice in participants selected. Widening to other services may have avoided this but time constraints influenced this decision. The response rate may have also been influenced by the relationship between the author and other members of the service or alternatively, the historical associations of a sensitive subject.

8. Methods

To highlight the complexities of sexual diversity as a research topic, certain methods were selected. Firstly, a semi-structured interview was chosen as it produces rich data which are co-constructed 'in situ' but enables clarification of participants' meanings. The data were analysed using discursive psychology which enable the questioning of narratives in terms of their effects (Burr 2003) congruent with the underlying social constructionist epistemology. Discursive psychology is a form of discourse analysis, a tool which deconstructs the processes inherent in text which position knowledge, social relationships and perceptions (Potter 2003). This method, coupled with verbatim quotes, enables the reader actively to construct their meaning of the research text, thus enhancing the transparency of the research process.

9. Ethical considerations

It is acknowledged that the research is imbued with the author's rhetoric. However, the power differential throughout the research process was countered by using participants' verbatim narratives to structure the discussion. This enables polyvocality (Gergen and Gergen 2003), reducing the dominance of the author's voice. Previous research has focused on young people's voices in the area of sexuality diversity. In wishing to reposition sexuality as a social rather than a pathologised issue, this created tensions in representing SMYP indirectly. This was justified by an emancipatory aim in recommending actions towards change. Indeed, Burr (1998) argues that issues of disadvantage are highly complex. Through

reflection, it is considered that the discourse produced by the research does not limit SMYP in any way.

10. Other constraints on carrying out the research

This research has been produced within a limited time frame and reported within a constrained word limit. The research was undertaken whilst fulfilling a dual role as a trainee educational psychologist working part-time within a service, as well as fulfilling a research role. This meant that decisions regarding the recruitment of participants and the number of interviews transcribed fully were influenced by the nature of the dual role. Such limits on the final written draft have meant that both the themes obtained from the data analysis and the elaboration of the findings have been reduced to fit within the given parameters.

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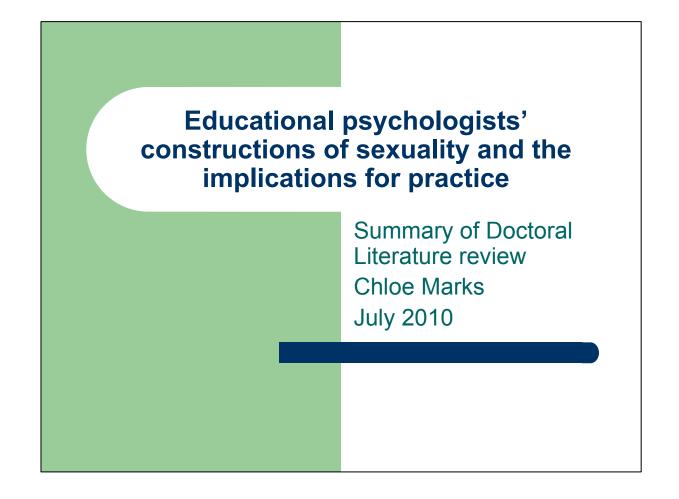
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Appendix 1

**Public Domain Briefing 1: Presentation of the Literature Review to the
Educational Psychology Service**

Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice

Summary of Doctoral
Literature review
Chloe Marks
July 2010

Literature review: context for research

- Increased interest in outcomes for children (Every Child Matters, DfES 2004).

- Sexual Minority Young People (SMYP) remain a vulnerable group due to a historically embedded social silence.

- Despite greater societal acceptance (demonstrated by recent legislation changes) and media portrayals of diverse sexualities, sexuality equality remains a low priority in education.

Legislation change – repeal of section 28 which prevented promotion of homosexual relationships in schools (2003), Civil Partnership Act (2004), similar rights for sexual minority couples

Terminology

- The term Sexual Minority Young People (SMYP) is defined as those who experience a marginalised position in relation to sexuality regardless of their sexual preference.

- SMYP chosen as it is intended to avoid dichotomising heterosexual and non-heterosexual experience whilst also inferring a power imbalance.

Literature review: Why has sexuality equality remained a low priority in education?

- Epstein and Johnson (1998) - Schools imbued with discourses of childhood which position children as asexual, heterosexual and vulnerable simultaneously.

- Foucault (1978) – These discourses stem from 18th century government control practices which constructed sex as an adult concern.

- Diamond (2005) – found a discourse of victimisation which constructs SMYP as weak and in need of support. This discourse is reflected in studies by Walker (2001) and Rivers (2001).

- Interpretive repertoires which have been historically embedded and are reflected in contemporary social practices today. We use these to evaluate versions of events and acting in situations.

- Rivers (2001) SMYP experience of homophobic bullying

- Walker (2001) SMYP – well being and suicide

Literature review: Educational interest so far …

- Support for SMYP has been provided under the anti-bullying umbrella.

- Stonewall - The School Report (2007) found that SMYP experience homophobia, invisibility and social exclusion.

- 1/3 pupils unhappy at school
- 1/2 feel unaccepted in school environment
- 58% reported that they could not discuss sexuality and homophobia
- 48% were victims of violence
- 90% experienced name calling

The School Report (2007) gained the views of SMYP through a national survey.

Literature review: Research into sexuality

- Tended to problematise sexuality – e.g. D'Augelli et al (2001) and Walker (2001) highlight mental health difficulties as a result of integrating sexual minority identities but also suggest that social support influences mental health for SMYP.

- This research highlights discrimination but positions SMYP as victims which may be perceived again as privileging heterosexuality (Jeyasingham 2007).

- Research by Savin Williams (2001) contradicts this by providing an alternative to this problematic trajectory. He found diverse group with varying trajectories. He critiques the methodologies of the above studies in terms of representative samples.

- Cohler and Hammock (2007) highlight an emancipatory narrative of SMYP which suggests a more fluid and problem-free experience.

- Social support (Rutter 1985) is a protective factor for mental health

- Stonewall (2008) panic attacks, eating disorders, suicide attempts, self-harming

- Walker (2001) suicide attempts - Social support- peers and family protective factor from retrospective accounts of sexual minority adults

- Difficult to access SM due to sensitivity of the subject, also sample may reflect those who have sought support so may bias the findings.

Literature review: Contributions from caring professions

- Increased interest from social care and health (McCann 2001, Ben Ari 2001 and Brownlee et al 2005) in professionals' attitudes

- The above studies found that professionals conveyed heterosexist attitudes.

- However, these have been criticised for employing positivist measures which ignore complexity and simplify attitudes in the search for an objective truth (Potter 2003).

- McCann (2001) negative assumptions held about SM in clinical settings

- Ben Ari (2001) academics in education, psychology and health care- levels of homophobia. Psychologists had lower levels of heterosexism.

- Brownlee et al (2005) social care undergraduates – low levels of heterosexism – diversity training reduces this as by fourth year – lower levels

- All use scaling and quantitative analysis.

Literature review: contribution of educational psychology

- Largely omitted from EP literature

- Education and Child Psychology dedicated entire edition in 2001 focusing on identity issues, invisibility and homophobia.

- Again this highlighted discrimination but perpetuates a victim discourse.

- Positive aspects included the acknowledgement of a cultural bias within the profession towards heterosexism and actions needed at different systems levels

- Recent interest - research by Williams (2008) and McIntyre (2009) accentuating a lack of awareness of heterosexism. McIntyre suggests that EPs are ideally positioned to challenge institutionalised silences.

- Walker (2001) well being, Robertson and Monsen (2001) identity issues, Crowley (2001) support for SMYP, homophobic bullying (Rivers 2001)

- McIntyre (2009) interviews and questionnaires with school teachers – found teachers lacked language to discuss LGB issues. Looked at barriers and facilitators to inclusion of LGB.
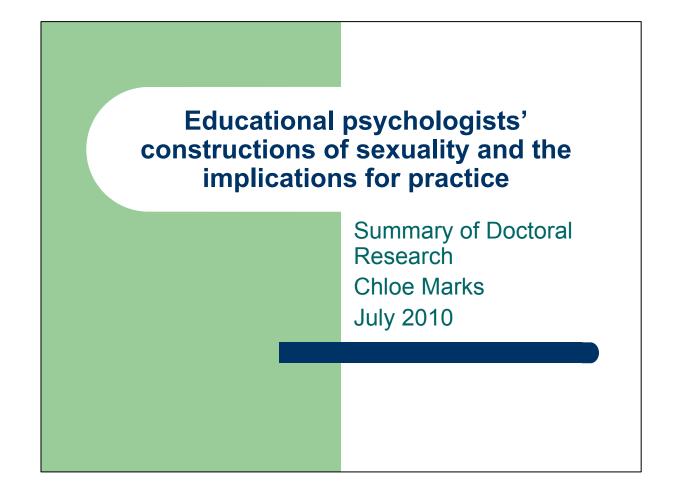
Literature review: conclusions

- Much of previous research has focused on SMYP and constructed narratives which perpetuate a historical dichotomy suggesting intervention is needed at a crisis level.

- Research by other caring professionals has shown a need to explore professional constructions of sexuality to impact at a preventative level.

- Lack of interest by EP profession generally in meeting the needs of SMYP. However, since 2001, EPs have recommended interventions at varying systems levels and inferred an ideal position for EPs in working with schools to develop sexuality equality practice.

- Before such intervention, there is a need to explore EPs' constructions of sexuality to understand how these and understandings of our role in this area may influence practice and therefore outcomes for SMYP.

Gap – no literature examining EPs' understandings of sexuality. Also, qualitative measures had not been used prior to McIntyre (2009) which had not been published until after the research.

Public Domain Briefing 2: Presentation of the Research to the Educational Psychology Service

Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice

Summary of Doctoral Research

Chloe Marks

July 2010

Negotiating the research

Meeting with Acting Principal of EPS

- discussion of aims, context and rationale for study

- participants to be selected from the service

- ethics form

- Service gave freedom of choice for research topic.

Research aims

- To provide understanding of how EPs construct sexuality and how this impacts on their practice.

- To stimulate dialogue about a virtually 'invisible' subject.

- To add to developing EP practice in the area of sexuality diversity.

- To contribute knowledge which could create safe educational environments for SMYP.

Research questions

1. How do EPs construct sexuality including:
- children's sexuality?
- the needs of SMYP?
- sexuality in educational settings?

2. How do EPs construct their role in relation to the area of sexuality diversity?

3. What functions do these constructions serve?

4. How do these constructions contribute to current practice in this area and what are the implications for future practice?

Epistemology

Social constructionist epistemology

- Explores social world acknowledging a multiplicity of knowledge forms and diversity in life

- Knowledge is partial and contextually embedded – situated knowledge about sexuality and SMYP may construct an oppressive or emancipatory reality

- Reflects the complexities inherent in the area of sexual diversity

- Takes a critical stance on historically established forms of knowledge about sexuality

Looks at how people categorise/experience the world through language

Research methodology

Sampling
- 7 educational psychologists from Birmingham EPS
- Voluntary response to email request

Semi-structured Interview
- Theory will emerge from the data
- Balance of power – participants' narratives central
- Fixed questions but prompts to clarify responses

Ethical considerations

- Preparation time given for participants to view the questions (due to the sensitivity of the subject). Debriefing also followed the interviews.

- Direct quotations of participants' responses used in final report to increase saliency of their voices and to reduce the power differential.

Method of analysis

Discourse analysis – Discursive psychology

- Constructionist approach which explores how phenomena are constructed, used and the implications of this.

- Language is a social practice which serves a variety of functions and consequences

- Exploring talk on sexuality will reveal how it impacts on practice

Findings

Themes

Greater acceptance

Normalising sexual diversity

Sexual diversity is part of the equality umbrella

Protection of children

Awareness of heterosexism

Inclusive vs non-inclusive school cultures

Systemic vs Individual work

Accountability in sexuality diversity

Findings: Constructions of sexuality

Normalising sexual diversity

'I think everybody's needs are different… I think it would be the same needs as any other person. Sensitivity… being open to that young person and supportive. I don't think their needs would be any different to any young person who is going through a difficult time in adolescence."

- Different subject positions and competing discourses
- Non-prejudiced position – minimising differences between SMYP and peers
- Victim discourse – 'difficult time'
- Negotiating a dilemmatic position – tensions between the two constructions of SMYP

EPs minimised the differences between non-heterosexual and heterosexual young people.

Findings: Constructions of sexuality

Awareness of heterosexism (2 participants)

'I think that they [children] would probably get the message that most people are heterosexual.'

- Much of the literature refers to a lack of awareness of heterosexism by educational professionals (Atkinson and Depalma 2008, Williams 2008 and McIntyre 2009).

- Concurs with Ben Ari (2001) psychologists showed more awareness of sexuality diversity than other professionals.

Findings: Constructions of the EP role

Accountability

> 'I wouldn't have raised it because as I say, it was not raised with me as a concern. If I did raise it as a concern, I think that people would think that I am jumping to conclusions or making presumptions. You never can tell, people might feel offended.'

- One of the main organising features of participants' talk in this study.
- Responsibility of the school to raise
- Implicit reference to binary distinction of normal and abnormal sexuality – 'offended'
- Child protection repertoire – 'presumptions'

Would the EP raise sexuality diversity when working with schools?

Summary of findings

- EPs use a variety of constructions for different purposes (multiple and fluid).

- Constructions were influenced by various interpretive repertoires and individual discourses.

- These were used to negotiate social and practice-related dilemmas (Developed 'in situ' – context-dependent).

- Two main concerns: the need to maintain a non-prejudiced position and to manage accountability tensions.

- 2 EPs were aware of heterosexism.

Limitations of the research

- Justification of the findings – no omnipotent claim – multiple voices within the research

- Not representative – researcher's bias acknowledged

- Apolitical stance (Willig 2003) – political position as it purposely researches how the 'othered' is shaped.

- Microlevel analysis may have surfaced more patterns.

- Focus group may have produced 'free flowing' conversation but this was avoided due to sensitive nature of subject.

Future research

- How are constructions of sexuality managed within educational settings between EPs and other professionals?

- Action research to examine sexuality diversity training on psychological and educational communities.

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'Well, at the start we've got to talk about it, haven't we?!' (Participant 2009)

CHAPTER TWO

SEXUALITY DIVERSITY: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sexuality Diversity: A Review of the Literature

Abstract

This literature review considers sexual diversity and education. In particular, it focuses on the effects of heterosexism (defined as a socially created value system which contrasts heterosexuality as normal and non-heterosexuality as inferior, Fish 2008), on sexual minority young people. This is explored in relation to an examination of socio-historical issues of sexuality, research undertaken with sexual minority young people and caring professionals, studies in educational settings and interest from educational psychology. Evaluation of the literature revealed a pathological and problematized narrative of sexual minority experience and a lack of interest from educational psychology generally, although a small amount of educational psychology literature did focus on homophobia and identity issues linking with research and societal focus. There was nevertheless, one line of enquiry: the need to examine sexuality issues not just at the individual level, but at group and systems levels. Research from other caring professions suggests that examination of professional assumptions is a prerequisite to impacting on outcomes for sexual minority young people. The conclusion considers that research of a qualitative nature is needed to explore educational psychologists' discourses of sexuality and the implications of this for practice, to improve outcomes for this group of young people.

Sexuality Diversity: A Review of the Literature

(Paper written in accordance with author guidelines for Educational and Child Psychology)

1. Introduction: Current Context

'The nature of sex – one which always hides, so muted and often disguised that one risks remaining deaf to it.'

Foucault (1978) p35

During recent years, there has been increased interest in outcomes for children (Every Child Matters DfES 2004). The Farrell report (Farrell et al 2006) describes this as an opportunity for educational psychologists (EPs) to meet the needs of specific groups of children. Interest has focused on the needs of vulnerable groups such as looked after children, children affected by poverty and children with disabilities. However, historically and currently, the needs of sexual minority young people have largely been ignored. Although many of the issues faced by this group come under the rubric of Every Child Matters (DfES 2003), such as staying safe from discrimination and being emotionally healthy, this population with additional needs (Baxter and Frederickson 2005) often fall below the radar due to the invisibility of issues which contradict educational images and constructions of childhood. To date, the needs of this group have been considered to be met under the umbrella of anti-bullying rhetoric (DCSF 2007).

However, many implicit issues remain unaddressed, resulting in schools falling short of their duty of care in ensuring that they provide safe environments which respect diversity (Ferfolja 2005). Harbeck (1995) argues that the invisibility of sexuality does

not justify the lack of support in this area, with Biddulph (2006) calling for a revision in current practice in meeting the needs of this group. This would mean broadening the term inclusion in line with Rosenthal's (2001) definition of inclusion which goes beyond the incorporation of children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools to encompass the recognition of religious, gender, cultural and sexual differences within educational settings. The current educational climate should therefore foster commitment from Educational Psychologists (EPs) in proactively pursuing such diversity issues. However, for this to occur, an examination of why this vulnerable group have remained so should be undertaken to identify how EPs can be a part of future change.

1.1 Aims of the Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to review existing research on sexuality, from the 1990s onwards, to identify themes which highlight reasons as to why sexual minority issues remain a low priority in education. The review aims to examine the following questions:

- What research has been undertaken in the area of sexuality?
- What themes emerge from the literature and how do they contribute to the low prioritisation of this group's needs?
- What has research identified which impacts positively on meeting the needs of sexual minority individuals?
- What interest has there been from educational psychology?
- What gaps are there in the literature which may suggest how future research could contribute to improved educational psychology practice?

1.2 Methodology

An outline of the methods used to locate relevant sources of information is presented below. Firstly, a 'snowballing' approach was utilised to identify published documents relating to educational psychology, sexuality and relevant legislation. Secondly, Internet search engines were also utilised to access relevant government documents and recent developments in this area. Also, a literature search was undertaken by the researcher using a computer data base search. The databases included Assia and Swetswise as well as a retrospective examination of psychological and social work journals. The search strategy used key concepts relating to sexuality including heterosexism, lesbian, gay, homosexuality, identity development and homophobia. Other key terms used were constructions, attitudes, children, young people and a variety of caring professionals and educational settings. Initial searches produced approximately 120 papers from UK and international sources.

After an initial examination, 25 were discarded as they were not closely related to the research questions above. From the remaining articles, the following were selected and are reported in the following paper: 15 articles related generally to sexuality, 10 of which were from a social constructionist stance. Other papers generated included 8 articles centred on homophobia, 10 articles connected to heterosexism, 10 papers discussing sexuality and school settings, 5 papers on sexuality and other professions and 17 papers regarding sexuality and adolescents. These papers were selected as they met the criteria of the research questions stated above and the research studies presented robust evidence. These sources were summarised and critiqued with regard to epistemological assumptions, adopted methodology and evidence in relation to resultant conclusions. The social constructionist articles most influenced

my own position on this subject, after gaining a broad picture of the topic and so formed the epistemological basis of this literature review.

1.3 Definitions

Prior to discussing why this group has remained vulnerable, key concepts which relate to sexuality diversity need to be explored. Firstly, for the purpose of this research, the term sexuality diversity refers to the social inclusion of sexualities other than heterosexuality. Secondly, the use of a label to describe sexual minorities is considered to be problematic but is a necessary descriptor when writing about this subject. Indeed, in 2001, Monsen stated that there was little agreement between writers on terms. This is explained by several reasons; all language carries meaning which is interpreted differently by individuals, labels reflect the socially dominant discourses constructed within a particular time and place and also on a personal level, the label I use will need to be congruent with my current construing and my own understanding of sexuality. It is acknowledged that I would describe myself as 'othered' in terms of sexuality and that this is integral to my interest in this area. The term which I choose will therefore reflect my position and contribute to the history of written discourse on this subject. I have decided to avoid any terms associated with identity, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered individuals as later discussions will reveal how this creates a pathological understanding of sexuality. Consequently, this may be linked to essentialised (ascribing a fixed nature to phenomena) notions, which in themselves can be the source of discrimination. The term non-heterosexual individuals has also been avoided as I again interpret this in terms of an essentialised notion of one aspect of a person's behaviour which reinforces division between this and heterosexual behaviour. This relates to another

term which is integral to this paper, the concept of heterosexism. Heterosexism is defined by Plummer (2004) as a

> 'diverse set of social practices – from the linguistic to the physical, in the public sphere and the private sphere, covert and overt – in an array of social arenas (e.g. work, home, school, media, church, courts, street, etc…) in which the homo/hetero binary distinction is at work whereby heterosexuality is privileged. '

Plummer (2004) p19

This definition suggests a psycho-social foundation for one of the main constructions of sexuality prevalent in society today. I will later outline arguments which assert that this socially embedded practice underlies much of the discrimination against this group in contemporary society. Another useful and more comprehensive definition of heterosexism is provided by Fish (2008). He argues that heterosexism is a value system which places heterosexuality as normal, thus suggesting non-heterosexuality as inferior. Butler (1990) terms this heteronormativity which developed from her research into the relationship between sex and gender. This is based on an underlying presumption that all individuals should be heterosexual (defined as compulsory heterosexuality by Butler 1990). This definition demonstrates the interdependence of heterosexuality and homosexuality linking with Derrida's (1978) notion that binaries are constructed through their inter-relations. The term heterosexism is preferred to homophobia as it identifies problems associated with sexuality from the individual to the collective (Burman 2007), assuming that the world is perceived through a heterosexual lens (Butler 1990). The term homonegativism is also used interchangeably with heterosexism, implying negative connotations of homosexuality. The effects of heterosexism can be seen at the societal level, organisational level and through behaviour at individual levels.

Traditionally the needs of SMYP have been connected to the concept of homophobia (Stonewall 2008). Homophobia is described in terms of overt hostile acts directed towards those perceived to be non-heterosexual, resulting in fear at an individual level (Fish 2008). This overt behaviour is easier to identify and change at an individual level and so has been the adopted position from which to relieve oppression. Although this form of discrimination may appear more easily identifiable than heterosexism, homophobia is also a complex form of behaviour as Plummer (2001) indicates in his study of masculine stereotypes in peer culture, suggesting that homophobia takes many forms relating to a situated context. The homophobia position has provided a basis for campaigns towards equal rights over the last thirty years through maintaining a visible and identifiable position from which to initiate change. However, Plummer (2004) would suggest that studying 'non-heterosexuality' itself leads to the reinforcement of this false dichotomy. This of course requires my reflexivity in how to produce a discourse which does not perpetuate the very historical tradition it seeks to discourage!

After much deliberation and as far as this paper is concerned, I have decided to use the term 'sexual minority young people' (SMYP) to represent this group, as this encompasses an acknowledged variety of sexualities (Savin- Williams 2001) other than heterosexuality and also highlights the power imbalance which I believe still exists in society today. It is acknowledged that this may still suggest a dichotomy and be a problematic term for some. However, it is also intended to represent those who experience a marginalised position in relation to sexuality issues regardless of personal sexual preference. Finally, I have chosen to utilise the original descriptors used by researchers for sexual minorities in some of the studies reported as this defines the particular samples used whilst also enabling evaluation of the studies.

1.4 Outline of the literature review

Based on the premise that knowledge is socio-historically created, the following literature review begins by exploring the historical background to contemporary issues of sexuality. Firstly, two major theoretical stances, essentialism and social constructionism, are highlighted as highly influential positions from which much of the research and developments in theory have originated. In particular, the work of Foucault (1978) and other post modernist writers is considered in relation to the development of societal understandings of sexuality which perpetuate homonegativity. This provides a context for another important factor which has maintained the vulnerable position of this group, Sedgwick's (1990) notion of the 'epistemology of the closet'. This builds on Foucault's (1978) assertion that blends of discourses contribute to the invisibility of sexuality. This social constructionist position provides the context for reviewing studies undertaken with sexual minority youth populations. Examinations of these reveal problematised and essentialised discourses which focus on identity integration and mental health issues. It is argued, that these contribute to the maintenance of a vulnerable position.

Next, this construction of a within-problem for sexual minority individuals is questioned through the exploration of studies which begin to present enabling or disabling social environments as influencing outcomes for sexual minority young people. Also, studies (e.g. Savin Williams 2001) are presented which counter narratives of essentialised homogenous sexual minority populations with problematic trajectories. This again shows how research can reinforce societal perceptions of this group. The next section builds on this historical background by revealing

contemporary societal contradictions in attitudes towards sexuality from the exploration of changes in legislation and media portrayals of sexual minorities.

Following on, historical societal constructions of sexuality are assumed to underlie discourses and practices in educational settings. This is explored through consideration of research which reveals three constructions of children's sexuality: the asexual child, the heterosexual child and the sexual minority child as a victim; all contributing to the invisibility of issues for sexual minority young people (Epstein and Johnson 1998, Reynolds 2000, Wallis and Van Every 2000, Buston and Hart 2001, Ferfolja 2005, Atkinson 2008 and Rothing 2008). This again highlights the social nature of the problem and thus the paper moves to examine how other caring professions have begun to explore these issues at the social level by examining professionals' attitudes to sexuality. This is mostly achieved through the use of quantitative methods which are criticised for presenting a simplistic view of a complex subject.

The final section explores the lack of interest from psychologists generally and identifies some research with familiar themes: amongst them, a focus on identity and addressing overt homophobia but also promising suggestions about the need to address sexuality issues at different levels (Robertson and Monsen 2001). This leads to a discussion on how educational psychologists may be in a strong position to influence educational settings but also identifies a need to examine their own preconceptions in this area prior to this, as suggested by other professions (e.g. Jeyasingham 2007). Further than this, recommendations for future research are proposed with an emphasis on the use of qualitative methodology with an underlying social constructionist epistemology to highlight educational psychologists' (EPs')

constructions of sexuality and children's sexuality which may influence their work. This reflexive approach is considered an essential prerequisite to being an agent of change in this area.

2. Historical theories of sexuality: *Essentialism versus social constructionism*

> 'Our ways of understanding the world do not come from objective reality but from other people both past and present.'
>
> Burr (2001) p7

A prerequisite for exploring issues around the continued vulnerability of sexual minority individuals is an understanding of the main historical theories of sexuality which underlie much of the literature on this subject. From a theoretical position, sexuality has largely been concerned with two opposing views: essentialism and constructionism. Essentialism epitomises the positivist tradition in searching for objective truths about social phenomena. It ascribes a fixed nature to category members enabling resultant assumptions. Essentialism has been defined by Haslam and Levy (2006) as the assignment of an 'essence' or shared features to a category by a culture, which legitimises social structures. Essentialist discourses have been historically associated with sexuality having been used both to undermine sexual minority rights, and protect them. For example, religious groups have utilised this position to reinforce notions of sexual normalcy whereas pro-gay activists (Stonewall 2008) have promoted a fixed natural trajectory as a precursor to acknowledging, legitimising and securing rights for sexual minorities in a bid to alleviate oppression. However, it can be argued that adopting essentialist discourses may widen gaps between differences rather than reduce them as it maintains and reinforces a heterosexual and non-heterosexual dichotomy. Indeed, Jeyasingham (2007) asserts the need to explore knowledge systems operating around specific groups rather than

enhancing the visibility of a particular category. Further to this, McFadden and Sneedon (1998) also argue that simplistic essentialist models linking sexual behaviour and nature are inadequate in describing the spectrum of sexualities.

In contrast to this, social constructionism has developed as a grand narrative which highlights the complexities of a post-modern world. Social constructionist theory contends that people construct the world from their social interactions. It proposes that humans categorise the world through their use of language. This is realised at both the microlevel in daily discourse but also at a macrolevel in societal and organisational mechanisms (Burr 2003). Harding (2007) summarises the main tenets of social constructionism as: a critical stance on assumed knowledge, the belief that knowledge is socio-historically created and the dispensation of the separateness of knowledge and social action. From this perspective, knowledge is never value-neutral and it underlines the need to question and challenge categories imposed by society (Kitzinger 1987, Filax 2006), and the powerful discourses which reinforce these distinctions (Epstein and Johnson 1998). It must be noted here that sexuality research has largely been influenced by the essentialist position, resulting in studies with an underlying preoccupation with a view that sexual realities can ultimately be known (epitomised in early developmental identity models e.g. Cass, 1979, which are explored at a later point).

Throughout this discussion, I consider that the social constructionist stance is highly useful in challenging assumptions related to discrimination (Moore 2005) as it questions established versions of reality (Burr 2003) and destabilises essentialist narratives (Hepburn 1999). However, it is acknowledged that it is itself a form of knowledge which presents a particular view as argued by Burr (2003). Furthermore,

it is asserted that this epistemological position is needed to explore a contemporary world with a multiplicity of knowledge forms and diversity of life. Thus, issues around sexuality will firstly be considered from a social constructionist perspective involving the exploration of historical conceptions of sexuality, as it is assumed that these influence contemporary understandings and social practice (Sedgwick 1990).

2.1 Foucault's contribution to theories about sexuality

One of the main contributors to social constructionist theory on sexuality is Foucault (1978). He highlights a number of assumptions relating to Western society's construction of sexuality. These can be found in his *History of sexuality volume 1* (1978). The main points pertinent to this paper are outlined below. Firstly, he asserts that sexuality was more visible prior to the 19th century and that strategies were used after this point, by Western governments to control sex. One of the most relevant strategies to this paper is the 'pedagogization of children's sex' which gave adults agency (through a designated teaching role) in this area of children's lives. Later this will be described in connection to present practices in schools which are constructed around this discourse. Secondly, Foucault (1978) identifies a complex history of discursive practices embedded within social practices, language and structures which have constructed a 'normal' and 'othered' dichotomy of sexuality. This, he argues structures our thinking about sexuality today.

Next, Foucault (1978) describes how this dichotomy was produced from a modern society, with a dominant positivist paradigm, that sought to provide an objective understanding of sexuality, resulting in the identification of the 'homosexual' species. This was achieved through a combination of discourses including the psychoanalytic

theories of Freud which led to the medicalisation of the phenomenon and links to religious confession which inferred 'sinful behaviour'. Both contributed to science's essentialised notion of sexuality in defining and explaining this object. Foucault (1978) argued that clinical psychology gained from this in that the psychoanalytic trend thrived on solving this 'pathological problem' through therapy. Whilst it did succeed in changing discourse by providing escape from repression, thus increasing the visibility of sexuality on one level, it did not achieve the abolition of this silencing of 'othered' sexualities. This idea of an invisible 'other' reinforced and maintained through language has been developed further by Sedgwick (1990). She uses the term, 'epistemology of the closet' to describe this stating,

> ' ''Closetedness'' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech acts of silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularly by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it.'
>
> Sedgwick (1990) p3.

In accordance with Foucault's claims then, Sedgwick (1990) and later Corker (2001) argue that the oppression of this group has resulted from this societal labelling of deviance which was maintained through language-defined boundaries.

2.2 Evaluation of Foucault's thesis

Foucault's (1978) contribution shows how discursive formation, with its 'blend of discourses', has become embedded within social practices; we view sexuality through a heterosexual lens (Butler 1990). However, although Foucault (1978) provides a comprehensive history of sexuality since the eighteenth century, his work has been criticised on several counts. Firstly, Bricknell (2006) asserts that utilising a social constructionist framework positions human actions as determined,

underestimating individual human agency and disregarding the importance of lived experience. Secondly, Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality* has been criticised for omitting the history of sexuality preceding the 18th century (Epstein and Johnson 1998). Sexual minority individuals have not always been defined as deviant either in other contemporary cultures such as the culturally accepted homosexual male relationships between unmarried Melesian males in the South Pacific (Davenport 1965), or historically. For example, Robertson and Monsen (2001) describe a history of sexuality in which societies did not prefer heterosexual relationships, citing such examples as Ancient Greek society with accepted male homosexual relationships. Linking with Foucault's (1978) emphasis on the relationship between power and sexuality, Kaplan (1997) also implicates a power dynamic as the underlying force for the acceptance of homosexual relationships in Ancient Greece. At this time, political and social status was attached to older males forming relationships with younger males, the inverse of the predominant cultural stance of today.

Through this identification of the construction of knowledge about sexuality, Foucault (1978) has shown how adopting a social constructionist position enables the questioning of how academic research has contributed to the maintenance of the status quo (McFadden and Sneedon 1998). The implications of this with regard to sexuality will be explored further as the literature regarding the positioning of this group is reviewed, echoing Weeks (2000), who argues that the way sexuality is written about influences how it is experienced. The next section describes why this group are vulnerable and how different interacting influences have resulted in maintaining a minority status for this group of young people

3. Outcomes for sexual minority young people: Wellbeing

Research into sexuality has tended to problematise homosexuality (Cates 2007, D'Augelli et al 2006, Vicars 2006, Busseri et al 2006). I am using the term homosexuality here as it reflects the historical bias in the literature towards a predominantly male sample (Kitzinger 1987). Indeed, Lee and Crawford's (2007) review of sexuality literature shows that lesbians were omitted from sexuality research from the 1970s – 2001, indicating again how knowledge about sexuality is socially determined. There has been a wealth of literature which explores mental health risk and sexual minority youth (e.g. Walker 2001, D'Augelli et al 2006, Busseri et al 2006 and Floyd and Stein 2002). Indeed, Stonewall (2008) report that young people identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual had high levels of mental health difficulties such as panic attacks, eating disorders and suicide attempts. They also state that one in five lesbian or bisexual young women have self-harmed and are more likely to have attempted suicide than their heterosexual peers. Much of the literature links mental health distress to difficulties for individuals integrating sexual minority identities, associating problematic developmental trajectories (e.g. Busseri et al 2006, Carrion and Lock 1997, Carver et al 2004), thus suggesting between group differences as a risk factor for mental health. Concentration on young people integrating a non-heterosexual identity into their self-concept has pervaded as a societal 'truth' about this group. This problematisation of integrating sexual identities locates the problem at the individual level (Weeks 2000) rather than highlighting heterosexism at societal and interpersonal levels which may impact on the mental health of some sexual minority individuals (Carrion and Lock 1997).

Social support has been identified as a generic protective factor for mental health difficulties by Rutter (1985). This is reflected in research which demonstrates the importance of the social context on outcomes for sexual minorities. For example, D'Augelli et al (2006) undertook a longitudinal study of young people who self-identified as gay or lesbian. They found that young people reported links between their mental health status and the support of peers and parents. Similar findings have also been found by Busseri et al (2006) and Floyd and Stein (2002). However, the samples in these studies may not be representative of the wider population of sexual minority youth as all participants were connected to support groups which could have positively influenced their perceptions of support. Research by Walker (2001) also shows an increased risk of adolescent suicide for those identifying as lesbian and gay. From interviews with adults, he found reports of parasuicide (attempted suicide), self-harm and social isolation. Further analysis of the data revealed links between a lack of family acceptance and social support and these mental health issues.

The above studies may suggest that there are mental health risks associated with integrating sexual minority identities, but rather than this being a within-person problem, the integration difficulties are exacerbated by the social environment. Research by Beals and Peplau (2005) supports this as they found that perceived social support is positively associated with well-being in their research with adult lesbians. However, criticism has been aimed at many of these previous studies in terms of methodology. This has been particularly asserted by Savin Williams (2001) who questions their validity in terms of the rigour of scientific inquiry: for example, unrepresentative samples due to the invisibility of the population result in a distorted version of reality for such individuals. This can be seen in Walker's research (2001)

which utilised a sample of fourteen adults predominantly male and so this may not be considered as representative of a wider sexual minority population. Further to this, retrospective memory effects could have also influenced the data produced from the interviews with adults in the research by Walker (2001) and D'Augelli et al (2006) and so caution should be used when generalising the extent to which mental health problems present in sexual minority individuals.

In fact, Savin Williams (2001) uses his criticisms of scientific method to argue that this over-represents mental health difficulties. This relates to Sedgwick's assertion that inherent invisibility makes the prevalence of mental distress in SMYP difficult to establish (Sedgwick 1990).   Alternatively, it may be that mental health difficulties may be amplified in sexual minority young people due to disclosure difficulties experienced whilst at school.   Indeed, Burman (2007) reports increased adult referrals for therapy in relation to sexuality issues. This may highlight mental health difficulties which are internalised and later addressed in adulthood.

Whilst this group of studies does shift the idea of pathologised vulnerability to social factors, it still links well-being to a particular sexual identity. Again this reinforces a false dichotomy based on heterosexual or non-heterosexual experience. Research needs to look beyond this and explore sexual minority issues at the societal level and how this influences organisational settings and consequently, the effects of this on young people.

3.1 The school environment and educational achievement

Many sexual minority young people (Stonewall, 2007) describe negative educational environments which impinge on their educational success and well being. For example, Stonewall's The *School Report* (2007), a national survey of young people who identified as gay or lesbian in schools, identifies particular difficulties in school for sexual minority young people. It stated that over a third of pupils were unhappy at school and half of the pupils also reported feeling unaccepted in the school environment due to issues such as invisibility of sexuality (58% of pupils reported that they could not discuss issues related to sexuality) and homophobia. Survey results showed that 48% of the sample were victims of violence and 90% experienced name-calling in relation to their perceived sexual status. These findings are not dissimilar to those found by Rivers (2001) who undertook a three year study seeking retrospective accounts of school experience of sexual minority adults. He also found that 82% of non-heterosexual young people experienced name-calling, 60% were hit or kicked, 27% felt isolated from their peers and 11% were sexually assaulted. Rivers (2001) concludes that described negative school experiences were reflected in self-destructive behaviours in sexual minority individuals. However, these retrospective accounts may have been influenced by adult appraisals of their current situation thus questioning the reliability of the data collected.

Stonewall (2008) reports another study where schools in one Local Authority which had higher rates of truancy and dropping out of school and low exam results for sexual minority youth. This suggests that homophobia may affect pupils' feelings of belonging in schools, particularly if they do not feel able to access adult support. This was also found by Rivers (2001). These studies show that social inclusion is an

issue for sexual minority youth that impacts on their well-being but the studies also reveal that the educational environment may affect achievement and consequently long term outcomes for this group. However, this is perhaps not surprising as Douglas et al (1999) report that only 6% of a 1000 secondary schools in England and Wales addressed homophobic bullying in their bullying policies. Many of the issues illuminated by the above studies (e.g. bullying and emotional needs) are topics that educational psychologists deal with on a daily basis. How many of them have underlying issues around sexuality which are never surfaced due to the silent nature of the subject?

The above studies highlight a trend in research identified by Diamond (2005) which she describes as largely ignoring a variety of positive experiences self-reported from sexual minorities (e.g. acceptance of sexual preference rather than internalised homophobia) and thus reflecting prevalent discourses which construct sexual minority individuals as vulnerable. Although problematic narratives do not presume identity integration difficulties, they still convey a problematic association with sexual minority status as it is still used to highlight their oppression. This may reinforce societal perceptions of this group. However, an evaluation by Crowley et al (2001) does examine positive educational experiences, although it is acknowledged that research is undertaken in an alternative setting. They report that in response to the views of sexual minority youth on their education, one Local Authority provided an extra-curricular study support group. Their study highlights the importance of a safe educational environment. They found that young people benefited from an environment where their sexuality was not invisible, they could access the support of accepting adults, and could interact with non-judgemental peers, whilst also developing their learning in a secure environment. Although the findings result from

a small-scale case study approach, information was provided by young people reflecting on positive experiences in education, thus highlighting the importance of extracting a multiplicity of personal experiences of youth to counteract simplistic essentialised and problematised notions of sexuality as indicated by the previous research (Walker 2001 and D'Augelli et al 2006). This highlights the point that 'victim' positions are not the only way of highlighting the needs of a marginalised group.

3.2 A vulnerable 'group'?

Linking with an alternative narrative to the problematic trajectory traditionally presented and in contrast to a presented homogenous group with associated stereotypes, Savin Williams (2001) suggests a diverse community with considerable variability in trajectories. He argues that the uniqueness of the 'homosexual' individual with related mental health issues is a myth. He does acknowledge that some of this population are at risk, but asserts that the link between sexual identity and suicide is weaker than is perhaps portrayed. He bases this on identified methodological weaknesses inherent in the studies: for example, sample groups which are not representative of the wider population, as they are comprised of 'at risk' individuals who attend support groups. This may exclude those who may not feel able to disclose sexuality issues. He also argues that uni-dimensional measures are used which limit the range of responses. This may magnify certain mental health issues and mask others. In support of Savin Williams, Lee and Crawford (2007) also refer to an absence of 'normal' life representation in sexual minority research until this date.   Cohler and Hammock (2007) term this depiction of sexual minority adolescents, as victims of bullying and internalised homophobia linked with mental health issues, as a '*sturm und drang'* or 'struggle and stress' narrative. Taking a

social constructionist stance, they question research inferring linear developmental stage models (Cass 1979, Carrion and Lock 1997) which maintain and reinforce essentialised notions of sexuality and normality.

Supporting Savin-Williams (2001), Cohler and Hammock (2007) identify an emancipatory narrative sourced by young people, which highlights sexual plasticity (Diamond 2005), demonstrating fluid, heterogeneous and problem-free lifestyles. This contradicts the idea of inherent vulnerability for this group and the research uses a narrative approach (Cohler and Hammock 2007) to reveal the influence of both personal experience and societal discourse on people's perceptions of sexuality. This view is also asserted by Jeyasingham (2007) who states that pathologising sexuality creates myths which again privilege heterosexuality. Furthermore, he asserts that heterosexist preconceptions prevent conscious examination of constructions of sexuality, further maintaining and reinforcing this through social interactions. It is this, rather than individual sexual preferences which create a context of oppression and vulnerability for those who identify as non-heterosexual. This suggests that there is a need to question normative assumptions around sexuality and this can be unpicked by examining contemporary discourses around sexuality.

4. Contemporary societal constructions of sexuality

> 'The heterosexual couple are the raw material through which society may interpret and imagine itself.'

> Richardson (1996) p11.

There have been recent noticeable changes in public perceptions of accepted sexuality (Myers 2002). This is reflected in media representations of gay and lesbian

characters which have steadily become normalised whilst also often maintaining myths regarding sexual minority lifestyles and adding to media sensationalism. These conflicting images influence individual views of the world which, Gergen (1991) suggests, result in the 'saturated self'. By this he means that multiple social constructions result in incoherent notions of the self as people repeatedly construct and reconstruct themselves in relation to their social experience. In support of this, Reynolds and Koshi (1995) suggest that these multiple discourses act as stressors which create dissonance for sexual minority young people and it is this, rather than the status itself, that increases their vulnerability. Traditionally, as Foucault (1978) suggested, sexual minority status has been associated with both deviant and abnormal behaviour which has been reflected in societal laws. For example, the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act prohibited both public and private homosexual male acts (House of Commons Research Paper, Thorp 1998). This was only amended in 1967 with the Sexual Offences Act giving 21 as the age of consent for homosexual males, still reflecting an imbalance in rights (House of Commons Research Paper Thorp 1998). It must be noted here that there have been no laws prohibiting female homosexual behaviour, reflecting societal views and enforcement of the passivity of women. It is also interesting that the American Diagnostic Statistical Manual classified homosexuality as a mental health disorder and did not remove this until 1973, while the World Health Organisation (WHO) removed the designation in 1992, reflecting a prevailing discourse of medicalisation of 'abnormal' sexuality from the modern age (Foucault 1978).

However, recently changes in societal attitude have been reflected in legislative changes, in the UK, towards equal rights for sexual minorities, such as the Sexual Offences Amendment Act (Office of Public Service Information 2000) which saw

equality in the age of consent for homosexual males in line with heterosexual males to 16 and the Civil Partnership Act (House of Commons 2004), which afforded sexual minority couples similar rights and responsibilities as civil marriages in such aspects as property, tax exemption and pensions. Although there have been positive changes to legislation, this attitude change is not universally observed across societies or even within Western society (Harding 2007), as heterosexuality and resultant discrimination pervade the experiences of sexual minorities (e.g. Epstein and Johnson, 1998 and Stonewall, 2007). Indeed, Johnson (2004) argues that tolerance is promoted but that the dichotomy still exists which distinguishes difference. Jeyasingham (2007) adds,

> 'There is a strange silence about how in such liberal times homophobic practices continue to expose lesbians and gay men to unemployment, homelessness, isolation, criminalisation, violence and exclusion from families and communities, regardless of our emotional wellbeing. Ignorances are as much a part of the structure of heteronormativity as are privileged knowledges.'
>
> Jeyasingham (2007) p149

4.1 The influence of school culture on children's constructed sexualities

The school context can be viewed as micro-society (Barrett et al 2005). It therefore follows that schools create, regulate and inhibit understandings and practices that children experience in line with societal trends. However, education does not seem to have moved with current changes in societal perceptions. The following sections will explore possible influences on this inertia, using studies which have identified particular constructions about sexuality and children.

4.2 The construction of the 'asexual' child

Embedded within educational institutions are historical and contemporaneous issues of sexuality prevalent in wider society. Inconsistencies in societal discourse around sexuality in British and other cultures therefore create tensions in the transmission of sexual knowledge in the school environment (Biddulph 2006). Epstein and Johnson (1998) suggest that schools transmit discourses of childhood which construct particular subject positions for children, including that of the 'asexual'. They argue that closeting sexuality in the school environment reflects wider societal beliefs that it is inherently an adult matter. This has its roots in Foucault's (1978) societal control strategy regarding the 'pedagogization of children's sex'. Indeed, Allen (2007) argues that schools closely guard a nonsexual position for pupils, which is maintained and reinforced through boundaries designated by speech and action denying agency for young people in decisions about sexuality. Indeed, Reynolds (2000) states that;

> 'closeting children's sexual knowledge as 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate' and constructing children as sexually innocent and ignorant reflects the discomfort of UK Government officials and 'adult' society more widely in acknowledging children as sexual beings'.
>
> Reynolds (2000) p490.

This idea is supported by several studies. In their study of sexuality in primary schools, Wallis and Van Every (2000) found that rhetoric regarding the innocence and protection of children was used to justify an explicit 'asexual' environment. However, they found that school environments are far from asexual and are structured both explicitly and implicitly through power relationships reflecting compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1990). Indeed, they report tensions for teachers identifying with sexual minority identities and acknowledging this in the personal

domain whilst constrained in the public school domain by the practices inherent in the school.

However, the researchers acknowledge that this study represents the experiences of a small sample of parents, teachers and pupils in one primary school context. It does however support evidence from Epstein and Johnson (1998) who found both invisible and visible references to sexuality in schools, through rules regarding self-presentation, power dynamics regarding repression, through control and relationships and discourses reflecting cultural beliefs and practices. This view of sexuality positions schools as dynamic institutions which actively shape individual sexual identities rather than reflecting naturally occurring categories (Epstein 1997). Research by Buston and Hart (2001) also indicates that adults experience difficulties in dealing with sexuality issues in school. They interviewed secondary school teachers and found that they feared discussions around sexuality. This evidence was triangulated by observational evidence of teachers ignoring salient sexuality issues in the classroom. Regardless of sexual orientation then, this suggests that on a daily basis, teachers and pupils experience tensions between changing societal attitudes and organisational pressure to keep sexuality out of schools.

4.3 The construction of the 'heterosexual' child

Another way in which school environments perpetuate inconsistencies in societal acceptance of sexuality issues is through the active construction of the heterosexual child through explicit and implicit practices of invisibility and silencing (Ferfolja 2005). Indeed, research (Atkinson 2008 and Rothing 2008) draws on Sedgwick's (1990) reference to the 'epistemology of the closet' in describing school environments as

sources of discourses imbued with implicit knowledge which maintains heteronormativity. Rothing (2008) argues that heterosexuality becomes an invisible point of reference from which discourses of sexuality are related. This fixed heterosexual-homosexual binary privileges heterosexuality whilst presenting homosexuality in a qualitatively different and inferior form. This is conceptualised by Foucault's comment,

> 'Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of the discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary; than an element which functions alongside things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorised or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses.'

> Foucault (1978) p27.

This reflection of a heteronormative school culture was observed by Epstein (1997) in her ethnographic study of prevalent discourses in a primary school. Taking a feminist stance, she argues that teachers actively reinforce heteronormativity through daily discourses. In particular she links girls' understanding of gender with the heterosexual lens (Butler 1990) which is constructed through classroom interactions involving teachers and pupils and playground interactions between pupils: for example, teachers' reinforcing girls' futures in discussions about heterosexual couples and motherhood or boys and girls enacting gendered or sexualised behaviours in the playground. Although this study provides discourses supporting heteronormative references by both adults and children in the school environment, it is acknowledged that this study may have been biased by the author's political position. Also, the researcher's presence in the educational context may have

distorted the version of reality presented, as the behaviour of the participants may reflect their awareness of the observation. Research by Epstein and Johnson (1998), again using Butler's (1990) notion of 'performed genders', suggests that children are 'schooled' into gendered positions reflecting societal beliefs. They also refer to the effect of policies as agents of social control particularly citing the importance of Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 contributing to this protection of children, but also contributing to the invisibility of a vulnerable group of children. Section 28 (Office of Public Service Information 1998) was introduced by the Conservative government in 1988. It stated that,

(a) a local authority shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the idea of promoting homosexuality,

(b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.

Allen (2000) Local Government Bill 87 The 'Section 28' debate p6.

This Act was designed to prevent the promotion of homosexuality but Carter (2004) asserts that this unwittingly evoked public interest and strengthened the gay community's response to homosexuality in schools. Section 28 was eventually repealed in 2003 but effects still linger on as the following studies show. For example, Atkinson (2008) interviewed teachers and found that they felt that adopting a sexual equality position in the classroom would be both inappropriate and hazardous. Furthermore, research by Warwick et al (2004) suggests that teachers acknowledge inadequate knowledge of non-heterosexual issues and a lack of

opportunities for development in this area. This position, adopted by educational institutions, which regards children as both 'asexual but heterosexual' not only ignores children as active constructors of their own experience, which may cause incongruence if their own sexual experience does not match with this imposed social context, but also perhaps protects against adults' own insecurities in their knowledge of this subject (Bhana 2007). This inequality persists within educational institutions where equal consideration of other diversity issues such as race and religion are championed without accompanying connotations. The implications of heterosexist oppression are conceptualised by Ferfolja (2005),

> 'Until educational institutions and their communities acknowledge, deconstruct and address the unequal power relationships reinforced by the 'heterosexual us homosexual them' binary, and until non-heterosexual identities and relationships are included as part of the everyday schooling dialogues in relation to policy, pedagogy and practice, the 'Other' will continue to be othered.'

> Ferfolja (2005) p160

4.4 The construction of the 'victim'

Another construction of sexual minority individuals maintained by school culture is that of the victim position already discussed with reference to research problematising identity. Indeed, Atkinson (2008) cites silencing and invisibility discourses based on fear or stigma, which marginalise sexual minority individuals rather than contest normalised heterosexist culture. Robinson (2002) conceptualises this as a 'hierarchy of differences' where knowledge which is perceived as unacceptable is given low importance. Thus, labelling homophobic responses as 'bullying' reinforces the invisibility of the issues as their non-existence means that issues regarding understanding and equity can be ignored. Myers (2002) asks how

professionals can condone this behaviour which is unacceptable elsewhere in society. For example, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Office for Public Service Information 2003) prohibit discrimination against employees due to their sexual orientation. Indeed, Kitzinger (1987) concludes,

> 'Person-blame interpretations of social problems not only free the government and other primary social institutions from responsibility for the problem; they also provide and legitimate the right to initiate person change rather than systems change programmes thus reinforcing the status quo.'

> Kitzinger (1987) p35.

Building on Foucault's (1978) idea of discursive formation, it follows that the combination of the above discourses implicitly reinforces and maintains oppressive societal practices in education, thus creating a vulnerable group of young people.

5. Other research in different areas, particularly the caring professions

Largely, the main focus of interest in sexuality issues in education has been centred on discrimination in relation to overt homophobia (Stonewall 2008, Rivers 2001, Adams 2004). However, other disciplines have begun to focus on an exploration of perceptions and attitudes towards sexuality and how this may influence their practice. This positions the oppression of this group as external to the individual and shifts the location of the problem to the social level. As shown above, historical constructions of sexuality have influenced contemporary attitudes towards sexuality. Therefore it could be argued that professionals are subject to cultural influences as all members of society are. It follows then that they will have absorbed cultural beliefs regarding sexuality. The following studies have asserted that caring professionals are liable to

hold negative assumptions in regard to sexuality, thus resulting in less than 'caring' relationships with their clients (McCann 2001).

A study by Ben Ari (2001) showed that academics in education, psychology and social care in one University in Israel displayed homophobic attitudes. Homophobia, in this study, incorporates both overt homophobia and heterosexism. Ben Ari (2001) found that of the three groups, psychologists were the least homophobic. He speculated that diversity and counselling training may contribute to this. The 'Index of Homophobia' was utilised as a measure which is intended to assess levels of homophobia. Ben Ari (2001) found that all groups were categorised as 'low-grade homophobic' indicated by scores between 50 and 75 out of 100. This suggests low levels of homophobia in all the professional groups. Although this study may present findings which suggest some heterosexist attitudes among caring professionals, it can be criticised from a number of angles. Firstly, this study comprises a small sample of professionals from a community of universities in one culture; thus generalisation of findings should be made with caution. Also, the use of a scale means that individual perceptions are pre-categorised thus pre-empting and generalising individual responses (Potter 2003). Further than this, Speer and Potter (2000) argue that a standardised measure is an inappropriate way to understand such a complex phenomenon as data are reduced to a numerical form. Alternatively, their research into heterosexism (Speer and Potter 2000) provides a critique of such attitude studies. Utilising discursive psychology, a form of discourse analysis which relies on the constructionist paradigm, they found that heterosexism is complex, fluid and indexical (context-dependent) in nature. This new understanding which presents flexible attitudes to sexuality may be a better base from which to explore change in this area.

Brownlee et al (2005) examined heterosexist attitudes among four cohorts of undergraduate social work students in a Canadian University. Again using a standardised survey, they found that generally, students reported attitudes which indicated many positive perceptions but with some low levels of heterosexism amongst them. Although further examination of individual responses indicated neutral responses, this was interpreted, by the authors, as possible undisclosed negative construing due to the knowledge of the nature of the study. This finding shows that statistical analysis alone may not capture the complexities of social realities. One finding worth noting from the study is that fourth year students had lower levels of heterosexist attitudes, suggesting that diversity training positively changes individual construing in this area thus showing how awareness can impact on attitude change. This provides support for Ben Ari's (2001) hypothesis that training lowers levels of heterosexism.

The hypothesis that professionals may hold preconceptions about sexuality is also proposed by McCann (2001) who asserts that heterosexist practice by clinical psychologists has been detrimental to achieving outcomes for sexual minority individuals. He argues that therapeutic contexts reflect and reinforce social control on sexuality rather than meeting individual needs. By this he means that counsellors may assume the heterosexual status of their clients, thus unwittingly causing a power imbalance. Wilson (1999) also acknowledges this point, arguing that it can result in isolating experiences particularly for young people.

This assertion is supported by research from Neville and Henrickson (2006) who state that nursing environments are also not 'culturally safe' for sexual minorities, an

important prerequisite for ensuring the well being of clients in particularly distressing circumstances.   Again, this is similar to the findings from educational research (Ferfolja 2005, Stonewall 2008, Rivers 2001, Crowley et al 2001), suggesting that educational contexts are non-inclusive settings for sexual minority young people. McCann (2001) argues that this should be addressed through the examination of heterosexist attitudes of professionals, ensuring that they have the knowledge to challenge assumptions, thus justifying the need for research to explore professionals' constructions of sexuality.   Indeed, this could link with the findings of Buston and Hart (2001) mentioned above, which suggests that teachers acknowledge their lack of knowledge about sexuality, and also the views of Reynolds and Koshi (1995) with reference to counselling settings, where they suggest that professionals should be more than tolerant by showing support, acceptance and affirmation.   I would argue that this cannot be achieved without reflection upon apriori judgements about sexuality.

5.1 Educational Psychology and its contribution to sexuality equality

The research by Ben Ari (2001) may indicate that psychologists may be more aware of their assumptions about the nature of reality due to their professional training. Indeed, it might be expected then that educational psychologists would be ideally positioned to impact on reducing the oppression of vulnerable groups.   However, in their review of educational psychology literature, Imich et al (2001) found little evidence of research into sexuality by EPs, suggesting that the constraints of Section 28 may have overriden ethical motivations to develop this area of practice: although this does not presume that sexuality diversity is not recognised in Local Authority practices.   Indeed, Imich et al (2001) report topics, from EPS training in one Local

Authority, which centre on increasing EPs' knowledge of the vulnerability of sexual minority pupils, legislation and services available. It would seem that issues of sexuality had been largely ignored by educational psychology until 2001 when support for sexual minorities was increasingly recognised. This may have begun with the British Psychological Society (BPS) creating a Lesbian and Gay Psychology section, against a background of hostility, in 1999 as recorded by Lunt (2001). Also at this time, Monsen (2001) reports on the Inaugural European Conference: *Gay and Lesbian Identities: Working with young people, their families and schools* which aimed to inform practice for psychologists and educators with the underlying purpose of creating positive change for young people. At this juncture, Monsen (2001) reflects on much opposition from professionals and a particularly low response rate from educational psychologists, but from this an interest group was formed.

Interest in sexuality issues by educational psychologists was prevalent in 2001 shown by Edu*cational and Child Psychology* devoting an issue to sexuality. This focused on issues such as identity (Robertson and Monsen 2001), the experiences of children with gay parents (Barrett and Tasker 2001), constructions of the sexuality of disabled young people (Corker 2001), support for those identifying as homosexual (Crowley 2001), sexuality training in counselling (McCann 2001), homophobic bullying (Rivers 2001) and well being (Walker 2001). Many of these articles have been referred to in earlier discussions and highlight how intolerance of this group still existed, whilst highlighting the invisibility of issues which could underlie many behavioural cases allocated to EPs (Robertson and Monsen 2001). However, it must be pointed out that the subject foci reflect the historical and societal constructions concerning sexuality at the time, for instance, an essentialised gay identity is presumed although not necessarily problematised. This positions sexual minorities

as victims and still forms the basis of action in terms of meeting the needs of this group. For example, school responses to difficulties faced by sexual minority individuals are at a crisis level. This is epitomised by Walker's (2001) study of psychological well-being and suicide risk in sexual minority young people referred to in an earlier section. He recommends further research with sexual minority youths to increase resilience. Robertson and Monsen (2001) also suggest research on a representative sample of young people looking at their experiences and understanding their needs. Again this focuses on the needs of a fixed group and differences between populations, thus reinforcing the false dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual experience (Khayatt 1998). Consequently this diverts attention away from societal and institutional oppressive environments.

Similar themes can be found in an article in *Educational Psychology in Practice* by Adams et al (2004) which again concentrates on the needs of individuals in response to homophobia. The discourse of the research describes a role for the EP in supporting sexual minorities (staff and pupils) in response to overt homophobia at an individual or organisational level. This once more reflects the dominant stance of the time with bullying behaviour as the only visible way of addressing diversity issues within the boundaries set by Section 28. However, Adams et al (2004) did highlight that covert forms of bullying were more or less ignored and thus recommended that the role of the EP could be to encourage proactive intervention through consultation to ensure that overt bullying was not the sole focus for supporting sexual minorities.

The following positive recommendations for educational psychology practice are described in the 2001 issue of *Educational and Child Psychology*: firstly, the need to address educational and societal homonegativism (Rivers 2001) although the paper

does not explicitly say how this can be done, thus showing how research often explores issues but consequently does not provide practical solutions leading to the emancipation of oppressed groups (Burr 1998). Secondly, that educational psychologists should be challenging the heterosexist practices that they observe in their work (Monsen 2001), and finally that a demonstration of disadvantage should not need to be a prerequisite for the right to be different (Crowley et al 2001). One notable study which moves away from problematising sexual minority youths was undertaken by Corker (2001) taking a social constructionist stance. Although, her research was undertaken on a specific population (disabled young people), she describes how meanings about sexuality are contextualised and actively constructed by humans. Unlike most studies, she presents multiple accounts of heterosexism and other constructions of sexuality in the discourses of young people which show how internalised norms influence individual values and actions, again locating difficulties at a social level rather than problematising individuals.

5.2 The role of the Educational Psychologist in meeting the needs of sexual minorities

Since 2004, there has been a lack of published research articles from educational psychologists regarding sexuality. Therefore, it may be hypothesised that this may reflect increased interest in other vulnerable groups, or that the repeal of Section 28 may have signalled a presumption that schools should now be more aware of issues relating to sexuality due to the more open forum this facilitated. Alternatively, it may be that an implicit heterosexist world view prevents both the visibility and thus prioritisation of this subject. There has however, been one article by Williams (2008) which asserts a lack of awareness of EPs in regard to sexuality diversity and

recommends the need for EPs to question the pervasive nature of heterosexism in school environments. Also recent research by McIntyre (2009) examines teacher discourse regarding the barriers and facilitators to including lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils. She found that teachers lacked sexuality diversity knowledge and suggests that EPs are ideally positioned to open dialogue in this area.

This literature review has already implied that there are tensions in attitudes between macrolevel influences such as legislation and media over the last eight years, resulting in some change but the extent of this progression does not seem to be reflected in educational environments (Ferfolja 2005, Stonewall 2008, Rivers 2001). However, against this context, one thing remains the same; sexual minorities still remain a vulnerable group and educational psychologists have not yet convincingly identified how they can support this group, although they are present in situations within which sexuality is embedded on a daily basis. However, the invisibility of the issues may mean that they are unaware of many issues related to sexuality. Indeed, previous narratives on this subject have tended to have been provided by those who are 'othered' advocating for sexual minority young people.

A question is posed by Plummer (2004) calling for change and asking who will introduce new discourses in this subject. I would argue that EPs are ideally placed to facilitate change in this area as challenging perceptions can be viewed as an integral part of their role. This idea is conceptualised by Cameron (2006) who states,

> 'The distinctive advantage of [educational psychology] is that a rich and multi-layered picture of the problem situation is constructed, while stereotyping, especially of persons from diverse backgrounds, is reduced and common biases, snap judgments and unwarranted explanations are minimised.'

> Cameron (2006) p294.

In further support of this, Baxter and Frederickson (2005) suggest a more radical role for the EP in shaping services for children on outcomes which are important to them (Every Child Matters 2003). Certainly, research (Stonewall 2008, Crowley et al 2001) has suggested that sexual minority young people are concerned about safety and security in their school environment. This was reiterated by the president of Stonewall, Ben Summerskill (2008) at an anti-bullying conference (again showing how this issue is positioned and therefore tackled) hosted by Birmingham City Council, who stated the need to 'create safe school environments where all children's differences are celebrated'. This emphasis on a culturally safe environment is also suggested by the Audit Commission (2002) who identified the necessity to address the diversity of needs within each classroom rather than crisis intervention. This provides a background for change in how we meet the needs of sexual minorities universally, thus moving from victim and essentialised status. This is conceptualised by Robertson and Monsen (2001) who advocate that,

> '... Intervention needs to take the form of raising understanding and awareness about sexuality within the educational and psychological communities in order to challenge the many untested and irrational assumptions made about gays and lesbians. ....Interventions by educational psychologists need to be related to reducing the negative experiences of young gays and lesbians and need to take place at a number of different levels within the educational establishment (i.e. individual, group and systemic levels).'

> Robertson and Monsen (2001) p26

Indeed, recent literature on the role of the EP asserts a unique role in problem solving at different levels (Cameron 2006), communication skills (Farrell 2006) and changing perspectives (Ashton and Roberts 2006). Thus the EP would seem ideally positioned to challenge constructions of oppression by changing the source of

concern from those affected and locating a solution with the very people who may view the world through the heterosexist lens.

6. Future research

'Man is capable of changing the world for the better if possible, and of changing himself for the better if necessary.'

Frankl (1959) p133.

This leaves the question of how to make sexuality equality more salient to educational psychologists. Research from other professions (Ben Ari 2001, McCann 2001, Fish 2007) has shown there is a need to examine professional values and beliefs in relation to issues of sexuality as this impacts on approaches to work. This indicates that prior to EPs' addressing issues in educational environments, they must first examine their own preconceptions. Indeed, Ben Ari (2001) suggests that self-awareness is a major influence on individual responses to diversity. This leaves the issue of how best to illuminate such realities. Other research examining professionals' attitudes has been underpinned by positivist methods which may be perceived as producing a simplistic and inaccurate picture of a complicated reality (Potter 2003). Such theory and resultant methodology would seem to be out of the range of convenience (Kelly 1955) for such a complex subject as sexuality.

One way of accessing and reflecting on constructions of reality is provided by Moore (2006) who argues that EPs should critically evaluate the epistemological and ontological foundations of their practice. He advocates the use of social constructionism as a way of understanding the complexities of the post modern social world with particular reference to its relevance in diversity issues, as a sound

ethical base. Indeed, this paradigm offers an alternative position to any essentialised notions of sexuality which may perpetuate the stereotypes which underlie discrimination. This idea has already underpinned the action research approach of Queer theorists (Queer theory is founded upon post modernist and feminist epistemology and developed as a response to identified social inequalities connected to gender and sexuality, Filax 2006), who highlight the need to question and examine heterosexist preconceptions in society which contribute to the maintenance of the status quo.

Therefore, research is needed to explore how educational psychologists construct sexuality and how this may impact on their active involvement with educational settings. This would generate understandings which would have implications for improved future practice. An examination of discourse is fundamental in accessing these constructions, with a focus on extracting detailed and complex accounts which illuminate issues and contradictions. The following research questions could be posed in response to this: How do EPs construct sexuality? How do EPs construct their role in relation to sexuality diversity? What are the functions and the implications of these constructions for educational psychology practice?

Such research might begin to realise Foucault's (1978) view that discourse can be a potent force in highlighting and transforming the power which maintains it. This form of reflexivity could be used to influence the educational environment for young people, elicit and amplify marginalised voices and promote inclusion through dialogue (Rosenthal 2001, Warwick et al 2004). This might help to ensure that psychological research, theory and practice can contribute to inclusive strategies (Cameron 2006) to meet the needs of sexual minority young people.

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CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice

Abstract

Despite an underlying inclusion agenda, sexuality equality remains a low priority in education. A large body of literature suggests the marginalization of sexual minority young people (SMYP) in schools and indicates the need to enhance understanding in this area to change existing practice. Whilst other disciplines have begun to examine professional practice with regard to heterosexism (defined as a socially created value system which contrasts heterosexuality as normal and non-heterosexuality as inferior, Fish 2008), educational psychologists have not yet embraced action which locates intervention at the social level. This study explores Educational Psychologists' (EPs') constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice. Discursive psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987) was used to analyse semi-structured interview data from seven EPs. Multiple and context-dependent constructions of sexuality emerged from the study. The research revealed that participants oriented to the need to maintain a non-prejudiced position and managed tensions of accountability using rhetorical strategies and various interpretive repertoires. Conclusions centre on the need for reflexive practice to challenge taken for granted assumptions regarding sexuality in education and psychology communities so that new discourses infuse the drive towards a sexuality inclusive school culture.

Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice

(Paper written in accordance with author guidelines for Educational Psychology for Practice)

1. Introduction: overview of the paper

This paper examines the historical background and contemporary position of sexuality diversity in education (for the purpose of this research, the term sexuality diversity refers to the social inclusion of sexualities other than heterosexuality). It reviews studies on sexuality and research into sexuality by caring professions. Following this, the paper reviews EP literature and describes a lack of interest by educational psychologists in this area, thus revealing a need for research into EP practice. The paper explores how EPs construct sexuality and their role in sexuality diversity through discourse analysis of interview data. The resultant constructions are then examined with reference to related literature and the implications of these constructions for EP practice are considered.

1.1 Sexuality diversity and education

'The limits of my language are the limits of my world'

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1922) 5.6 p56

The social inclusion agenda has been growing steadily and has become a collective educational philosophy with a growing focus on meeting the needs of all children (Every Child Matters DfES 2004) over the last few years. However, whilst there has been an emphasis on reducing inequalities for children, in such areas as race (e.g.

Schools, Race and Equalities Policies, Department for Education and Skills, DfES, 2004) and poverty (e.g. Ending Poverty Making it Happen, Department for Children, Schools and Families, DCSF, 2008), one area, sexuality, has remained largely muted; dulled by a pervasive silence which 'surrounds and constitutes it' (Sedgwick 1990 p3). In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) demonstrates how a dichotomy which defines heterosexuality and homosexuality as normal and abnormal respectively has become embedded within contemporary social practices. It may therefore be argued that this underlies and perpetuates inequalities in sexuality diversity today.

Despite the combination of legislation changes towards equality at a societal level, (e.g. the 2003 repeal of section 28, of the Local Government Act 1988, which had prevented the promotion of homosexual relationships in schools, Civil Partnership Act which created similar rights to sexual minority couples, House of Commons 2004) and greater societal acceptance (Myers 2002), sexuality equality continues to be overlooked in the educational sphere. Although inclusion rhetoric has become embedded within education, there is a disparity between recent societal and educational emphasis in achieving sexuality equality, leaving the needs of sexual minority young people (SMYP) largely unaddressed. The term SMYP is defined in terms of young people with a variety of sexualities other than heterosexuality. The author acknowledges that such a term (SMYP) may be problematic for some as it infers a dichotomy between heterosexual and 'other' sexualities, but was chosen as a descriptor for this vulnerable group which acknowledges their current marginalised position.

1.2 Review of the literature on sexuality diversity and education

The research literature outlines several influences which have contributed to the absence of sexuality from the diversity agenda. Firstly, Epstein and Johnson (1998) argue that schools are imbued with discourses of childhood which position children as asexual, heterosexual and vulnerable simultaneously. These interpretive repertoires stem from 18th century government control practices which constructed sex as an adult concern (Foucault 1978) and can be observed in Butler's (1990) research into 'performed genders' whereby children are coached into gendered positions. The term 'interpretive repertoires' is defined below,

> 'By interpretive repertoires we mean broadly discernable clusters of terms, descriptions and figures of speech often assembled around metaphors or vivid images…. They are available resources for making evaluations, constructing factual versions and performing particular actions.'

> Potter and Wetherell (1995) p89

A substantive part of academic literature (e.g. Walker 2001, Rivers 2001, Sears 2001 and D'Augelli 2006) suggests that children are constructed as vulnerable either as the target of homophobic bullying or experienced mental health difficulties. Research by Diamond (2005) shows how a discourse of 'victimization' echoes throughout schools constructing sexual minorities as weak and in need of support. Support for SMYP has previously been provided under the anti-bullying umbrella, (for instance, Homophobia, Sexual Orientation and Schools: a Review and Implications for Action, Warwick et al 2004 for DfES), with a growing national interest in homophobic bullying. This focus has been heavily influenced by research by Stonewall (The School Report 2007) which reveals the impact of homophobia, invisibility and social exclusion on SMYP. The School Report (Stonewall 2007) gains the voices of young

people identifying as lesbian or gay who report feelings of unhappiness and a lack of acceptance at school. However, it has been argued that whilst this increases the saliency of inequalities for SMYP, this 'victimization' discourse maintains the hetero: homo binary distinction, thus reinforcing notions of the 'othered' and maintaining the status quo (Atkinson and Depalma 2008 and Røthing 2008). By focusing on SMYP as a homogenous group with universal experiences and needs, this detracts from the social assumptions which underlie such discrimination.

In response to this, the term 'homophobia' is increasingly being replaced by the concept of heterosexism, as this moves from a pathologised problem to that of a social bias. Plummer (2004) defines heterosexism as,

> 'a diverse set of social practices – from the linguistic to the physical, in the public sphere and the private sphere, covert and overt – in an array of social arenas … in which the homo-hetero binary distinction is at work whereby heterosexuality is privileged.'

> Plummer (2004) p19

This concept is synonymous with the terms heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1990), suggesting that the world is viewed through a heterosexist lens (Butler 1990).

1.3 Sexuality diversity and the caring professions

With the introduction of the term heterosexism, there has been increased interest in the examination of attitudes within the caring professions (e.g. McCann 2001, Ben Ari 2001, Brownlee et al 2005). These studies reveal that professionals typically hold heterosexist assumptions which influence outcomes for sexual minorities. In

particular, the research by Ben Ari (2001) shows how sexuality diversity training positively impacts on psychologists' preconceptions regarding sexuality. However, these studies may be viewed as limited as they rely on positivist measures such as attitude scales which oversimplify attitudes in the search for an objective truth (Potter 2003).

Further than this, Kitzinger (1996) has criticised such attempts for reinforcing the notion of pathologised attitudes. Indeed, research by Speer and Potter (2000) based on a discursive approach (Potter and Wetherell 1987) shows the complex, indexical (context dependent) and fluid nature of heterosexism. This research reveals how people use flexible attitudes which serve a variety of purposes depending on the context in which they are used. Both the impact of training (Ben Ari 2001) and the flexible attitudes to sexuality revealed by Speer and Potter (2000) imply the need for professionals to examine and reflect on their assumptions of sexuality in their everyday practice to influence positive outcomes for sexual minorities.

1.4 Sexuality diversity and educational psychologists

Whilst other caring professions (Jeyasingham 2008, Fish 2007, Brownlee et al 2005, McCann 2001) have begun to research sexuality and its impact on practice at the social level, few published studies from the educational psychology profession have explored this area. Paradoxically, educational psychology espouses a strong social inclusion stance (McKay 2009) underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (United Nations General Assembly 1989), but perhaps has not convincingly demonstrated this with regard to the sexuality equalities agenda. Until 2001, sexuality diversity had been largely omitted from educational psychology

literature as reflected in the review by Imich et al (2001). This paper outlined training in sexuality diversity in one service and highlights a lack of other service interests across the UK. Although this training focused on bullying and identity issues, it does acknowledge how this positions SMYP as 'victims' with homogenous attributes. It also acknowledges the need to develop a service approach to this area of diversity.

In the same year, *Educational and Child Psychology* dedicated an entire edition which included a record of the creation of a lesbian and gay section by the British Psychological Society in 1999 (Lunt 2001) and a report on the inaugural European Conference: Gay and Lesbian Identities: Working with Young People, their Families and Schools which aimed to improve sexuality diversity practice against a background of little support (Monsen 2001). The issue referenced intolerance, invisibility and identity issues amongst other topics (Walkerdine 2001, Rivers 2001, Robertson and Monsen 2001) which again highlighted discrimination but also perpetuated victim discourses. It may be argued that this positioning diverts the focus from the social level (Jeyasingham 2007).

This diversion from social bias was addressed partially by Adams et al (2004) suggesting the proactive involvement of EPs to combat implicit bullying. More importantly, Robertson and Monsen (2001) suggested that EPs, as members of society, may also hold cultural bias towards heterosexism and suggested accountability for EPs in acting in this area at different systems levels. However, since this flurry of articles, interest seems to have waned, as there have been no published studies indicating the progress of the profession in addressing issues at any level.

However, it is acknowledged that an article by Williams (2008) does highlight the continuing need for action in this area, with its assertion that EPs demonstrate a lack of awareness of the pervasive nature of homophobia and heterosexism in school environments. Also, research by McIntyre (2009) shows renewed interest in the area of sexuality equality. McIntyre (2009) examined teacher discourse from survey and interview data with regard to the barriers and facilitators to the inclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) pupils in schools. The research was undertaken with a small sample of teachers from one Scottish local authority and so may not be representative of the larger population of teachers. However, she found that LGB pupils were paradoxically positioned as the 'same as' other young people but simultaneously described as different through the use of pathologised language. The research by McIntyre (2009) also revealed that teachers lacked the language to discuss sexuality equality and demonstrated an unawareness of heterosexist attitudes. She concludes that EPs are uniquely positioned to challenge and reconstruct the institutionalised silence in education.

1.5 Previous research into sexuality diversity

Much of the research into sexuality has been conducted with sexual minorities. Most studies attempt to capture the current or retrospective experiences of sexual minorities in the education system and relate this to future action (e.g. Walker 2001, D'Augelli 2001, Savin Williams 2001, Busseri et al 2006). However, Clarke et al (2004) have aimed criticism at previous research which has studied the voices of the 'oppressed', arguing that it leads to further categorisation and marginalisation. The research by Savin Williams (2001) is an exception as the study sought to provide emancipatory narratives of youths which demonstrated fluid sexuality and a sense of

freedom rather than vulnerability. Again, this may reject problematic discourses but may also serve to mask many problems faced by SMYP from an underlying social bias.

2. Overview of research orientation

In conducting this research, I have consciously avoided studying SMYP as a marginalized group. By seeking to explore EPs' constructions of sexuality and the related implications for practice, this explicitly locates the focus at the social level. This also fulfils a gap in the literature as research into EPs' discourses of sexuality equality has been omitted to date. The research has an underlying social constructionist epistemology selected to illuminate complexities inherent in the subject, counter taken for granted assumptions (Burr 2003) and question embedded societal discourses. Indeed, Moore (2006) advocates evaluation of EP practice using such a reflexive approach. As a result then, it is intended that new discourses will emerge to generate understanding in this area, reconstruct alternative actions (Burr 1998) and firstly, begin to open the closet door. This is encapsulated by Fairclough (2003) who argues, 'Texts can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth.' (Fairclough 2003, p8). This directly positions responsibility with EPs in response to Plummer's (2004) comment, asking who will initiate new discourses on sexuality diversity and Robertson and Monsen's (2001) recommendation for action by EPs in challenging assumptions and current practice to meet the needs of SMYP. The following research questions will be explored:

1. How do EPs construct sexuality including:

- children and sexuality?

- the needs of sexual minority young people?

- sexuality in educational settings?

2. How do EPs construct their role in relation to the area of sexuality diversity?

3. What functions do these constructions serve?

4. How do the above constructions contribute to current practice in this area?

5. What are the implications of these constructions for future practice?

3. Method and methodology: research design

The aim of the study was to explore how EPs construct sexuality and how they negotiate their role in relation to these constructions. Congruent with the underlying social constructionist stance, a flexible design was chosen so that multiple constructions would be revealed through an exploration of the layers of data (Robson 2003). Discourse analysis was selected as an appropriate approach to meet the aim of the study. Discourse analysis has been used in previous research to challenge dominant constructions of sexuality through the deconstruction of such categories (e.g. Speer and Potter 2000).

It is acknowledged that the term discourse has ambiguous associations but in terms of this research, discourse is defined as,

> 'A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event, person or class of persons, a particular way of representing it in a certain light.'
>
> Burr (2003) p64.

Further than this, Parker (1992) also adds, 'Discourses form the objects of which they speak' (Parker 1992, p100). It is therefore conceived that exploring 'talk' on sexuality will highlight how it impacts on the EPs' practice in the area of sexuality diversity. It is assumed then that narratives constitute a particular reality (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Thus, the positivist search for an objectively knowable truth becomes redundant as discourse analysis destabilises essentialist categories of sexuality through the exploration of linguistic functions (Hepburn 1999). As Potter (2003) concludes,
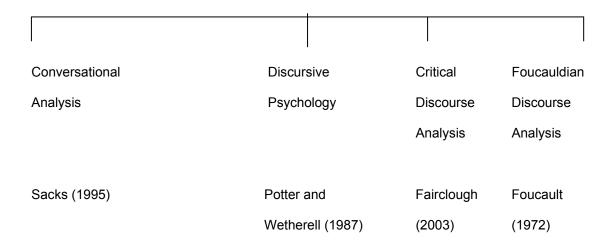
'Discourse is the vital medium for action. It is the medium through which versions of the world are constructed and produced as pressing or ignorable. For social scientists the study of discourse becomes a powerful way of studying mind, social processes, organisations, events, as they live in human affairs.'

Potter (2003) P10.

Further than this, Willig (1999) argues that constructionism has the, 'possibility of creating previously unimaginable views of people and society.' (Willig 1999, p33), but adds that this remains an ongoing challenge. A further emancipatory dimension is therefore implied in the purpose of the research as it is intended to create opportunities for action in the area of sexuality diversity.

Discursive psychology was selected from a variety of discourse analysis approaches. Pomerantz (2008) places discursive psychology in the middle of a continuum of approaches to analysing spoken discourse, indicating that language is interpreted as representing phenomena beyond the text itself.

Figure 2: Continuum of Discourse Analysis Methods

Conversational Analysis	Discursive Psychology	Critical Discourse Analysis	Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
Sacks (1995)	Potter and Wetherell (1987)	Fairclough (2003)	Foucault (1972)

Adapted from Pomerantz (2008) p 7.

Discursive Psychology (Potter and Wetherell 1987) is a constructionist approach which relies on the application of techniques from discourse analysis. Unlike the underlying premise of the hermeneutic tradition, which positions participants' talk as a 'symbolic representation of reality' (Potter 2003 p783), this form of discourse analysis assumes that language is a social practice which serves a variety of functions and consequences. Thus, language is both constructive and constructed, revealing multiple and varied descriptions of phenomena dependant on inherent functions. A number of previous studies have also utilised discursive psychology to explore attitudes and prejudice (e.g. Tileaga 2006, attitudes towards Romanies), including sexuality (Speer and Potter 2000, Clarke et al 2004). Such a form of discourse analysis enables the exploration of how phenomena are constructed, used and the consequences of this. It also highlights how participant subject positions may prevent or create opportunities for action (Willig 1999), which is particularly relevant to EP practice in this area. The research was conducted using Potter and

Wetherell's (1987) ten stage analysis process, although not adhered to rigidly. The

structure is outlined in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Potter and Wetherell's (1987) Ten stage analysis

Potter and Wetherell Method	Implications for the research
1. Formulate research questions	- Research questions were constructed in relation to the themes revealed from the literature review and the aims of the study.
2. Sample selection	- All EPs in one service were contacted via email. - Interviews were arranged with those who volunteered their participation.
3. Collection of records and documents	- Documents and records were not examined due to time constraints inherent in a small scale study,
4. Interviews	- Semi-structured interview schedule chosen to increase comparability of utterances. - This type of interview also enabled flexibility in allowing conversational style which enabled differences in accounts
5. Transcription	- Audio-recording of interviews was transcribed and revisited throughout analysis process
6. Coding	- Initial codes based on research questions - Codes evidenced and other quotes disregarded based on knowledge of the literature
7. Analysis	- consistency and variation within participant accounts - shared features and differences between participant accounts - functions and implications of utterances considered
8. Validation	- coherent patterns and exceptions considered - rhetorical devices explored in relation to participants' orientations - novel examples
9. Reporting	- detailed description of analysis process included - cyclic analysis process continued throughout writing of research report
10. Application	- Implications for EP practice

Table 1 shows how Potter and Wetherell's (1987) ten stages were considered and

adapted in relation to this research study.

3.1 Sample selection and procedure for Interviews

Interviews were undertaken with seven EPs from one psychological service in the UK in July 2009, thus purposive sampling was employed based on the availability of participants. Participants were recruited through internal advertisement using the psychology service email system. Information regarding the rationale for and involvement in the study was disseminated prior to volunteering (Appendix 2). The sample contained EPs between the ages of 25 – 60 years, from a second year trainee educational psychologist (TEP) to senior EPs with between 2 and 20 years experience. It is acknowledged that there was a gender bias with a 6:1 female: male ratio. All interviews were held within the psychological service building and conducted individually, by the author. The interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one hour and twenty minutes. Twenty minutes preparation time was provided prior to the interview which enabled each participant to browse the main questions to counter sensitivity issues associated with the history of the topic. A debriefing session was also undertaken after each interview to address any possible concerns which may have arisen as part of the interview process (See Appendix 6).

3.2 Selection of method and instrument design

Due to the nature of the topic investigated and the limits of a small scale study, it was judged that exploration of naturally occurring narratives about sexuality would be a fruitless endeavour. Thus, an Interview was chosen as an alternative which demonstrates 'qualitative understanding of how culture mediates human action' (McCracken 1988, p9) on the subject of sexuality. This posed several problems: how would a contrived situation capture participants' naturally occurring 'talk' on sexuality and how would questions be designed to avoid framing participants' responses? At

this stage, vignettes or photographs as stimuli were discounted as it was considered that they may frame participants' talk.   In response to this concern for authenticity, a semi-structured approach was selected as it would enable direct and purposeful questioning (Lincoln and Guba 1985) of the participants on the topic of sexuality whilst allowing for flexibility to ensure that participants' narratives were central.

The schedule (Appendix 4) allowed for different constructions regarding sexuality, education and the EP role to be revisited many times through direct and indirect questioning (Bryman 2004), capturing the complexity of the topic.   The main questions were asked in the same order throughout all interviews but occasionally the topics of conversation overlapped.   This was taken into account and adaptations made within the structure of each interview.   The interview schedule was designed with a progressive format, flowing from more general constructs to specific aspects of the topic, with each question building on the knowledge discussed in the last.   This technique is used in discursive psychology to surface contradictions and tensions in accounts which highlight functions for participants (Potter and Wetherell 1987) and in this research revealed the implications for the EP role in the area of sexuality diversity.   Thus, a holistic view of participants' discussions revealed discrepancies in views which demonstrated a flexible use of constructions to suit a purpose.
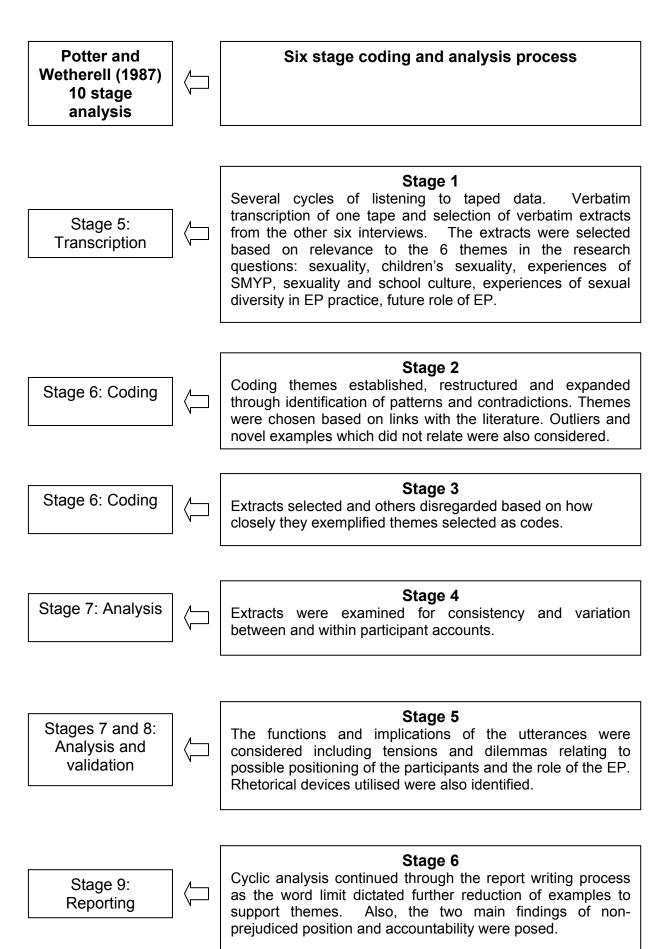
The six questions were designed to answer the research questions and were framed openly to enable narrative to emerge in situ.   However, probes were also utilised to act as an aide memoir to ensure sensitivity to the research questions and engage discussion to stimulate a variety of ideas (Potter and Wetherell 1987).   Thus, the data produced were co-constructed.   One pilot interview was undertaken to test the sensitivity of the questions.   As a result, changes to the wording in questions were

applied and probes were adapted. The pilot interview was incorporated into the main

corpus of data due to its richness, relevance and similarities in the basic questions

asked.

3.3 Data Analysis procedure

The data analysis was conducted utilising the 'bottom up' approach in Potter and

Wetherell's (1987) stages 5 to 9 (shown above in table 1). Stages 1 - 4 occurred

prior to the data analysis process.   Figure 3 below shows the data analysis process

in relation to Potter and Wetherell's model.

Figure 3: Overview of six stage coding and analysis process

Potter and Wetherell (1987) 10 stage analysis	⇐	**Six stage coding and analysis process**

Stage 5: Transcription	⇐	**Stage 1** Several cycles of listening to taped data. Verbatim transcription of one tape and selection of verbatim extracts from the other six interviews. The extracts were selected based on relevance to the 6 themes in the research questions: sexuality, children's sexuality, experiences of SMYP, sexuality and school culture, experiences of sexual diversity in EP practice, future role of EP.

Stage 6: Coding	⇐	**Stage 2** Coding themes established, restructured and expanded through identification of patterns and contradictions. Themes were chosen based on links with the literature. Outliers and novel examples which did not relate were also considered.

Stage 6: Coding	⇐	**Stage 3** Extracts selected and others disregarded based on how closely they exemplified themes selected as codes.

Stage 7: Analysis	⇐	**Stage 4** Extracts were examined for consistency and variation between and within participant accounts.

Stages 7 and 8: Analysis and validation	⇐	**Stage 5** The functions and implications of the utterances were considered including tensions and dilemmas relating to possible positioning of the participants and the role of the EP. Rhetorical devices utilised were also identified.

Stage 9: Reporting	⇐	**Stage 6** Cyclic analysis continued through the report writing process as the word limit dictated further reduction of examples to support themes. Also, the two main findings of non-prejudiced position and accountability were posed.

Two approaches were applied to the interview data. Firstly, one interview was transcribed verbatim and then direct quotes were selected based on relevance to the constructions indicated in the research questions (coding stage 6) to ensure sensitivity to the participants' talk (Strauss and Corbin 1998). This approach is shown in Appendix 7. A second approach was applied to the other six interviews and involved the identification of pertinent quotes (in relation to the first interview and transcription), which were transcribed verbatim rather than complete transcription as it was considered that selected verbatim quotations provided rich enough data for further analysis in such a small scale study. Indeed many of the final themes are *in vivo* codes (Glaser and Strauss 1967) from the original descriptions given by participants. Using participants' voices meant that the power differential between the researcher and the researched was reduced and that increased saliency was given to the participants' contribution to the study (Burman 1994). Other descriptors were framed by the researcher dependent on subjective meaning and themes from the literature.

Appendix 8 shows fifteen themes extracted from the data corpus. These themes were organised by the first two research questions:

o How do EPs construct sexuality, children and sexuality, the needs of SMYP and sexuality in educational settings? and

o How do EPs construct their role in relation to the area of sexuality diversity?

The themes selected extended to instances loosely connected to constructions of sexuality and the EP role in order to remain as inclusive as possible. The utterances were then further analysed (Stage 7) through several cycles of rereading and were

then examined both for consistent features and variations between participant and within participant accounts. At this point, the themes were reduced to nine codes to fit within the constrained word limit of the paper. This was enabled by similarities in the constructs within the verbatim quotes. For example, the theme 'heterosexist school environments' was merged with the 'awareness of heterosexism' theme (Appendix 8) and the theme 'problematised experiences of SMYP' (Appendix 8) was explored through considering tensions experienced by the participants in minimising differences between SMYP and their peers (Appendix 8). These two themes were combined and recoded as the 'normalising sexual diversity' theme (Table 4, Theme 3). Reduction was also achieved by combining the themes 'clarity needed within the area of sexuality diversity' and 'EP as advocate for the child' into the 'accountability in sexuality diversity' theme (Appendix 8), as these themes were considered to be functional for the participants in achieving particular rhetorical effects. The analysis procedure continued with further examination of the functions and consequences of the utterances for the participants in managing conversations about sexuality diversity and their related role in this.

3.4 Evaluating qualitative research

Within constructionist epistemology, such measures as validity and reliability are considered to be outside of the frame of reference (Marshall and Rossman 1999). However, qualitative research is still subject to critique but is often judged by different criteria. One of the central tenets of social constructionism as a research tool is epistemic relativism (Billig 1994). This treats meaning as dependent on the social situation, resulting in knowledge which is fluid in nature. The resultant data collected in this study are indexically implicated and so each utterance should be considered in

the context of other utterances and the social context from which it was produced. Thus, the notion of reliability becomes extinct with *specificity* (Parker 1994) its replacement. Thus, accountability relies on explicit referencing of possible bias stemming from the process. This bias is acknowledged in the strengths and limitations section below. Similarly, the underlying relativist position of this research leads to inconclusive findings which are open to alternative constructions by the reader on its credence (Parker 1994). Alternative constructions are enabled by visible acknowledgement of sample selection procedures and data analysis process.

Lastly, the use of a constructionist paradigm leads to the acknowledgement of the mutual relationship between the researcher and researched. Throughout the process the author provided evidence of the systematic procedure through acknowledgment of reflexivity as supported by an audit trail (Miles and Huberman 1994) which includes notes on the research process, reviews of progress and reflective annotations throughout to acknowledge the embedded and embodied researcher position (see Appendix 9). According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), this dependability increases the trustworthiness of the data collected. They also suggest that qualitative research should be subject to criteria for authenticity. Thus, this research seeks fair representation of the participants interviewed and aims to show ontological authenticity in providing a richer understanding of EPs' constructions of sexuality. Lastly, real world value is reinforced by recommendations for the profession to begin to address the area of sexuality equality (Catalytic authenticity, Guba and Lincoln 1985).

3.5 Ethical considerations

The research was conducted with reference to the Code of Ethics and Conduct of the British Psychological Society (2006) and the study was approved by the university ethical review procedure (Appendix 1). Initial consent to undertake the research was gained from the Acting Principal Educational Psychologist. Informed consent from participants was established through a written document outlining the rationale and nature of the research (Appendix 3). Thus, deception was intentionally avoided (Fox and Rendall 2002). Informed consent was also gained verbally at the beginning of each interview to ensure that consent was freely given at this later stage. Similarly, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at the consent stage and again in the interview situation. No participants withdrew from the process.

The data collected were stored anonymously without reference to participants' names. The data have been reported anonymously, with participant identities coded. The data were stored and handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 (office of Public Service Information 2009) which states that interview data should only be accessed by the researcher. Confidentiality agreements were discussed and confirmed with participants in relation to the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2006).

Further ethical issues encountered relate to reducing the power differential in the interview situation and in reporting the research. Again, the semi-structured interview allowed participants to set boundaries on the topics introduced as the questions asked were deliberately open. The power dynamic was also influenced positively by

the preparation time which participants reported as beneficial in creating a safer discussion through prior knowledge of the structure.

4. Findings and discussion

The following extracts illustrate how EPs, in this study, orient to assumptions around sexuality whilst managing discussions of sexuality in relation to their role. It should be noted here that the participants may not necessarily be aware of their constructions, thus some may be conscious and some unconscious selections (Speer 2001). A number of identified social constructions emerged from the data, fulfilling a number of functions for the participants and demonstrating a variety of implications for practice. The interconnections between these were abstracted through continuous reflections on the research questions and the findings and are depicted in Appendix 8. This evidence led to eventual hypotheses about EPs' constructions of sexuality and the implications of these constructions for EP practice.

The themes are structured by the first research question: how do EPs construct sexuality and the second research question: how do EPs construct their role in relation to sexuality diversity? The other research questions are answered through these main questions. The reported data are transcribed verbatim and are accompanied by the author's interpretations. Significant words which contribute to the discussion are highlighted in italics. This process allows alternative interpretations of the data framed by subjectivity but also open review of the author's judgements. A selection of quotes exemplifying each theme is used within the main body of the paper. However, further quotations to support the identified themes are presented in Appendix 10.

4.1 How do EPs construct sexuality?

Theme 1: Greater Acceptance

Table 2: Theme 1 – Greater acceptance

Table 2: Theme 1 - Greater Acceptance	
Quote A	People are *allowed to be gay* now whereas before in culture it was a *taboo*. Well, people *can come out* or be *openly gay* and be who they are and *don't have to marry opposite sex/gender* because it's *accepted* of them.
Quote B	Participant: 'I think as a society we are more *aware* that there are different sexual identities and I think that that's one of the best things really about where we are in history. That's a lot more of an *open* construct. People are *more able* to be *open* about *(1) how they feel, (2) who they love, (3) who their partners are* than I think they have ever done before.' Researcher: So would you say that that acceptance, if you like, is in all areas of society? Participant: *No absolutely not. I'd say it's in mine* and my family's erm sphere but I'm aware that people who are older than me or perhaps in the generation above me, *absolutely not.*'

All participants referenced greater acceptance when discussing sexual diversity in society today. Quote A in Table 2 demonstrates this. Here the participant constructs an account which portrays an accepting society which is contrasted with an awareness of historical legal constraints indicated by the words, 'allowed' and 'marry'. The above construction of greater acceptance serves to present a non-prejudiced subject position for the participant. It also contains an implicit binary division between heterosexual and homosexual experience indicated by the words, 'gay' contrasted with 'opposite sex/gender'. This binary distinction is acknowledged throughout the literature on sexuality (Sedgwick 1990, Butler 1990, Fish 2008) and

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has its roots in Foucault's (1978) *History of Sexuality* where he describes how discursive formation (a combination of modern discourses) sought to identify an essentialised category distinction based on 'normal' and 'othered' sexualities. It has been asserted that this distinction is an organising feature of experience and may form the basis of the heterosexist discrimination which may exist in society today (Plummer 2004, Butler 1990).

Another participant (Quote B, Table 2) also spoke about this greater acceptance but this time negotiates a dilemmatic position when challenged on the absolute nature of their argument. Dilemmatic positions occur when a subject struggles to present a coherent version of reality (Wetherell 1998) and presents two opposing stances consecutively. Firstly, the participant uses a three part list which is a rhetorical device (Jefferson 1990) used to persuade when stating a point of view. In this extract, the participant is orienting to a non-prejudiced position. The challenge by the researcher causes potential tension in undermining the participant's non-prejudiced position. This is negotiated through the use of 'mine' as contrasted with another prejudiced position. This shows acknowledgement of the relativist nature of attitudes whilst confirming the respondent's non-prejudiced subject position. Speers and Potter (2000) term this rhetorical device as 'softening the blow' and argue that this indicates that attitudes are fluid and indexical in nature rather ontologically pathological in nature.

Theme 2: Invisibility

Table 3: Theme 2: Invisibility

Table 3: Theme 2 - Invisibility	
Quote A	Well, I suppose at the very start, we've got to *talk* about it haven't we?
Quote B	*I think that difference* full stop really should be erm *talked about* and celebrated.

Several participants referred to the invisibility of sexuality in schools and society generally. Examples are found in Table 3 above. Both quotes implicitly construct sexuality as invisible as the phrase 'we've got to talk about it' implies the abnormality of speaking about sexuality. The participant in the first quote (Quote A, Table 3) is positioned within this 'closet' whereas the second utterance (Quote B, Table 3) seems to counteract a non-prejudiced position through a direct assertion of an ideal. This attempt at normalising sexuality serves to highlight its abnormality, again reflecting the heterosexist binary distinction (Plummer 2004). This discourse of invisibility reflects a large body of literature (Foucault 1978, Epstein and Johnson 1998, Buston and Hart 2001) encapsulated by Sedgwick's (1990) 'Epistemology of the closet' which is defined as a silence 'which surrounds and constitutes sexuality' (Sedgwick 1990 p3). Atkinson and DePalma (2008) argue that such discourses contribute to the maintenance of heteronormativity which pervades school environments.

Theme 3: Normalising sexual diversity

The term sexual diversity is used within this research to describe the participants' perceptions of human sexuality.

Table 4: Theme 3 – Normalising Sexual Diversity

Table 4: Theme 3 – Normalising Sexual Diversity	
Quote A	I think everybody's needs are different. I don't think there is one fixed. I think it would be the *same needs as any other young person*. *Sensitivity*, erm, erm … *being open* erm to that young person and *supportive*. I don't think that their *needs would be any different to any young person* who is going through a *difficult time in adolescence*.

Several EPs minimised the differences between non-heterosexual and heterosexual young people. Quote A in Table 4 exemplifies this theme. Again, several subject positions and discourses of sexuality are implicated and negotiated in this account suggesting that people orient to heterosexism in interactions (Speer and Potter 2000) but also indicating the dynamic and flexible use of discourses. Firstly, sexual minority experience is normalised through the reference to the universal needs of the peer group. This creates a non-prejudiced subject position. Potter (1996) argues that normalising objects is a rhetorical device intended to enhance the social acceptability of a view. However, this creates a dilemma as the participant anticipates that this may be perceived as insensitive to the needs of this group. This is repaired indirectly by the inclusion of caring actions such as 'support' and 'being open'. The reassertion of 'same as' is then used to bolster the original position. This rhetorical device is termed, 'three part structure' (Antaki and Wetherell 1999) and serves to increase the robustness of an account through stating a viewpoint which is open to challenge, producing evidence against the statement and qualifying the original position through a repetition of the first opinion (in a similar form).

The above quote (Quote A, Table 4) also shows competing discourses of sexuality. The opening argument overtly minimises the difference between sexual minority young people and their heterosexual peers. This positions the participant as non-prejudiced. However, the phrase 'difficult time' counteracts this first discourse by implicit reference to a problematic experience. This causes tensions between the first position used to convey a non-prejudiced stance and relates to literature which problematises sexual minority experience (Busseri et al 2001, D'Augelli et al 2001, Rivers 2001, Diamond 2005, and Stonewall 2007). Although initially resisted, the use of the 'victim' discourse indicates how interpretive repertoires frame and influence social practice. Research by Atkinson and DePalma (2008) shows how teachers and non-teachers use this discourse to portray a pathologised problem thus unwittingly resisting attribution of the problem at a social level and resulting in reinforcement of the status quo. The research on teacher discourse by McKintyre (2009) also reveals pathological descriptions of SMYP experience. The EPs in this study seemed to resist this discourse to maintain a non-prejudiced position but showed implicit awareness of it, thus showing how the homo:hetero binary frames human experience. This rhetorical use of interpretive repertoires is acknowledged by Speer (2001) who suggests that sexuality is positioned by the interaction between macrolevel discourse and negotiation of these norms in situ.

Theme 4: Sexuality diversity is part of the equality umbrella

Table 5: Theme 4 – Sexuality diversity is part of the equality umbrella

Table 5: Theme 4 - Sexuality diversity is part of the equality umbrella	
Quote A	It's just a general *equality issue in my eyes* and If *I know* more about the issues and I can be more clear about the *assumptions I make* because *I must make them* all the time. *If I was clear* what those *assumptions* were my equal opportunities practice would be better and I would be more able to support people who would be going through *those issues*.

Several of the participants explicitly positioned sexuality diversity within the equal opportunities umbrella. Quote A, Table 5 demonstrates this construction. This account shows the negotiation of several dilemmas as the EP shifts between different positions. Firstly, a non-prejudiced stance is established, similar to the *normalising sexual diversity* theme by positioning sexuality diversity under the equal opportunities umbrella. This then creates an egalitarian role for the EP. This is bolstered by further owning responsibility with the use of the words 'I make them' in reference to assumptions, thus acknowledging the participant's heterosexist frame of reference. However, this is then countered by phrases such as 'if I know more' and 'if I was clear' suggesting lack of knowledge (Speer and Potter 2000) as explanation for a lack of involvement in sexuality diversity to date. This lack of knowledge was also found by McIntyre (2009) in teacher discourse. This shows how a discourse of diversity is competing with responsibility, thus the participant is constrained by this ideological dilemma (Billig 1996). This positioning to reduce accountability is a commonly used rhetorical device (Buttny 1993). However, this construction of sexuality diversity serves to minimise the difference between sexuality and other

diversity issues and by doing so may implicitly reinforce the invisibility of the subject, thus maintaining the status quo (Atkinson and Depalma 2008).

Theme 5: Protection of children

Table 6: Theme 5: Protection of children

Table 6: Theme 5 – Protection of children	
Quote A	*I think* we need some *clarity* about sexuality issues generally. I think at the moment, *adults don't feel comfortable* with it so you would have to be *clear* about it. What we are *allowed to do and what we're not* because I think *people get worried about child protection*… talking children into something.
Quote B	There are *boundaries* set almost by definition. For example, when a child asks, *when a little child asks* where babies come from you're gonna give them an explanation which is appropriate to their age and stage of development and *likewise with sexuality*. You're not going to go into the whys and wherefores with a six year old. You might do with a sixteen year old who is questioning; do I like men, or women or do I like both? What do I do about these emotions or feelings I'm having.

Several participants utilised a discourse which constructed the need to protect children from sexuality. This is reflected in the account above (Quote A, Table 6). Here, the participant takes ownership (using the words, 'I think') in constructing the problem that sexuality may be omitted from professional agendas due to a lack of clarity in discussing sexuality with children. This locates accountability at an organizational level (suggested by the word 'allowed') thus deferring their own responsibility. This deferred responsibility is further strengthened by locating discomfort generally with adults, thus managing difficulties in linking sexuality with children. The use of 'I think' again strengthens this position. Finally, the participant

utilises a discourse of protection associated with children explaining the need for clarity, which they were orienting to throughout the account. Foucault (1978) argued that this discourse (pedagogization of children's sex) emerged from government strategies of control employed in the eighteenth century which gave parental agency over children and sex.   This underlies the construction of children as sexually innocent and in need of protection (Epstein and Johnson 1998) which underlies the discomfort of adults (Reynolds 2000). The use of the protection repertoire by some of the participants supports the argument presented by Burr (2003), that humans use interpretive repertoires to construct phenomena which justify a cultural moral position.

This underlying protection discourse also causes tensions for participants when maintaining their non-prejudiced position. This is displayed in quote B, Table 6. In this account, the participant explicitly refers to boundaries surrounding discussions of sexuality with children but is orienting to the need to maintain a non-prejudiced position. These tensions are managed by normalising sex and sexuality ('likewise with sexuality'). This is consistent with research by Fefolja (2005) who argues that child protection discourse prevails and frames actions with regard to sexuality diversity.

Theme 6: Awareness of heterosexism

Table 7: Theme 6: Awareness of heterosexism

Table 7: Theme 6 – Awareness of heterosexism	
Quote A	*I think* that they [children] would probably get the *message* that most, most people are heterosexual.
Quote B	Mostly, *I would think* from the experiences I have had that there will be phases and assumptions and shaping and reinforcing that will be coming through *teachers* that will reflect what the teacher's *heterosexual orientation* says about their own life.
Quote C	I do wonder whether it's the *needs of other people* we are talking about here. It's the *discomfort* or *'ist' attitudes of the majority* that need to be addressed.

Much of the literature on heterosexism (Atkinson and Depalma 2008, Brownlee et al 2005, Ferfolja 2005, Wallis and Van Every 2000, Epstein and Johnson 1998, McIntyre 2009) refers to lack of awareness by professionals, particularly in education. This is conceptualised by Røthing (2008) who states, 'heterosexuality is constantly present, taken for granted and continually produced as normative' (Røthing 2008, P259). However, two of the participants made indirect references to heterosexism at both a societal and organisational level, showing awareness of this concept and so partially contradicting the existing literature. For example, one participant acknowledged the presence of heterosexism on two occasions during the interview (Quote A and Quote B, Table 7). In the two extracts, the participant constructs difficulties for SMYP at the societal level by acknowledging an omnipresent heterosexism. Although only two participants attended to heterosexism, it provides evidence to support Ben Ari (2001) who found that from the caring professionals within his research, the psychologists showed more awareness of sexuality diversity

issues. It also partially counters the assertion made by Williams (2008) that EPs are largely unaware of the pervasive nature of heterosexism in school environments. However, the participant uses it to construct a definite problem in the school environment which rests with the adults within it, again managing accountability tensions.

Another participant (Quote C, Table 7) also constructed the need to counter pervasive heterosexism in school environments. Quote C shows how the participant deals with discomfort whilst clearly showing differentiation between their non-prejudiced stance and the implied heterosexism of others.

Theme 7: Inclusive vs. non-inclusive school cultures

Table 8: Theme 7 – Inclusive vs. non-inclusive school cultures

Table 8: Theme 7 – Inclusive vs. non-inclusive school cultures	
Quote A	Its interesting when you go into schools and see *nice stuff* going on and it's beyond the teaching and learning. It's about the expectations from the *adults* towards their children. Then you've got the opposite where it's almost *poisonous*. It's *toxic*. It takes a *very strong person* and *I don't think that I am that person* to constantly challenge that *toxicity* because you're dealing with constructs radiating out and mixing with everyone else's'. Unless you've got *somebody* who is very clear in terms of *what they want their* school culture to be or the ethos then for those who are *outside what is classified as the norm* in that school, life is gonna be *tough*.

Several EPs talked about the dichotomous nature of school environments (as inclusive and non-inclusive) which may affect the inclusion of SMYP. This construction of school cultures again shows the negotiation of dilemmatic positions. This is exemplified in quote A, Table 8. In this account, there are a number of

tensions experienced by the EP which are managed by the interweaving of different positions. Firstly, the EP defines schools as inclusive and non-inclusive. This social exclusion for SMYP is widely acknowledged in the literature (E.g. Ferfolja 2005, Stonewall 2007, Crowley et al 2001). This argument is supported by words such as 'toxic' and 'poisonous' which represent the extremity of feeling by the participant. These are presented factually (Speer and Potter 2000) and clearly define the subject's position as inclusive. However, this position then presents a dilemma for the EP, as by acknowledging that this social exclusion exists, this presents accountability for action in this area. To counter this struggle, the participant constructs a barrier to acting by deferring responsibility to the school ('what they want their school culture to be'). In turn, this deferred responsibility may show a less than caring attitude and so the EP reasserts acknowledgement of a problem ('life is gonna be tough') to sensitise this whilst locating school culture at the heart of the problem.

4.2 How do EPs construct their role in relation to sexuality diversity?

Several constructions of sexuality have been presented above which depict dilemmas and tensions for EPs when managing interactions reflecting their role. These will be explored further in the following examples.

Theme 8: Systemic vs. individual work

Table 9: Theme 8 – Systemic vs. individual work

Table 9: Theme 8 – Systemic vs. individual work	
Quote A	I don't think individual work would be helpful cause then you are *locating the problem within the individual*. I would imagine … you would be working on a *systems level* with staff and adults, will share those or support the message, *whatever that would be* or support children *experiencing a difficulty* in this area with regard to their *identity* or whatever or with regard to *any bullying* that might be going on in the school. *I'm not sure what the issues are around that.*

Several EPs presented tensions between different levels of working which were influenced by competing discourses. An example of this construction is found in Quote A, Table 9. Again this account shows variability in views (Potter and Wetherell 1987). The participant is asked about the nature of the EP role in sexuality diversity which results in the need to manage tensions between competing discourses. Firstly, an organisational script is used to portray a desired EP role which does not undermine their identity. The service that the EP works in has a strong systemic emphasis. Thus, the participant wants to convey this. However, this causes tensions between the participant's knowledge of SMYP, which relies on a victim discourse, which infers a within-person problem, which makes systemic practice more difficult. The use of the words 'I would imagine' and 'I'm not sure' display uncertainty (Speer and Potter 2000) and highlight the difficulty that the EP is experiencing as the competing discourses are mutually incompatible, coupled with the need to maintain a non-prejudiced position.

Theme 9: Accountability in sexuality diversity

Accountability is acknowledged as a main organising feature of participants' talk in this study. Similar accountability tensions occurred when participants were explicitly discussing the EP role in raising the profile of sexuality diversity in schools. The following quotes exemplify multiple and dilemmatic positions which fluctuate through the participants' accounts.

Table 10: *Theme 9: Accountability in sexuality diversity*

Table 10: Theme 9 – Accountability in sexuality diversity	
Quote A	*I wouldn't have raised* it because as I say, *it was not raised with me* as a concern. If I did raise it as a *concern*, I think that people would think that I am *jumping to conclusion* or *making presumptions*. You never can tell, people might feel *offended*.
Quote B	It's a *very, very sensitive*, it could be a *very sensitive* area but I think one of *our jobs* is to *illuminate the difficulties a child* is experiencing so if part of the reason for the *difficulties* is because of *sexual preference* or the way *sexual preference is dealt with* then EPs are in a *good place* to *talk* about it.
Quote C	*We've got a responsibility. We should have anyway*, to sort of promote and ensure that the *adults understand* where the young person is coming from and their *views and perceptions*. Somebody who's a bit of *an advocate* for making sure that they're not some sort of *invisible* person … making sure their *views are heard*.

Quote A is a response to the question of whether the EP would raise sexuality diversity when working with schools. In managing this, the EP defers responsibility to school and takes ownership of this position through the use of 'I'. This claim is evidenced by factual presentation of extreme reactions by others if responsibility was taken, shown by the words, 'jumping to conclusion, making presumptions, offended.' This position contrasts with earlier constructions of greater acceptance and is

underpinned by the binary distinction between normal and abnormal sexuality (Plummer 2001) and the child protection repertoire (Reynolds 2000). This supports Røthing (2008) who argues that heterosexuality is an invisible framework within which discourses of sexuality are embedded. In this instance, these discourses are used to legitimise lack of action by EPs and manage the tension associated with responsibility.

Another participant (Quote B, Table 10) experiences tensions in managing accountability. On the one hand, sexuality is explicitly defined as 'sensitive' (shown by the repetition of the word 'very') which presents a barrier to acting for the EP and legitimises the lack of action in this area to date. The word 'talk' also indirectly implies the invisibility of sexuality (Sedgwick 1990) as a barrier. Thus, the EP defers ownership by constructing a problem outside of their control. However, again this may appear as a prejudiced position. An unbiased position is restored by asserting a collective role for the EP in supporting children's difficulties using a discourse of inclusivity. This position relies on minimising the differences between universal difficulties and sexuality diversity difficulties (referred to in an earlier theme). However, by doing this, it may be considered that sexuality diversity issues are rendered invisible and the status quo is maintained (Atkinson and Depalma 2008).

Another EP managed accountability in sexuality diversity using a different discourse. This is shown in quote C, Table 10. In this utterance, the participant explicitly references a role for EPs drawing on the construction of the EP as an advocate for the child. The EP uses the collective voice of the profession to defer responsibility at an individual level. In doing this, the participant implies that ('we should have

anyway') this is not happening already using the discourse of invisibility and repetition of the word 'views' to suggest a lack of action currently.

5. Summary of findings and contribution of the study

The findings in this study show that EPs use a variety of constructions of sexuality for different purposes. This reveals that constructions of sexuality are exponentially more complex than previous studies (exploring professionals' attitudes to sexuality) have demonstrated through quantitative measures (e.g. Ben Ari 2001 and Brownlee et al 2005). Congruent with Potter and Wetherell (1987), in this study, participants constructed particular versions of reality using a variety of rhetorical devices and relying on interpretive repertoires based on social structures and practices, infusing this with their own constructions (Fairclough 2003). These strategies and discourses were used to manage social and practice-related dilemmas. The participants in this study oriented to two main concerns: the need to maintain a non-prejudiced position and a necessity to manage accountability tensions. In maintaining a non-prejudiced position, the participants relied on a number of strategies (such as normalising differences between SMYP and their heterosexual peers, locating sexuality diversity within the equal opportunities umbrella and inferring greater acceptance). However, this orientation created a number of tensions as competing socio-historical discourses such as the victim and invisibility discourses contradicted these positions.

In managing tensions concerning aspects of their role in sexuality diversity, accountability was asserted, on the one hand, using such strategies as the acknowledgement of non-inclusive school environments for SMYP and the EP as advocate. However, this threatened an egalitarian position as it also revealed a lack

of action thus far. This was countered by a number of discourses and rhetorical strategies which repositioned responsibility elsewhere: for example, the discourse of protection, a lack of clarity at an organizational level, non-inclusive school cultures and constructing schools as responsible.

One other notable finding from the study revealed that some EPs showed awareness of embedded heterosexism which contradicts assertions by Williams (2008) regarding EPs' ignorance of heterosexism. This awareness has implications for practice as it repositions and creates an opportunity for action at the social level, thus contrasting with present approaches to sexuality diversity. This aligns educational psychologists' constructions with the envisaged practice of other caring professions in developing positive outcomes for sexual minorities through examining assumptions about sexuality (e.g. Brownlee et al 2005, Jeyasingham 2007, and McCann 2001).

6. Strengths and Limitations

The study relies on a relativist position which challenges the positivist assumption of an objective truth. However, this relativist position has been criticised as the presumed absence of an objective truth means that it is difficult to justify the significance of the findings (Burr 2003). Thus, the status of the episteme could be questioned in relation to the underlying social constructionist premise that there is no one truth. It is therefore considered that there is no underlying omnipotent claim (Potter 2003) but that the strength of this research is increased by reliance on 'polyvocality' (Gergen and Gergen 2003) with the use of multiple voices and contradictions within the paper increasing its specificity. It is acknowledged that this multi-voice is within one population.

The discursive psychology approach integral to the study has also been criticised for its apolitical stance (Willig 2003, Hepburn 1999). Parker (1999) adds that discursive psychology avoids the problem of political paralysis (Hepburn 1999) by looking at functions and consequences of constructions. However, in direct response to this, I would argue that the research takes a political position as it purposely does not research the 'othered' but how the 'othered' is shaped; thus, challenging the status quo by questioning practice at this level. Indeed, Speer (2001) argues that discursive psychology is inherently political, stating,

'It is nevertheless the case that as an approach that questions *all* knowledge claims, it is extremely good at exposing the political rhetoric of its own, as well as others' constructions.'

Speer 2001 p128.

Other critics have suggested other limitations with discourse analysis. Firstly, it may be argued that partial knowledge has been produced by omitting other contextual factors such as non-verbal communication (Hammersley 2003 and Brown 2001) and the avoidance of microlevel analysis which may have surfaced further patterns. Also, in particular, discursive psychology has been criticised for ignoring the significance of discourse as an instrument of power (Fairclough 2003, Hook 2001) thus failing to satisfy an emancipatory function. Indeed, Willig (2003) argues that although discourse analysis demonstrates alternative ways of experiencing the world, recommendations for achieving this actuality are often omitted. To counter this, recommendations for practice will be considered later in the paper.

Hammersley (2003) criticises discourse analysis for presuming that the resultant discourses would be representative of the population studied. However, it is

acknowledged that this small scale study in one EPS would not capture the totality of discourses in circulation. Further than this, the final analysis reflects both my framing and word limitations. The research exemplifies *homo rhetoricus* (Hammersley 2003) as the researcher's bias is explicitly acknowledged in the methodology section. This point is exemplified by Burr's (2003) comment, 'No human being can step outside of their humanity and view the world from no position at all.' (Burr 2003, P152). This also counters a criticism from Scheurich (1997) which suggests that the data analysis process serves to decontextualise the data as the researcher and data engage. However, greater transparency may have been achieved through verbatim transcriptions for all interviews as this may have allowed a more thorough examination of the participants' narratives and greater public evaluation of the whole analysis process (Bryman 2004).

In the interview situation, the data which emerges are dependent on the researcher's skills. My own experience of interviewing clients in the EP role was utilised throughout the process. To strengthen the data collected, this interview experience was augmented by challenges to participants' statements (Kvale 2007). The practice of qualified naiveté (the willingness to consider any eventuality, Kvale 2007) was also applied and is reflected in the outliers (themes identified by fewer participants, Miles and Huberman 1997) included and *in vivo* codes which are not based on interpretive repertoires from apriori knowledge. However, it is acknowledged that participant reactions to their awareness of being studied (Denscombe 2002) may have influenced the resultant data, particularly social desirability with regard to presenting as egalitarian. This was countered by neutral responses to their replies (Bryman 2004). Further bias is accepted on the basis of the likelihood that the sample population reflects individuals who may be comfortable and familiar with the topic,

and participant perceptions of the author's sexuality, which was not disclosed as part of the process.

A design limitation is present in the omitted triangulation of methods (Strauss and Glaser 1998) which may have strengthened the findings. However, discursive psychology unearths a complexity of tensions which multiple methods may not further embellish. As an alternative, a focus group method may have increased the richness of the data, as such group situations can stimulate free flowing conversation (Lyons and Coyle 2007) and access multiple layers of meaning (Robson 2003). However, this method was disregarded due to awareness of the historically created sensitive nature of the subject. Although discursive psychology has progressed towards naturally occurring conversation (Potter 2005), time constraints meant that ethnography was considered but rejected.

7. Implications for practice and suggestions for future research

The broader implications of the research will now be considered. The use of discursive psychology has revealed that multiple and contrasting narratives of sexuality circulate in social spheres (Gergen and Keike 2006). This concurs with Speer and Potter (2000) who found multiple discourses of sexuality used in various social situations (e.g. interviews, focus groups, magazines and newspapers and television documentaries) but contrasts with much of the previous research which has suggested pathologised and stable attitudes (e.g. Ben Ari et al 2001). It has been demonstrated that constructions of sexuality are fluid and indexical in nature so it therefore follows that 'psycho-discursive practices' (interactional practices which construct phenomena through spoken language, Wetherell 1999) may shape

outcomes for children in relation to sexuality diversity in school situations. Furthermore, it might be argued that 'in situ' conversations may facilitate or constrain a role for EPs in this area.

There is a need then for the profession to utilise social constructionist tools to challenge and question taken for granted assumptions (Burr 2003) relating to sexuality as part of the social inclusion agenda. As Ferfolja (2005) suggests,

> 'Until educational institutions and their communities acknowledge, deconstruct and address the unequal power relationships reinforced by the "heterosexual us homosexual them" binary, and until non-heterosexual identities and relationships are included as part of the everyday schooling dialogues in relation to policy, pedagogy and practice, the "other" will continue to be othered.'

> Ferfolja (2005), p160

In 2006, Cameron asserted the value of educational psychology as constructing 'rich pictures of situations' particularly in 'reducing stereotypes' (Cameron 2006 p294). Paradoxically, as a profession, it seems second nature to question assumptions regarding children, particularly discourses of behaviour which resonate within school settings (Pomerantz 2005); however, it seems that this 'elephant in the room' has avoided such scrutiny to date. In 2006, Moore challenged EPs to,

> 'begin to reflexively and reflectively question our own beliefs, and knowledge regarding our practice … and consider those aspects of practice … which legitimise certain ways of understanding, whilst also potentially subjugating others.'

> Moore 2006 p113

This critical position would enhance the ethical and egalitarian principles espoused in the profession whilst also beginning to deconstruct and reconstruct versions of the world (Burr 2003) which could underlie new forms of action (Cocoran 2007). The

dynamic nature of constructions of sexuality revealed in this study indicates that EPs could lead in co-constructing alternative discourses (Plummer 2004) which destabilise rather than unwittingly legitimise existing practice. Indeed, Jeyasingham (2007) argues that reflection on the epistemological systems which operate around sexual minorities is an alternative to highlighting category identity which perpetuates existing problems.

Thus, taking Jeyasingham's point (2007), with their influential positions in schools, EPs could provide a distinctive contribution to the social inclusion agenda by repositioning sexuality diversity at a social level. Indeed, in 2001, Robertson and Monsen suggested that EPs should 'raise awareness of important issues' and 'challenge attitudes and practices' within schools (Robertson and Monsen, 2001, p29). However, one of the main findings from this research (EPs orienting to various constructions of sexuality to serve particular functions, when managing discussions about their role in sexuality diversity, which may facilitate or constrain outcomes for SMYP) indicates that although EPs are ideally placed to do this, there is a need to develop awareness of sexuality diversity within the profession and equip EPs with knowledge in order to increase confidence and enable action in this area. This would be a precursor to leading innovative change in raising and prioritising the sexuality diversity agenda within the profession and eventually with schools and other professionals at a preventative level.

For this to be realised, there is a need for EPs to develop training in sexuality diversity for the profession which:

- provides opportunities to develop awareness of the cultural influences on and the possible barriers to fulfilling the sexual equalities agenda, including the concept of heterosexism;

- is underpinned by an examination of topics using a social constructionist approach which is considered to be fundamental in understanding the complexities of sexuality diversity. This should explore and challenge assumptions leading to new constructions of sexuality and the role of the EP in meeting the needs of SMYP. Beyond this, more mainstream applications of psychology can be used to explore specific situations and facilitate decision making. This would ensure that EPs utilise their distinctive contribution to change practice in this area; and

- develops confidence for EPs in repositioning and prioritising sexuality equality in line with other anti-discriminatory practices.

Perhaps then, opportunities may be sought via action research to examine the impact of such reflexive sexuality diversity training within psychological communities reflected in organisational change projects. Such research would provide a contribution to an evidence base which is currently lacking. Eventually, this knowledge and training may be disseminated to other professionals to ensure that psychological knowledge and theory infuse the creation of sexuality diverse and safe environments for all children. Perhaps then, future research could explore how constructions of sexuality are managed in school settings between EPs and professionals. This may highlight how constructions may constrain or facilitate the drive towards a sexuality inclusive school culture.

8. Conclusion

Finally, this study has indicated that assumptions about sexuality surround us, and as such, constitute the nature of our realities. It has also recommended the importance of reflexivity for future change so it would seem fitting to conclude with a reference to Wittgenstein's comment, 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world'. Educational psychologists hold the tools (Moore 2006) to create new dialogues, thus extending the frontiers of sexuality diversity in education. As one participant put it, 'well, at the start we've got to talk about it, haven't we?'

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Appendix 1

School of Education Research Ethics Form

Appendix 2

Recruitment of Participants and Rationale of the Research

Participants wanted for Doctoral research in July 2009

Hi

I am a year 2 trainee educational psychologist.

This is a research request for 8 educational psychologists to take part in a small scale research project as part of my Doctorate. I would like to recruit EPs with varying experience, including year 3 trainees. It would take approximately one hour and fifteen minutes of your time.

The research is titled 'Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice'. Details are given further below.

If you are interested in taking part in the research, could you reply by 9th June 2009.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this request and I look forward to hearing from any interested parties.

Chloe Marks

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Rationale for the research

To date, the needs of sexual minority young people have been considered to have been met under the umbrella of anti-bullying agendas. As a result, the needs of this group of young people have not always been met within education affecting their educational success and well being.

Other caring professions have begun to recognise the need to address sexuality inequalities through the examination of professional attitudes, as increased self-awareness in this area is considered a pre-requisite to acting as agents of change for sexual minority young people.

In terms of research, educational psychologists have largely ignored sexuality issues. In response, this study seeks to explore educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality in their professional role and how this may contribute to current practice in this area. The research aims to increase understanding and raise awareness of sexuality issues in education and psychological communities, thus stimulating dialogue about a virtually invisible subject. It is intended that this will contribute to changes in the way professionals address the needs of sexual minority young people resulting in safer educational environments.

What would taking part involve?

The research will comprise of a series of face to face semi-structured interviews between individual educational psychologists and the researcher (myself). Each participant would take part in one interview which will last no longer than one hour and will take place in the MEC on one of the following dates: 2nd, 3rd, 16th, 23rd July 2009.

A sensitive issue!

I acknowledge that the topic of sexuality has been highly influenced by its socio-historical background, which may mean that this is a sensitive subject. To take this into account, participants will be asked to take part in a preparation session lasting approximately fifteen minutes, prior to the interview. This will involve participants viewing the six main interview questions so that they have time to think about their responses if necessary. Also, EPs will be able to participate in a debriefing session immediately following the interview to clarify any questions regarding the research and any address any concerns the participant may have which have arisen from the interview.

Anonymity and confidentiality

All data received from participants will be confidential at all stages of the research including related reports and publications. The researcher will record the interviews and will transcribe the data collected verbatim. The research will adhere to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and conduct (2006) with all information remaining confidential unless participant safety is threatened, illegal behaviour or behaviour which is harmful to others is disclosed.

Participants will receive a summary of findings which will also be made available to the participating educational psychology service. Access to full copies of the research will also be possible on request.

Withdrawal

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the project at any time knowing that their data would be omitted from the project. Also, participants can decline to answer any of the questions presented in the interview. This need not affect their overall participation unless the participant wishes to withdraw in response.

Final request!

I hope that you will consider this a unique opportunity to contribute to a part of the inclusion agenda which is under-researched and so often ignored. It is hoped that reflections on this topic will stimulate awareness and contribute to change in developing safer educational environments for sexual minority young people.

Appendix 3

Educational Psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice
Information and consent form

To date, the needs of sexual minority young people have been considered to have been met under the umbrella of anti-bullying agendas. As a result, the needs of this group of young people have been largely ignored within education affecting their educational success and well being. Other caring professions have begun to recognise the need to address sexuality inequalities through the examination of professional attitudes, as developed self-awareness in this area is considered a prerequisite to acting as agents of change for sexual minority young people. Educational Psychologists have largely ignored sexuality issues and in response, this research seeks to explore their constructions of sexuality in their professional role and how this may contribute to current practice in this area. The research aims to increase understanding and raise awareness of sexuality issues in education and psychological communities, thus stimulating dialogue about a virtually invisible subject. It is intended that this will contribute to changes in the way professionals address the needs of sexual minority young people resulting in safer educational environments.

The research will comprise of a series of face to face semi-structured interviews between individual educational psychologists (EPs) and the researcher. Each interview will last no longer than one hour and will take place in private rooms, within the educational psychology service building, during July 2009. The researcher acknowledges that the topic of sexuality has been highly influenced by a socio-historical background, which may have resulted in sensitivity issues, and so prior to the interview, participants will be asked to take part in a preparation session lasting approximately fifteen minutes. This will involve participants viewing the main interview questions so that they have time to think about their responses if necessary. Also, the EPs will be able to participate in a debriefing session immediately following the interview to clarify any questions regarding the research and any address any concerns the participant may have which have arisen from the interview.

All data received from participants will be anonymous at all stages of the research including related reports and publications. The researcher will record the interviews and will transcribe the data collected verbatim. As the research has an underlying qualitative methodology, individual responses may be included in the results section of the research report. The research will adhere to the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and conduct (2006) with all information remaining confidential unless participant safety is threatened, illegal behaviour or behaviour which is harmful to others is disclosed. In this event, the researcher will report this to the appropriate authorities. Participants will receive a summary of findings which will also be made available to the participating educational psychology service. Access to full copies of the research will also be possible on request.

Participation in the research is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the project at any time knowing that their data would be omitted from the project. Also, participants can decline to answer any of the questions presented in the interview. This need not affect their overall participation unless the participant wishes to withdraw in response. If you have any queries about the nature of the research or the research process, then please contact the researcher.

Thank you for taking the time to read and complete this form.

Chloe Marks
Trainee Educational Psychologist

I have read the information stated above and consent to take part in the research project.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 4

Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice
Interview Schedule
Researcher copy of questions and prompts

Question 1	Prompts	Comments
What does the term 'sexuality' mean to you?	How would you define the term? What historical influences might it have had? Has our understanding of sexuality changed over time? Have you noticed any changes in attitudes to sexuality? Do you think that there are any generational differences in understandings of sexuality? Would different groups of people have different understandings of sexuality? Do we have different expectations of sexuality now? Is sexuality fixed? Does sexuality change over time? Do we have choice over our sexual preferences? How would you separate different sexual preferences?	Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Question 2	Prompts	Comments
How would you relate the term 'sexuality' to children?	Does maturity affect the level to which children should be exposed to sexuality?	
	At what school stage should children develop understanding about sexuality?	
	Do you think that there are sexual stages which children pass through?	
	Do you think that adolescents have a qualitatively different experience of sexuality than younger children?	
	Should children be protected from discussions or issues of sexuality?	
	How does the 'media' affect children's understanding of sexuality?	
	Do you think that adolescents have a different experience of sexuality than younger children?	
	How would children know about sexuality?	
	How would we know that children are aware of sexuality?	
	Is it relevant to discuss sexuality issues with children?	
	Who should do this?	
	How should schools discuss or generate understandings about sexuality?	
	Would you see any sexuality in play?	
	Would the child's experience of their own and other close family structures influence their understanding of sexuality?	Is there anything else that you would like to add?
	Are parental or children's beliefs about sexuality culturally specific?	

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Question 3	Prompts	Comments
I am going to use the term 'sexual minority young person' in the next question – how would you define this term? What experiences in life do you think that SMYP might have encountered?	What age would they be? What gender? Would they be aware of their sexuality? What cultural influences would there be on experience? How might media portrayals of sexuality influence experience? – tensions/contrasts – think about different shows, soaps, daytime TV, evening viewing, film, tabloids, internet , self-esteem Would their trajectory be similar to heterosexual experience? Would family attitude be significant? Describe relationships with their friends? Why would they have these experiences? What are the needs of SMYP? What might school be like?	Explore aspects of definition: gender, ethnicity, age etc. (Listen for indication of …Bullying, homophobia, identity integration issues, self-esteem – no use of word problem or difficulties unless participants lead on this) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

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Question 4	Prompts	Comments
How would you define the term 'school culture'? Are there aspects of school life and culture which may have an impact on SMYP?	Sometimes, organisations such as schools are described as micro-societies? If this is the case, what societal influences regarding sexuality may be embedded within schools? e.g. media- conflicts in images, local views, gender understandings How would relationships with pupils be? Bullying, supportive How would teachers be? Supportive, ignoring, promote sexuality discussions, deal with incident How may inclusion of the pupil differ over the school day? Playtimes, transitions, adults present or not, classroom situation, YP perceived as SMYP Are there any particular school phases which stand out? E.g. teenage years/gender identity What would affect disclosure of feelings of/actual exclusion? – staff, family/friends reactions What school structures may be in place to support pupils? Are there issues around sexuality discrimination in school? What would prevent schools from addressing issues? What would promote understanding in schools? Are these issues addressed in school? How are issues in schools addressed? Should these issues be addressed in school? Who should address them? Within school or role of external consultants as well?	Barth's definition (2007) "A school's culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions, and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organization. It is the historically transmitted pattern of meaning that wields astonishing power in shaping what people think and how they act". Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Question 5	Prompts	Comments
In your role as an EP so far, what experiences have you had of sexuality diversity?	Can you give any examples and how you were involved? School – What level – e.g. individual, group/class, teachers, whole school, training, families with diverse structures EPS Training Trainee Were there any cases or involvement with settings where you felt there may have been underlying sexuality issues but these were manifest through referral for other reasons? E.g. bullying, self-harm Did you think about highlighting sexuality as a factor? If yes/no why or why not? Did any other people including child/family/staff highlight sexuality as a possible factor? Why or why not? What happened? What reflections do you have about this? How might you deal with this differently now? What issues were there? What influenced your involvement – role, decisions for intervention, actions, any reflections on the work? If you cannot recall experiences, why do you think that you have had limited experience in this area? EPS, National, not relevant Can you recall any of your colleagues' experiences and how they were involved?	Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Question 6	Prompts	Comments
What do you think the role of the EP should be in the area of sexuality diversity?	Is it an area which EPs should be involved in? Why or why not? If not, who should be involved instead? Whose role is it? Types of work – with whom? SMYP, children in general, teachers, whole school, crisis level or preventative – mental health issues What level of intervention would be needed? Individual as difficulties arise, group or class, whole school, authority What ethical issues might be involved? Disclosure What would influence your involvement What constraints and facilitators would there be on the EP role? – national, local, service level, relationships with schools/settings, relationships with parents How can EPs contribute to positive outcomes for SMYP? What training have you had which would contribute to this? Is more training needed? What form would the training take? What skills/theory do EPs have which could contribute to these forms of involvement?	Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix 5

<u>Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice</u>
<u>Introduction to the interview</u>

Thank you for taking part in this interview. Before we start, I would like to tell you about myself and my research. I am a trainee educational psychologist undertaking my doctorate at the university of Birmingham but also work for Birmingham educational psychology service.

The research arose in response to the lack of interest generally by educational psychology in sexuality diversity issues. It seeks to explore educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality in their professional role and how this may contribute to current practice in this area. The research aims to increase understanding and raise awareness of sexuality issues in education and psychological organisations, thus stimulating dialogue about a virtually invisible subject. In particular, it is hoped that your reflections will encourage greater reflexivity with regard to this subject by the wider educational psychology community. It is intended that this will contribute to changes in the way professionals address the needs of sexual minority young people resulting in safer educational environments.

The interview will be taped and comprises of three parts. The first part is 15 minutes preparation time which is intended to provide time to reflect on the main questions which will be asked. If it is helpful, you can make notes for use in the main interview. The second part is a semi-structured interview which will last no more than fifty minutes. Although the main questions will give a structure, it is hoped that the format will be conversational in style with subsidiary questions to clarify meaning and generate deeper understanding of your responses. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just interested in your opinions and experiences so just do the best you can. Feel free to interrupt or ask for clarification if you need it and take as much thinking time as you like. The last section involves debriefing and will last up to ten minutes. This will provide opportunities for you to ask any questions about the nature of the research, the research process and allow me to ascertain whether you have any concerns, as a result of participating in the interview.

All responses given will be anonymous and treated as confidential for the duration of the research and up to five years after completion of the research. Confidentiality will only be breached if you disclose information which threatens your safety, behaviour which is illegal or will harm others.

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage including during the interview. If you decide to withdraw, any data relating to you will be destroyed. You can decline to answer any of the questions posed and this need not affect your participation unless you wish to withdraw at that point. The interview can be terminated by you or myself at any point.

At this point, I would like to ask you if you have any questions regarding the interview situation.

I would also like to ask you, now that you have been given all the information about the interview process and the research, would you still like to take part in the interview and the research project?

Would it be okay to start the interview now?

Appendix 6

<u>Educational psychologists' constructions of sexuality and the implications for practice</u>
<u>Debrief</u>

Thank you for taking part in this interview and agreeing to the use of data collected during the interview in my research. You have provided important information which will contribute towards the examination of educational psychology practice in the area of sexuality diversity. It is hoped that this will be a catalyst for changes in the way we meet the needs of sexual minority young people.

Has the interview highlighted things which you had not thought about before or given you the opportunity to think about your practice in a different way?

Did you find the preparatory part of the interview useful? Why or why not?

Have you got any questions about the nature of the research or the research process? (anonymity, data storage, individual comments, data use in written reports, publication, intended outcomes of the research)

You will receive a copy of a report which summarises the main findings of the study. The educational psychology service will also receive a copy of this report which can be disseminated to its members. If you would like to receive a full copy of the research then you can request this now or contact me at a later point.

Yes   No

Have you got any other questions about anything that we have talked about?

Have you got any concerns which have arisen from your participation in the interview?	Researcher's concerns
Actions needed:	Actions needed:

Again, many thanks for taking part in the research.

Appendix 7

Transcript: Participant A

Coding Key
Greater acceptance
Invisibility
Minimising differences between SMYP and their peers
Dichotomous nature of schools as inclusive and non-inclusive
EPs raising sexual diversity/accountability
Systemic versus individual work
Protection

Interviewer: (1) What does the term 'sexuality' mean to you?
Participant A: (2) Well, some of the ideas I thought of here, it's not a term I have thought of
(3) long and deep, I have to say, erm ..but, after lots of scribbling and
(4) crossing out, I have come up with 'a person's sexual preferences, ie who
(5) and what characteristics they find sexually attractive, and that could be
(6) characteristics in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, anything that they find
(7) erm … their preferences in terms of characteristics', I would say.
Interviewer: (8) So do you think that this sexual attraction or preference, as you call it, is
(9) actually fixed?
Participant A: (10) Erm … Somewhat, some of the characteristics, perhaps, … maybe.
(11) For some people, perhaps.
Interviewer: (12) To some people, what do you mean by that?
Participant A: (13) Erm … Right, I think if I was to use ethnicity, I think I have gone through
(14) different stages in my life when I have found certain ….. types of people
(15) ,or certain people, from different races attractive or not attractive. I have
(16) gone through changes in terms of that but I think perhaps if that was in
(17) terms of gender that would have been established from pretty early on in
(18) my life, and you do hear of people who perhaps might have been
(19) attracted to men initially. I have heard this that women may be at an
(20) earlier stage in life, but, as they have progressed through life, they may
(21) have gone through a period of confusion but they have found actually they
(22) are more attracted to women, so I am not sure whether they have
(23) changed or whether they were confused.
Interviewer: (24) So are you saying that their sexuality may have changed over a period of
(25) time?
Participant A: (26) It's a difficult one… I think of paedophiles as well. I don't know whether
(27) this is the same conversation but you hear of these guys, you know,
(28) older guys, that like children, did they always like children, I don't know
(29) is that shaped by experience, they were children themselves once and is it
(30) a belief that this could be valid that we are capable of feelings from a very
(31) very early age, so I think I do believe it can be changed in some people, it
(32) can be changed in some people, as they get older.
Interviewer: (33) So do you think that we have choice over our sexual preferences?
Participant A: (34) I don't think it is conscious choice. Erm … I think it is just the way you feel
(35) about something, what you find attractive, erm, I might find ….. ….. It is
(36) just what you like, isn't it? I'm not sure whether that is shape of

	(37)	experience or choice that is shaped or beliefs and like attitudes, I don't
	(38)	think it is conscious choice but I think it is just who you are and to some
	(39)	extent that it is innate, I think a part of it is innate, but some aspects
	(40)	probably shaped by your attitudes and your belief systems which
	(41)	obviously have been shaped by your experience.
Interviewer:	(42)	So do you think our understanding of sexual identity has changed over
	(43)	time?
Participant A:	(44)	Erm, over a longer period of time do you mean, over decades?
Interviewer:	(45)	Yes, could be, … as a society, do you think, not necessarily our
	(46)	understanding, but our understandings have changed over time.
	(47)	Do you believe that has happened in your life-time?
Participant A:	(48)	Yes, I do believe so. I think definitely peoples' attitudes have definitely
	(48)	changed. Erm, I think perhaps sexuality even the word 'sex' was a taboo
	(49)	word pre-1960s, just the word 'sex', just the word sex, even, you know
	(50)	but people over decades have become more flexible about the term and
	(51)	also between peoples sexual preferences, as well. I don't think there is so
	(52)	much negative attitude today.
Interviewer:	(53)	And what would the negativity have been attached to which previously,
	(54)	what aspects of sexuality?
Participant A:	(55)	I think with regards to … with regard to age, with regard to who you
	(56)	choose as sexual partners, I think that has changed as well, where same
	(57)	sex couples, across race couples, I think it has kind of like become a bit
	(58)	more open, less … it's less shameful now, I think.
Interviewer:	(59)	So is there anything else that you would like to add to the question in
	(60)	terms of what does sexuality mean to you?
Participant A:	(61)	Erm, no, I don't think so. I definitely think it is to do with regard to
	(62)	personal sexual preferences erm … and may be there is some innateness
	(63)	to it but I think also there are environmental influences as well. OK?
Interviewer:	(64)	We'll go onto the next question now. How would you relate the term
	(65)	sexuality to children?
Participant A:	(66)	Well, I believe children are capable of sexual … feelings erm … so,
	(67)	erm … with regards to children, whether it isn't of as and shaping from
	(68)	society and where it's not spoken of in a certain way and where their
	(69)	beliefs and attitudes are less and less influenced, although they are
	(70)	influenced because they live in the world like the rest of us. I think with
	(71)	regard to young people, I think there is still a preference with natural
	(72)	affectionate feelings towards other people.
Interviewer:	(73)	So you said something along the lines of the way children are spoken to in
	(74)	the terms of sex perhaps and sexuality. What did you mean by that?
Participant A:	(75)	I don't think children well ….. children … under the age of Primary
	(76)	School, I don't think it is ever spoken of in terms of feelings, perhaps I
	(77)	think they have conversations about reproduction …..and, you know,
	(78)	…..the actual act of having sex and the biological stuff perhaps but in
	(79)	erms of the affectual aspects I don't think that is covered. So I think they
	(80)	are pretty much left to find out for themselves from experience or from
	(81)	what they observe, what they see, erm they know what sex is, they know
	(82)	how it is done and what sex produces and that it is part of adult
	(83)	relationships but I don't think they are taught or spoken to or they are
	(84)	talked to about emotional aspects of sex or …..
Interviewer:	(85)	Why do you think that?
Participant A:	(86)	I don't, I think it is probably because they don't need to know because a

	(87)	lot of people don't want to believe that children engage in sexual acts so it
	(88)	is not information that is needed to be known. I'm not sure about up to
	(89)	Secondary, may be it is, perhaps it is, I think I may have read somewhere
	(90)	that it is, but I know that … lower down in Secondary School, perhaps,
	(91)	and not Primary School. I know definitely that is not spoken of and I think
	(92)	sex is just a physical act. There are emotional, there is another side to
	(93)	sex and ….. I think sexuality is tied up with feelings and thoughts and I
	(94)	don't think that part, the behavioural part, is covered but I don't think the
	(95)	feelings and thoughts around sex, sexuality, are ever explored with
	(96)	children.
Interviewer:	(97)	So you sort of started to talk about, about school stages there and
	(97)	perhaps with reference to maturity, may be what sort of stages do you
	(98)	think children should develop understanding about sexuality, whether
	(99)	that's to do with like you say behaviour or feeling?
Participant A:	(100)	What age do you think they should they start?
Interviewer:	(101)	Yes, what sort of school stages do you feel that it should be introduced?
Participant A:	(102)	Erm not from a professional stance, I'm just thinking about stages my
	(103)	children, at in their development. I don't talk to my S, who is 9,
	(104)	about any sort of sex, I think that would be way over, I don't think whether
	(105)	it is the behavioural or whatever. My daughter who is 12, who is in her
	(106)	first year at Secondary School is. I think she did it last year, in Year 6.
	(107)	So I think perhaps from about Year 6 they are mature enough to start
	(108)	exploring those … the attitudes and beliefs and the cognitive aspects.
Interviewer:	(109)	So would you say that that decision about that kind of bench mark for
	(110)	them learning about that would be to do with their maturity then?
Participant A:	(111)	Oh, definitely, because they could be in Year 11 and they are not ready
	(112)	for that. My daughter is a girl, girls mature a lot quicker than boys.
	(113)	She is ready for that cause she asks questions and I have had a similar
	(114)	conversation with another colleague at work who has got a child in Year 6
	(115)	and she has had a conversation about sex … with her son and she felt
	(116)	he was emotionally ready for that. I think it was perhaps, she has and
	(117)	talked about the affectual side of that and the feelings and the thoughts
	(118)	behind it, I think she was very thorough about it from what she told me.
	(119)	But she has a son a year younger and she has asked the older one not to
	(120)	say anything to the younger one until it's time, so I think she considered
	(121)	her older son very much more mature, yes, feels he was mature enough
	(122)	to cope with that.
Interviewer:	(123)	So just you said you talked about I suppose the parents discussing it with
	(123)	their children. Would you think it should be parents or should it be
	(124)	schools, whose responsibility is it, if you like?
Participant A:	(125)	I think it should be done on a very personal, I think whoever does it, it
	(125)	should be on a personal. I think in front of the whole class …, I don't
	(126)	think it is always appropriate. I am not saying schools should not do it,
	(127)	because there could be the right people in schools, someone who the
	(128)	child, the young person, feels secure to talk about these things with.
	(129)	Erm, so I am not saying it should be school, it should be home, I think it
	(130)	should be especial relationships or the relationship you have or whether
	(131)	you feel safest and it may be that they feel safest to talk to an innate
	(132)	person at school about these issues or it may be someone at home, an
	(133)	aunt, or an older sibling at home they feel safest with. It is a delicate
	(134)	issue and personal topic really. When I was younger I think I would have

	(135)	probably talked to my brother about it. My brother is 12 years older than
	(136)	me and probably carried less prudish attitudes about and he was more
	(137)	perhaps on my wave length than me if you know what I mean, having
	(138)	been through the British school system a lot sooner than me. I remember
	(139)	I asked him about orgasm, I had just heard the word and he told me
	(140)	without any sort or kind of shame or any kind of …
Interviewer:	(141)	So why do you mention the word 'delicate' and the word 'shame', why
	(141)	would such a subject you know have, those kind of terms, what is it that
	(142)	has influenced those two words?
Participant A:	(143)	Just parental attitudes isn't it and it depends on what your ….. and what is
	(143)	going on in your life and how they view sexuality and it can be viewed as
	(144)	being a taboo subject and … one not to be spoken about and if that is
	(145)	how it is viewed by that adult then obviously the young people are going
	(146)	to keep this similar beliefs or students they will feel, keep it closeted, and
	(147)	keep it to themselves, they'll think it is a shameful thing to talk about and
	(148)	their sexual attitudes and beliefs they will view it as being shameful if the
	(149)	adults in their environment also if you do that way. Erm and that has got
	(150)	to do with family, culture in the family and beliefs, so it might be better for
	(151)	them to talk to somebody at school if that were the case.
Interviewer:	(152)	So I am just going back now to something you said earlier, which was that
	(153)	children do experience sex and sexuality in their lives. You have touched
	(154)	on some of these, what sources of information would children use in their
	(155)	understanding of sexuality?
Participant A:	(156)	Where would the sources of information come from?
Interviewer:	(157)	Yes if you like … how children experience sex and sexuality?
Participant A:	(158)	Erm, well, in their relationships with other children in the class,
	(159)	wouldn't they? They would know how they feel with different people
	(160)	and what they like, whether other children come and talk to them or touch
	(161)	them, they will know how that feels and what that feels to them.
Interviewer:	(162)	Would there be any like wider sort of societal influences?
	(162)	We talked about the, say, immediate system of school and the family.
	(163)	Are there any other references?
Participant A:	(164)	I think the younger the child is, perhaps like adults are very guarded
	(164)	about how much information they give to children who are young.
	(165)	As they get older, they are exposed to more experiences of peers, who
	(166)	can be quite forward and say something that is not necessarily true.
	(167)	They can hear things in adult conversations, adults talking, they might pick
	(168)	up things. I think you have to be more careful with younger children but
	(169)	when they get a bit older people might have to know these things so we
	(170)	are not so guarded about what they say: also television, the media.
	(171)	They will pick up things incidentally that way, won't they?
Interviewer:	(172)	And so is there anything else you would like to add to that question
	(173)	about children's sexuality?
Participant A:	(174)	um … …um … No, I don't think so.
Interviewer:	(175)	So I'm going to use the term sexual minority young person in my next
	(176)	question but, before I do, how would you define that term, sexual minority
	(177)	young person?
Participant A:	(178)	I've put a person under the age of 21 who is attracted to a person
	(179)	who is of the same gender.
Interviewer:	(180)	What life experiences would sexual minority young person have?
Participant A:	(181)	Are we talking just under the age of 21 or are we talking school age?

Interviewer:	(182)	Well you defined (laughter by participant) than you. You are right,
	(183)	we can just say a young person to me possibly would be school age,
	(184)	perhaps 18 or under. You said 21? Perhaps school or college age.
Participant A:	(185)	So you are asking me what sexual experiences they would have had at
	(186)	that age?
Interviewer:	(187)	Not necessarily, just life experiences.
Participant A:	(188)	With other personal experience, relationships?
Interviewer:	(189)	In any area of their life.
Participant A:	(190)	Up to that age it has been pretty much school based, hasn't it? Their
	(191)	peers, their experiences have been around erm … just general school
	(192)	relationships, erm schools take up the biggest part of their life really at that
	(193)	age, generally speaking hasn't it, I don't know what the percentage is but
	(194)	it would have been done so their greatest influences, particularly from
	(195)	Secondary age, would have been at school.
Interviewer:	(200)	erm, would they say have any cultural influences on their experience?
Participant A:	(201)	Yeah, definitely, that would have come through their family. And just the
	(202)	culture, school culture, culture of the erm school, yeah, school and home
	(203)	culture would have influenced.
Interviewer:	(204)	OK, so you said that it's influenced by culture and perhaps home as well.
	(204)	So do you think that their experiences of life in terms of life experience
	(205)	and wider experiences would have been problematic?
Participant A:	(206)	Could be, could be or it may have been quite nurturing, it depends,
	(207)	doesn't it?
Interviewer:	(208)	What does it depend on as to whether it would be, say, a problematic
	(209)	trajectectory or something not a problem at all. What sort of things
	(210)	would it depend on?
Participant A:	(211)	The parents, other people, but other people are influenced by other adults
	(212)	also so I think it would have been the adults around the young person
	(213)	who would have erm … perhaps …. shown sensitivity towards feelings…,
	(214)	behaviours, of this young person, it isn't always easy because we don't
	(215)	know what people are thinking unless they disclose that to you to the
	(216)	young people, they go through so many changes, don't they? When they
	(217)	are moody, what are they moody about? Very difficult to work out.
	(218)	I have not been through that with my youngsters yet, but I imagine it is
	(219)	very confusing, a very difficult time and depending on how supportive the
	(220)	adults have been through those times can make or break the young
	(221)	person.
Interviewer:	(222)	So you know, what would be needs of this type of person
	(223)	be, do you think?
Participant A:	(224)	That's a difficult one. Because I think that everybody's needs are
	(225)	different, I don't think there is one fixed. I think it would be the same thing
	(226)	as any young person. Sensitivity, erm … erm … being open erm to that
	(227)	young person, supportive. I don't think their needs would be any different
	(228)	to any other person who's going through a difficult time in adolescence.
	(229)	But I think …what would be needed for the adult to be aware of, what
	(230)	the young person's needs in order to be able to support that person
	(231)	because adults aren't often aware of what the difficulties are or what the
	(232)	struggles are or what the young person is going through.
Interviewer:	(232)	So you know it's difficult to generalise, but you said difficult time and
	(233)	difficulties, what do you think some of those difficulties could be for that

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	(234)	young person?
Participant A:	(234)	Identity, something I'm looking at the moment, social identity. And I'm
	(235)	looking at social identity theory at the moment. Erm … Adolescence is
	(236)	a time when people are trying to establish their own identity after when
	(237)	they are little children, they want to be everything that their parents are, do
	(238)	things that their parents say and do and want to please their parents and
	(239)	try to conform to their parents' behaviours and beliefs and whatever, but
	(240)	when they reach adolescence they want to form their own identity and
	(241)	those identities are often shaped within groups, with the groups that
	(242)	affiliated themselves that they or who they feel they identify most with.
	(243)	And erm if they don't find groups at school … clubs or if they attend after
	(244)	school groups or the groups that they are going to try to identify that are
	(245)	going to be found in school I think they are, if they can't find a group that
	(246)	could be a struggle, if they can't find a group that they can identify with,
	(247)	that's going to be a struggle. And they might be thinking where do I fit in
	(248)	here? I went through that struggle. I went to a private school, it isn't
	(249)	something I disclose to people very often because it's not something I am
	(250)	proud of and I was the only black child there. And I used to think, why
	(251)	was I made, why was I made like this, why did God create me black?
	(252)	Everybody else is different to me, why am I different, so it and I struggled,
	(253)	I struggled at school. I know that dual heritage people struggle with that
	(254)	as well, I'm only talking from my own experience, speak to people I know,
	(255)	to the point where some people scrub at their skin because they can't find
	(256)	people they can identify with.
Interviewer:	(257)	So would you say that is something that might be one of the needs of
	(258)	someone with sexual minority? Might they need some kind of reference
	(259)	group to identify with and that could be one of the supportive factors?
Participant A:	(260)	quite possibly, yeah, yeah. Definitely. I never thought of it actually, but
	(260)	now that you mention it. I was thinking of it on the gang and gangs
	(261)	but yeah I suppose it can apply to that situation.
Interviewer:	(262)	So what were you thinking of.
Participant:	(263)	No, I was thinking of why some people go into gangs, that is where I was
	(264)	thinking of and what happens if there is a group of failing youngsters, who
	(265)	are not doing well at school and they look for the kind of characteristics
	(266)	they can affiliate with and then the group, they don't want to feel they're
	(267)	….. that to boost their self esteem they try and find qualities within the
	(268)	group that can boost themselves and make them better than anybody else
	(269)	so I'm looking at it from that perspective but, yeah, part of being a group is
	(270)	identify yourself with a group and you try and boost up the characteristics
	(271)	of that group to boost your own self esteem so that you look at positive
	(272)	qualities that the group members might have to try and boost your own
	(273)	self-esteem, especially if you want to identify with that group but, yes, that
	(274)	is how I can see how that could be helpful in terms of self-esteem for any
	(275)	minority group really.
Interviewer:	(276)	Is there anything else that you would like to add to that question?
Participant A:	(277)	erm … … … No, not really. I'm thinking about social identity theory.
	(278)	(laughs)
Interviewer:	(278)	So how would you define the term school culture?
Participant A:	(279)	The ethos, beliefs and behaviour towards each other, of members of a
	(280)	school community

Interviewer:	(281)	So my question is, to what extent may this influence how young sexual
	(282)	minority person may feel or how they are included? How much would a
	(283)	school culture influence how sexual minority may feel at a school
	(284)	included in the school?
Participant A:	(293)	I was thinking if the culture celebrates and encourages successes and
	(285)	diversities of all … members of the school community, I suppose that is
	(286)	how it can be influenced.
Interviewer:	(295)	OK. And I mean, would you think, would relationships in the school
	(296)	be supportive, would you think?
Participant:	(297)	On, definitely, yes. As I was saying, I think I was thinking that in terms
	(298)	of helping that young person reach that potential, achieve what other
	(299)	people achieve in the school really.
Interviewer:	(300)	So would you say that generally, or in your experience, schools
	(301)	would have that supportive atmosphere for sexual minority people?
Participant A:	(302)	No, I think they are kind of invisible. You know … If they are not causing
	(303)	any problem, I don't think they are going to consider, or they don't appear
	(304)	to be experiencing difficulties, then I think schools probably think they are
	(305)	probably doing a great job for everybody.
Interviewer:	(306)	So how might teachers be within the school with sexual minority
	(307)	members?
Participant A:	(308)	That is a difficult one because I don't think they should be pointed out and
	(309)	held up as exemplars. Look here's someone who's doing really well,
	(310)	that doesn't fit comfortably with me … that they people should be
	(311)	singled out for being different and then and told you have done really well
	(312)	in this test blah blah, I don't think that's the way forward.
Interviewer:	(313)	Would there be different times of the day or different
	(313)	situations perhaps where the amount to which they are included might
	(314)	differ within the school context. I am thinking about structured times and
	(315)	perhaps unstructured times. Would there be any differences, do you
	(316)	think?
Participant A:	(317)	I don't know … what breaktimes and stuff like that? That's a difficult one,
	(317)	it really is. I don't believe in segregation and I think that is the only way
	(318)	you are going to get rid of ignorance by ensuring that everybody is doing
	(319)	the same thing not doing something else. I believe that about everything
	(320)	really. When you separate people you do one thing and one thing with
	(321)	another, you are highlighting the differences really. So I think … I think
	(322)	… everybody should have opportunities to experience the same things or
	(323)	the same activities or whatever ….. and where difficulties arise they
	(324)	should be addressed.
Interviewer:	(325)	And so when you say when difficulties arise where would you say those
	(325)	difficulties, those types of difficulties arise?
Participant A:	(326)	Where the young person is not feeling as though they are being included
	(327)	or treated in the same way.
Interviewer:	(328)	So what sort of experiences might that be, where they are not being
	(329)	included?
Participant A:	(330)	….. ….. I've got no … I have got no reference, I have got nothing erm I
	(331)	can refer to really, to draw on. I can't think of a situation erm … where a
	(332)	sexual minority person may feel excluded, you know, I can't.
Interviewer:	(333)	I mean, would there be any times of day or any kind of school phases that
	(333)	might make any difference, by school phases, I mean like key stages or

	(334)	would you know that make any difference and would they experience different difficulties?
Participant A:	(335)	Only if they never felt included or if they were made to feel ostracised.
Interviewer:	(336)	But what, say, would make them feel that they weren't included do you
	(337)	think?
Participant A:	(338)	What people are saying, children can be very cruel, if children were saying
	(339)	we don't want certain types of people in this group, we don't want you in
	(340)	this group erm …... that can make them feel ….. ….. ….. I can only talk
	(341)	from experience and how I was made to feel excluded and for me, it was things like and it seems very trivial now and I suppose it is. I
	(342)	remember playing "kiss chase" when I was at school and erm … I was
	(343)	only at Primary School and I was allowed to catch the boys and I was not
	(344)	allowed to kiss them and it is no big deal when I look at it now, I know,
	(345)	how that made me feel at the time, you know, and so I can imagine that if
	(346)	it were some kind of activity and the children said you can't take part in this because … you're not like us.
Interviewer:	(347)	So would they necessarily know, what would perhaps indicate to them that
	(348)	You know that they were not the same? What would indicate to the othe
	(349)	peers they were not the same? Do you think they would notice, or?
Participant A:	(350)	As they got older, they would. I think older children do. And even if they
	(351)	are not sure, they will make assumptions and they will throw words.
Interviewer:	(352)	What would those assumptions be based on?
Participant:	(353)	Well behavioural characteristics ….. perhaps ….. …Yeah behavioural
	(354)	characteristics yes, if a group of
	(355)	boys are talking about girls and they fancy this one and I fancy that one
	(356)	and they notice a certain young person is not joining in that conversation
	(357)	they will make assumptions. Erm … If then a group of boys are doing
	(358)	certain things. I remember when I was at school a couple of boys, they
	(359)	were not gay, but the rest of the school thought they were gay because
	(360)	they didn't take part in football and things like that, rough sports, all the
	(361)	sports that the other boys took part in. I don't know about one of them
	(362)	'cause he left. I remember another boy, he was my best friend actually,
	(363)	Franky, and he always played with the girls, when I look back on the
	(364)	photographs, he was always with the girls. And the way he ran, he kind of
	(365)	kicked out a little bit and everyone said he was gay. And he is married
	(366)	now with two kids but, at the time, when he didn't do the things that other
	(367)	boys did everyone thought he was gay. So I think young people kind of,
	(368)	young people pick on certain behaviours and certain oh I don't know, they
	(369)	can make assumptions, so they may be right, they may be wrong.
Interviewer:	(370)	So they pick up on behaviour and what has given them that information,
	(371)	that that behaviour, is different?
Participant A:	(372)	Again, it's all down to society, isn't it, it is about what they see, what they
	(373)	hear, what experience told them, what they tell each other, what peers tell
	(374)	each other. I don't know where they pick it up from but from as early
	(375)	as primary school they were calling Franky gay, you know, and another
	(376)	boy called Aaron, they said he was gay, as well, I don't know if he was.
	(377)	He left at Primary School, but as early as Primary School. I don't know
	(378)	where they get their perceptions or their views from or how they form or
	(379)	develop, but they just hold on to them and I suppose with girls it could go
	(380)	that way as well if girls are quite butch, or they are not … feminine people.
	(381)	The kids picked up on that and they assume that they are gay, that is

	(382)	unless the young person actually comes out and says I am gay, but I think
	(383)	young people form certain beliefs based on … characteristics, observable
	(384)	characteristics.
Interviewer:	(385)	And we have talked a bit about difficulties but, at the beginning, haven't
	(386)	we, but at the beginning you were talking about a supportive inclusive
	(387)	school culture what school structures do you think there may be in place
	(388)	at the moment to support minority sexual young people?
Participant A:	(389)	I don't think that is something that is explored, I think probably because
	(390)	they think they are a minority so it doesn't need to be addressed.
	(391)	I know there are some good schools in the city that are addressing it. I
	(392)	cannot remember which school, I saw one, but I can't remember where,
	(393)	now, where it had had been identified. I think schools that consider
	(394)	themselves to be quite emotionally literate environments, where they
	(395)	think they have got you know a, a supportive culture, where everybody
	(396)	can talk about anything that's worrying them or they think they are
	(397)	confused, they have got a mentor, they are able to support them and
	(398)	some schools say that they are … have got a positive culture and can
	(399)	support staff or they support people with any issues or identify crises or
	(400)	whatever.
Interviewer:	(401)	Erm, is there anything else you would like to add that question?
Participant A:	(402)	Erm, no.
Interviewer:	(403)	Right, last two questions now. In your role as an EP so far what
	(404)	experiences have you of sexual diversity?
Participant A:	(405)	None whatsoever. No-one mentioned them to me at school as an issue,
	(406)	you know, some schools might have problems they have never contacted
	(407)	me about this problem. But they have never said to me, incidentally this
	(408)	is a problem or, they might have this child who is gay or whatever. No
	(409)	that's never mentioned.
Interviewer:	(410)	Were there any cases now that you reflect back on where there might
	(410)	have been involvement where there might felt there might be underlying
	(411)	sexual issues but they were manifested in the referral for other issues?
Participant A:	(412)	No, I can't think of any cases that might have been because the cases
	(412)	that I have been asked to deal with … have been external behaviours, ie
	(413)	erm … and they have been explained because some have been looked
	(414)	after, so they have been uprooted from I don't know Africa and brought to
	(415)	the UK. So most of them are externalised behaviours, which are linked to
	(416)	erm quite traumatic experiences, erm life experiences. I don't get many
	(417)	emotional cases, if I do, they are from the Grammar School and they have
	(418)	been around, actually their might have been one case who said, one boy,
	(419)	he had been picked on by other students and he said it was because he
	(420)	was not supported. I suppose that could have been another one. Very
	(421)	articulate, very bright boy, lovely lovely boy, got a close friendship with the
	(422)	Mum who was in on the meeting, we were trying to problem solve. Didn't
	(423)	have a good relationship with his Dad, Dad had left home and then had a
	(424)	family somewhere else, so I suppose that could have been … kind of like
	(425)	mixed up in there but I would never have known because the issues he
	(426)	felt they were around he was not sporty like other boys. His sport was ice-skating and that was not viewed in a very positive way as rugby and
	(427)	football.
Interviewer:	(428)	So … I know you said that that was not highlighted at the time, but did you
	(428)	think that about highlighting sexuality as a factor at the time.

Participant A: (429) No, it wasn't mentioned to me so I wouldn't have brought it up.
Interviewer: (430) Do you think you might have dealt with this differently now, or would it still
(431) have been, you would still have dealt with it in the same way?
Participant: (432) I wouldn't have raised it because as I say, it was not raised with me as a
(433) concern. If I did raise it as a concern I think that people would think I am
(434) jumping to conclusions or making presumptions. You never can tell,
(435) people might feel offended. That wasn't a suggestion.
Interviewer: (436) Would it be different if the lad had disclosed?
Participant A: (437) If the lad had disclosed it, I would have dealt with it.
Interviewer: (438) Yeah?
Participant A: (439) I mean the culture of that school is very much, very male dominated
(440) environment and the alpha male kind of image is promoted, men have to
(441) be strong, men have to be tough, you know, deal with your emotions, you
(442) know, very much that kind of attitude, erm, it's not a very emotionally
(443) literate environment but I know what I would have been met with had I
(444) tried to raise it, it is not enough of an issue here for us to have to deal
(445) with this issue. It is not their line of children or young people with this
(446) issue for us to put in place a system. Because I was met with that kind
(447) of spot before about … when I approached the school about emotional
(448) literacy, it was not an issue with children with difficulties in this area for
(449) us to consider that issue as a priority.
Interviewer: (450) OK, you've said really that you have had limited experience of cases or
(451) you know any other work in sexual diversity
Participant A: (452) Yes.
Interviewer: (453) Why do you think that might be?
Participant A: (454) I don't think people raise it as an issue. I don't think they see it as a factor
(455) that can impede maybe their educational … … development, educational
(456) norm, yeah, because really schools see it as people achieving their
(457) educational potential aren't they and addressing any kind of like
(458) emotional or behavioural factors that might be impeding that but if it is
(459) not impeding that then I don't think schools, this is me personally, I may
(460) be wrong, feel need to address it. It's not impacting on their education,
(461) they don't need to address it.
Interviewer: (462) So are you kind of saying with a focus on the educational agenda that kind
(462) of prevents interest in that area. Do you think there are any other
(463) reasons why it may not be more prevalent in your work?
Participant A: (464) I think people probably feel, you see if it isn't mentioned by schools, you
(464) don't, you don't, you can't address it if it isn't brought up and I think it isn't
(465) brought up because it isn't brought to their attention. May be children
(466) don't highlight any problems that they are going through, you know, with
(467) their peers or within themselves, obviously don't mention it to staff.
(468) Because they feel that it is going to be met with negativity or it may be
(469) even worse, by the attitudes of the staff in schools. I'm speculating, I
(470) really don't know.
Interviewer: (471) So I mean is there anything else you would like to add to that?
Participant A: (472) No
Interviewer: (473) We'll just go on to the last question. What do you think the role of the EP
(474) should be in the area of sexual diversity?
Participant A: (475) Um … A difficult one. I'm not sure really.
Interviewer: (476) I mean, is it an area which EPs should be involved in, or not?
Participant: (477) Erm I'm not sure. I don't know enough about it. I need to know how much

	(478)	it is affecting young people before I can think whether it is something we
	(479)	should be engaged in. Are young people, are young people, sexual,
	(480)	sexual minority young people, … you know retrospectively do they feel,
	(481)	that having that been addressed or had … sexual diversity been
	(482)	promoted at school, would they be better off today? Do they think they
	(483)	would have achieved more or reached their potential, full potential had
	(484)	that been addressed? I'm not sure. I will have to look at what the
	(485)	evidence is around this, really.
Interviewer:	(486)	So would you say generally then as professionals that we have not had
	(487)	that information to date about some evidence for that number of young
	(488)	people perhaps?
Participant A:	(489)	May be that I have not explored it, there may be evidence out there, I just
	(489)	haven't looked, you know? It never been brought to my attention, and I
	(490)	have never thought to explore it. There may be evidence I have not really
	(491)	looked. May be if we explored the evidence we might find a role for us. I
	(492)	don't know, I really don't know.
Interviewer:	(493)	So, are you saying you know that first of all that you have to look for some
	(493)	evidence. I am going to pose a question now that erm possibly you will
	(494)	say I will need to look at the evidence, but you know just, say, speculating
	(495)	what types of work would you feel is needed, in terms of levels, I
	(496)	suppose, would you know, individual level of work or would you feel it
	(497)	would be more preventative. Where would you see a role for the EP in
	(498)	meeting the needs of that group of people?
Participant A:	(499)	I don't think individual work would be helpful 'cause then you are locating
	(499)	the problem firmly within the individual. I would imagine … you would be
	(500)	working on a systems level with staff and adults, will share those or
	(501)	support the the message, whatever that would be or support children
	(502)	experiencing a difficulty in this area with regard to their self-identity or
	(503)	whatever or with regard to any bullying that might be going on in the
	(504)	school. I think whatever the issues are I think they need to be tackled on
	(505)	a systematic level, a within … yeah.
Interviewer:	(506)	And what do you see the role of the EP in that?
Participant A:	(507)	Perhaps looking at psychological factors .. that may … be affecting these
	(508)	young people and thereby affecting their ability to to develop ….. into, to
	(509)	develop their full potential really, in terms of their whole being, not just
	(510)	educational, but their whole being, you know, personal, social and
	(511)	emotional well being.
Interviewer:	(512)	So you kind of mention that it should be at the level of adults, if you like.
	(513)	What would you see the EP role in working with adults in schools?
Participant A:	(514)	….. ….. I think it would be awareness-raising perhaps in terms of CPD.
	(515)	If we have got any data on this, perhaps sharing that with them and
	(516)	looking at the long-term impact of not addressing these areas and then
	(517)	perhaps looking at working with schools and setting up systems … to
	(518)	reduce what ever the evidence says, reduce those problems from
	(519)	escalating or occurring, or developing.
Interviewer:	(520)	Do you think there would be any ethical issues involved in this type of
	(521)	work?
Participant A:	(522)	….. ….. ….. ….. …Possibly. I think that some eyebrows might be
	(523)	raised. As with talking about sex in general, I mean you could be
	(524)	accused of putting ideas into young people's heads. I suppose, if you

Interviewer: (530) I mean, would there be any constraints on this kind of role, do you think?
Participant A: (531) constraints on the EP role you mean?
Interviewer: (532) Yeah, working in that way and working with that topic, would there be?
Participant A: (533) I think it would have to come from the school, I don't think we could
               (534) approach schools with this. I think the school would just have to
               (535) raise the erm … say, we have a number of children who we are aware of
               (536) of a sexually minority or we suspect are, is there anything we can do to
               (537) support these young people?
Interviewer: (538) Well, I mean, is there anything that would facilitate that type of work?
Participant A: (539) ….. ….. ….. ….. I don't know, you mean in terms of schools coming
               (540) forward.
Interviewer: (541) Any sort of practical ways? Either from the Service you are working in or
               (542) from the schools, themselves? What would you know, what would aid
               (543) that type or work?
Participant A: (544) I think, if there are people in a sexual minority. I am not aware of what the
               (544) issues are around that. I am not sure how it affects, how their school
               (545) experiences affecting them. And you know what factors in school can
               (546) make their life in school … great or what things can can actually, you
               (547) know, ruin them really. I think the information needs to be put out there.
               (548) I think that could really be helpful. Some information, some data, some
               (549) facts, some figures, on what the true state of play is around this , around
               (550) sexual minority young people. I don't know anything about it really and I
               (551) suppose when you haven't got any facts you are in ignorance really so
               (552) you don't really know what needs to be done, if anything, you know.
Interviewer: (553) So I suppose you know, would that be something that might contribute to
               (553) you working towards a positive outcome for that group that it is more
               (554) around information for you to start with?
Participant A: (555) And information for schools to see whether it is an issue that they want to
               (555) address. Well, really we have to pander to the needs of the school, we
               (556) can't develop a package … unless schools want it because we could find
               (557) we have developed a programme of support and we don't have anyone to
               (558) deliver it. So really we have to base it on a kind of needs assessment,
               (559) sort of want. We would have to investigate that first before we put
               (560) together anything. We might see the need and schools don't and then we
               (561) just spend a lot of time and effort producing this and there could be no
               (562) take up so we would really have to give the facts and figures to schools
               (563) and let them see whether it is something they want to address.
Interviewer: (584) And so would you say you have had any training that would contribute to
               (585) your involvement in the area of sexual diversity and, you know, what sort
               (586) of training would you think might …?
Participant A: (587) I would like to look at the research first of all, I'm not sure about training. I
               (588) think I want to see what the research is, I want to see what the outcomes
               (589) are, you know, sexual minority young people who have been through the
               (590) British education system. That's my first starting point, I think. Erm,
               (591) obviously you feel there is an issue because you are doing this
               (592) research but I would like to know what the, what the outcomes are really.

	(593)	Erm and then I would know what I would need to know, if you know what I
	(594)	mean.
Interviewer:	(595)	So it's more to raise your awareness in the first place.
Participant A:	(596)	Yeah to know what the needs are because then when I know what the
	(597)	needs are, is it around the attitudes of other children, is that they're
	(598)	damaged, is it around attitudes of the staff, is it around, I don't know, not
	(599)	having a peer group that they can identify with, I don't know, I would
	(600)	need to see you know what the issues are really.
Interviewer:	(601)	Is there anything else you would like to add to the question?
Participant A:	(602)	Not really.

Debrief

Interviewer: So anyway,thank you for taking part in this interview and agreeing to the use of data collection for my research and you have provided me information which will contribute towards the examination of educational psychology practice in the area of sexual diversity. It is hoped that this will be a catalyst for changes in the way we meet the needs for sexual minority in young people. I would just like to ask you some questions now just about the interview.

So has the interview highlighted things which you had not thought about before? Or given you the opportunity to think about your practice?

Participant: Well, it has kind of like made me realize that perhaps I have got a blind spot there because I have never believed sexual minority people and perhaps I thought they were OK because it isn't a visible kind of like difference. I kind of like thought well they are going to experience discrimination as quite visible and because society has moved on so much I find that was an issue now but it has kind of like got me thinking. I was basing all that on assumptions, maybe ….. ….. laughter on both sides! So there must be a need out there so perhaps what this …

Interviewer: Did you find the preparation part of the interview useful?

Participant: Yeah. This was very useful, actually.

Interviewer: Why?

Participant: It kind of gave me an idea of how far the interview we had got and (2) because it gave me time to think about some of these I hear before you because to be fair if you had asked me them cold I think this would have taken a lot longer. Ha, ha. Give me about five minutes and I'll come back to you on that one.

Interviewer: OK.

Participant: So you know it gave me time to think about things a lot better than coming up with an off the cuff answer, really.

Interviewer: Have you got any questions about the research or the research process?

Participant: No. About the ethical thing ……….?

Interviewer: So you will receive a copy of the report summarising the main findings of the study. The Educational Psychology Service will also receive a copy of this report which can be disseminated to members. If you would like to receive a full copy then you can request that or contact me at a later point. Have you got any other questions about anything we have talked about?
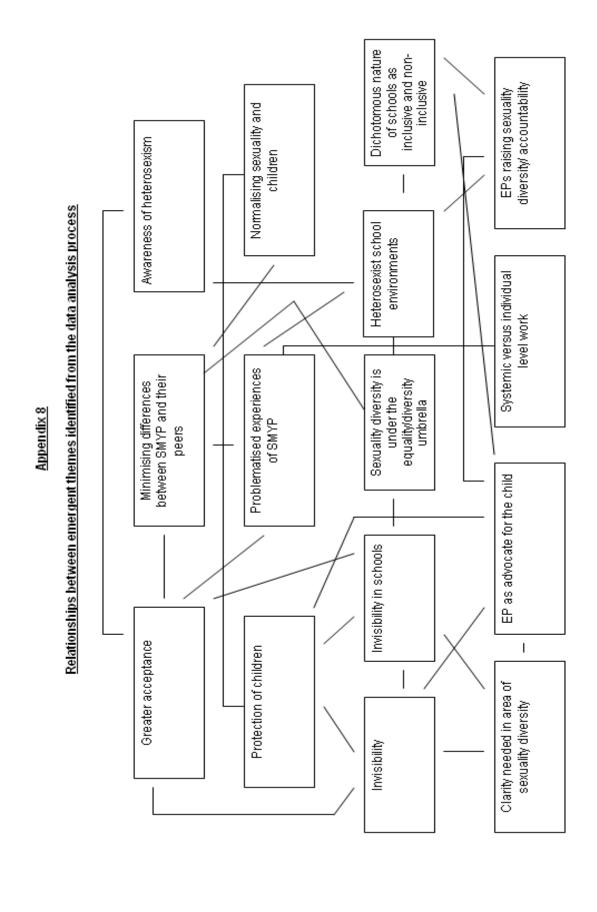
Participant: Not on the record, no.

Interviewer: OK, have you got any concerns about the subjects which have arisen?

Participant: Not concerns, really, just curious really, just raised my curiosity.

Appendix 8

Relationships between emergent themes identified from the data analysis process

Theme
Awareness of heterosexism
Normalising sexuality and children
Dichotomous nature of schools as inclusive and non-inclusive
EPs raising sexuality diversity/ accountability
Minimising differences between SMYP and their peers
Problematised experiences of SMYP
Heterosexist school environments
Systemic versus individual level work
Greater acceptance
Protection of children
Sexuality diversity is under the equality/diversity umbrella
Invisibility in schools
EP as advocate for the child
Invisibility
Clarity needed in area of sexuality diversity

Relationships between identified themes

As the themes were identified, it became apparent that there were interconnections between them. These interconnections were structured by similarities or tensions between the constructions. Also, further examination of the themes suggested that codes could be combined, with some themes serving a functional role for the participants, thus assisting in the decision to include just nine themes in order to fit the word limit of the paper. The interconnections identified between the themes are discussed in relation to specific quotes within the paper. However, it is important to note that the interconnections between the themes in Appendix 8 highlight certain consequences for the EP role and outcomes for SMYP.

Similarities between themes

The 'greater acceptance' theme is linked to the 'awareness of heterosexism' theme as these constructions present a positive view of sexuality diversity and may facilitate a role for the EP in meeting the needs of SMYP. The 'minimising differences between SMYP and their peers', 'normalising sexual diversity' and 'sexuality diversity under the equal opportunities umbrella' are all constructions which present a paradox that normalises aspects of sexuality diversity whilst indicating clear differences. When participants talked about sexuality, some of them described a general invisibility in society whilst others constructed invisibility in schools. This shows how invisibility is constructed at a macro and micro level. The 'heterosexist school environments' theme and the 'dichotomous nature of schools as inclusive and non-inclusive' theme both show how some EPs constructed schools as non-inclusive environments which would impact on outcomes for SMYP. These constructions may be functional for participants in creating a barrier or explanation for why EPs have not acted in this area, thus connecting to the 'EPs raising sexuality diversity/ accountability' theme.

Tensions between themes

Tensions were identified between the 'greater acceptance' theme and the 'invisibility' theme as participants constructed a more accepting society, but simultaneously acknowledged a conflicting reality. The 'EP as the advocate for the child' theme creates tensions with the 'protection of children' theme as it may be considered that constructing children as in need of protection from 'sexual knowledge or identity' may prevent EPs from acting in the area of sexuality diversity.

Functions and consequences of interconnections between themes

The 'invisibility' construction is linked to the 'protection of children' theme as it is considered that constructing sexuality as invisible supports the protection of children discourse which presents as a barrier to meeting outcomes for SMYP. The 'clarity needed in the area of sexuality diversity' theme and the 'invisibility' construction are connected, as the continued silence supports an unclear message. They are considered to be interdependent as affording greater saliency to children's sexuality may provide clearer messages for educational and psychological professionals, thus

facilitating action in the area of sexuality diversity. The 'problematised experiences of SMYP' theme supports the construction of individual level work rather than systemic practice and so may act as a barrier to preventative work in the area of sexuality diversity. The 'dichotomous nature of school environments as inclusive and non-inclusive' theme may present a barrier for EPs in raising sexuality diversity in schools as this links with the 'accountability' theme in providing a rationale for deferring responsibility to schools. However, the 'EP as advocate for the child' discourse counters this by reaffirming a role for the EP in meeting the needs of SMYP. The 'awareness of heterosexism' and 'heterosexist school environments' themes are linked in demonstrating an awareness of current gaps in meeting the needs of SMYP. However, in terms of EP accountability this is countered by the 'clarity needed in the area of sexuality diversity' theme, which may be used to explain the lack of involvement by EPs.

Research Diary Extract

Analysis   26.7.09

Limitations — Directly Questioning about the things
                       I want them to talk about
                       ie using term SMYP
                     – Directly discussing terms - open subject
                     – In this situation – these themes emerged
                     – What alternatives? How else get to
                       what EPs know about?

Analysis of data   'positioned as'   30.7.09 (language)
paradox of SMYP treated 'same as' and different
to other YP – though problematised - unsaid + said
Dangers of either position as needs not met or in right
                                                              way.
Actively constituting versions of reality not
reflecting it.
·   Nearly all, contested discourse in literature
· What about power? – Ed env + EPs' power not
· framed, constructs, The discourse of , neutral us
· Conjoined, tensions , is constructed as
· omnipresent heterosexuality acknowledged
    The discursive construction
· Simultaneously facilitate + prevent a role of EPs
· Parallels + counter argument to literature in seek atives
· Sexuality is situated.
· Co-existence of prejudices + factual reasons -
   constraining espoused desire for egalatarianism
   – Justify status quo (from P546 Speers +
   Speakers - Dual Concern . (Fluid) 2000) Potter
   express views but also present as Conny + egalar
· orienting to or attending to – overt↗
· oriented to directly + indirectly

Billig
1991

Verbatim quotations extracted from the seven interviews

It is acknowledged that whilst the quotes have been categorised into nine codes, there are overlaps between themes in terms of constructions and functions for the participants. Therefore, quotes have been included under the best-fit codes but may be considered within and in relation to other themes. The interconnections between various constructions and functions have been explored in relation to the themes included in the main body of the paper.

Theme 1: Greater Acceptance

Quote A

'People are allowed to be gay now whereas before in culture it was a taboo. Well, people can come out or be openly gay and be who they are and don't have to marry opposite sex/gender because it's accepted of them.'

Quote B

Participant: 'I think as a society we are more aware that there are different sexual identities and I think that that's one of the best things really about where we are in history. That's a lot more of an open construct. People are more able to be open about (1) how they feel, (2) who they love, (3) who their partners are than I think they have ever done before.'

Researcher: 'So would you say that that acceptance, if you like, is in all areas of society?'
Participant: 'No absolutely not. I'd say it's in mine and my family's erm sphere but I'm aware that people who are older than me or perhaps in the generation above me, absolutely not.'

Quote C

'I think our understanding conceptually, understanding of differences in sexuality have changed over time. It's because people have been able to witness or know more about a range of possibilities erm in terms of sexual diversity.'

Quote D

'In terms of young people's expressions like gay are more freely used not necessarily to describe a freedom to have sexual diversity but sometimes as what could appear to be liberal expression but actually has the affect of isolating by the use of that expression.'

Quote E

'Also the attitudes towards diversity and sexuality have been formed into legislation that is permissive so what has been illegal is now illegal which reflects changes, I believe, in attitude.'

Quote F

'We've become more accepting as a society that there are differences in terms of sexuality.'

Theme 2: Invisibility

Quote A

Well, I suppose at the very start, we've got to talk about it haven't we?

Quote B

I think that difference full stop really should be erm talked about and celebrated.

Quote C

'I also think that EPs … if I had a checklist in my head about what might be upsetting a young person I think I would notice because of my own history. Now let's think about this area but for most EPs it wouldn't even come into the frame.'

Quote D

'Its attitudes, expectations, it's assumptions and they're unquestioned, they're not unquestionable but they are unquestioned. It's about ignorance and that assumption that's made all of the time and I guess you are never sure when children begin to explore their sexual identities too… whilst people are not sure about when that is and how best to deal with it then its left alone and so it's not discussed at all is it?'

Quote E

'Sooner or later the service is going to have to upgrade and value. It's very interesting that actually they're gonna have to value that there are individuals in this service who don't necessarily have a comfortable voice.'

Quote F

'I don't think children, well … children under the age of primary school, I don't think it is ever spoken of in terms of feelings perhaps. I think they have conversations about reproduction … … and, you know, the actual act of having sex and the biological stuff but in terms of the affectual aspects I don't think that is covered. So I think they are pretty much left to find out for themselves from what they observe or what they see.'

Theme 3: Normalising sexual diversity

Quote A

I think everybody's needs are different. I don't think there is one fixed. I think it would be the same needs as any other young person. Sensitivity, erm, erm … being open erm to that young person and supportive. I don't think that their needs would be any different to any young person who is going through a difficult time in adolescence.

Quote B

'I think it may be as part of PCP or working with kids and ascertaining their views generally, their sense of self and identity, something around sexuality may arise.'
'In terms of sexuality, I don't deal with children's sexual identities unless it's raised by the young person or the adult around them. Erm … but then I've not dealt with other issues either that I thought I would like friendship and bullying generally. I haven't dealt with a range of social issues as I thought I would as an EP.'

Quote C

'I can't know anybody else's life experiences but what I can do is I can hear what they are saying and I can support them in making sense of what they are experiencing.'

Quote D

'If we take a constructionist viewpoint that all our previous experiences are going to inform us about how we feel about this experience then we can reflect back on what was good and bad and painful when we were adolescents.'

Quote E

'I get a bit worried when different groups or different people are grouped in different ways. Why should we be categorising kids if we are thinking about diversity? Everybody should be treated as an individual person.

Quote F

'I think there's probably universal experiences and different experiences for sexual minority young people.'

Quote G

'I have professionally met with people who have … sorry … children who have been described as gay and there's only been one or two who are quite emotional and not fitting in socially. What message are these children getting from the social world at school, at home or in the community? It's a problem for the other people which makes it a problem for them.'

Theme 4: Sexuality diversity is part of the equality umbrella

Quote A

It's just a general equality issue in my eyes and If I know more about the issues and I can be more clear about the assumptions I make because I must make them all the time. If I was clear what those assumptions were my equal opportunities practice would be better and I would be more able to support people who would be going through those issues.

Quote B

'I think that sexual minority groups should be part of that wider accepting differences and a school that has … that general ethos … there's a lot of different ways so through the

curriculum, the policies but also through what the adults do and say to children and who they invite into school, what school trips they do, what they display and how they respond to issues that are happening to children.'

Quote C

'I had one girl who self-referred and that was great. That was my only self-referral. She wanted to come and talk to me. She was sixteen and I was so intrigued that she asked out of curiosity. It wasn't so much about sexuality diversity but about diversity. She didn't feel happy in her own skin. We did a short bit of work loosely on CBT grounds to get her to challenge her own thoughts.'

Quote D

'It's about the emotional literacy climate and the tolerance of differences.'

Theme 5: Protection of children

Quote A

I think we need some clarity about sexuality issues generally. I think at the moment, adults don't feel comfortable with it so you would have to be clear about it. What we are allowed to do and what we're not because I think people get worried about child protection… talking children into something.

There are boundaries set almost by definition. For example, when a child asks, when a little child asks where babies come from you're gonna give them an explanation which is appropriate to their age and stage of development and likewise with sexuality. You're not going to go into the whys and wherefores with a six year old. You might do with a sixteen year old who is questioning; do I like men, or women or do I like both? What do I do about these emotions or feelings I'm having.

Quote B

'For me, I need reassurance that we are thinking in the right way. It gets adults very, very angry, very quickly and if we are doing it in a particular was that parents or teachers didn't like then we could get into real trouble.'

Quote C

'I think that once you put the word sex next to the word child or young person, you then have images that people want to walk away from because the word heterosexuality is so buried and omnipresent we have to think.'

Quote D

'I don't talk to my son who is 9 about any sort of sex. I think that would be way over. So I think from about year six they are mature enough to start exploring those, the attitudes, the beliefs, the cognitive aspects.'

Quote E

Researcher: 'You said something about they wouldn't be able to join in because it wouldn't relate to their own experience. What would happen if they started talking about it from their perspective? Something that wasn't the norm, what would happen to them?

Participant: 'That would be fascinating wouldn't it? From what I remember of being in school I don't think it would be tolerated, not when children are young … because there's a need when you are finding out about your sexuality, there's a need for conformity … anything that's different I imagine is a difficult thing to have.'

Theme 6: Awareness of heterosexism

Quote A

'I think that they [children] would probably get the message that most, most people are heterosexual.'

Quote B

'Mostly, I would think from the experiences I have had that there will be phases and assumptions and shaping and reinforcing that will be coming through teachers that will reflect what the teacher's heterosexual orientation says about their own life.'

Quote C

'I do wonder whether it's the needs of other people we are talking about here. It's the discomfort or 'ist' attitudes of the majority that need to be addressed.'

Quote D

'The media continues to presume that the norm erm is a heterosexual norm.'

Quote E

'I've got to be careful that I don't put my values on other people. When I'm talking to teenagers, what I have caught myself doing in the way that I'm careful not to say … I say, who lives at home with you. I also talk about when you're going out with other people. I try not to express what gender they might be. I am aware that it is a weakness of mine that I'm white, middle class heterosexual.'

Quote F

'I think that once you put the word sex next to the word child or young person, you then have images that people want to walk away from because the word heterosexuality is so buried and omnipresent we have to think.'

Quote G

'One could take the position that there's a possibility that adults including teachers erm… kind of live their own sense of relationships with others by reflecting them onto their children and making assumptions about children.'

Quote H

'I think that children are quite often exposed by default to the reality of heterosexuality because they are usually living with a man and a woman as parents who are going to be reasonably intimate. I found it noticeable that assumptions are made for children in school contexts where there is an assumption by the adult … when you meet a member of the opposite sex … there's an absolute assumption without the recognition of a possibility of the developing young person developing a form of desire.'

Theme 7: Inclusive vs. non-inclusive school cultures

Quote A

'Its interesting when you go into schools and see nice stuff going on and it's beyond the teaching and learning. It's about the expectations from the adults towards their children. Then you've got the opposite where it's almost poisonous. It's toxic. It takes a very strong person and I don't think that I am that person to constantly challenge that toxicity because you're dealing with constructs radiating out and mixing with everyone else's'. Unless you've got somebody who is very clear in terms of what they want their school culture to be or the ethos then for those who are outside what is classified as the norm in that school, life is gonna be tough.'

Quote B

'It's different in different settings. You have to respect the culture of the school community.'

Quote C

'A sense that one did not have, couldn't assume the characteristics in common with most people and because of that couldn't draw on the support of peers in general in educational settings which gives rise to feelings of isolation and probably corroborated by insipid messages in the media.'

Quote D

'It's a massive target for bullying … if you've got children in schools who are isolated.'

Quote E

'That would depend on the school wouldn't it?' I suppose children are more likely to feel isolated and deny their sexuality if the school don't have a good bullying policy or have a bullying policy but don't follow it through.'

Quote F

'It is reflected in a lack of awareness from people in the institution that they are part of the culture. If we think about an educational environment, people won't necessarily recognise that they are behaving or contributing to the culture.'

Quote G

'The image of prisons went through my head. You know you get wardens colluding with prisoners to create a hierarchy to control what's going on. I think schools are a bit like that. You have this hierarchy, hierarchy of influence and if you're okay, if you're not then shut up and put up which is a bullying culture.'

Quote H

'I know from experience that there are schools with great working models but the fact that I'm citing them as examples means that they are not the general.'

Quote I

'The culture permeates from the adults in the school but then the kids may be influenced by that … and I suppose I can see two things happening either in any school culture, that children get subsumed into it and then sort of model and behave as the institution expects but then equally there might be young people who are reactive to that.'

Theme 8: Systemic vs. individual work

Quote A

'I don't think individual work would be helpful cause then you are locating the problem within the individual. I would imagine … you would be working on a systems level with staff and adults, will share those or support the message, whatever that would be or support children experiencing a difficulty in this area with regard to their identity or whatever or with regard to any bullying that might be going on in the school. I'm not sure what the issues are around that.'

Quote B

'There are groups like stonewall who deal with issues and as a psychologist I try not to be issues based. What I try to do is deal with general principles. Just in the same way I don't deal with dyslexia first I try to deal with teaching reading. What I am trying to say is we need a population wide approach.'

Quote C

'If the school said to me, I've got this really troubled lady or young man, would you spend some time working with them and if it turned out it was to do with sexuality, whatever the definition was the issue then I would be perfectly comfortable with that.'

Theme 9: Accountability in sexuality diversity

Quote A

'I wouldn't have raised it because as I say, it was not raised with me as a concern. If I did raise it as a concern, I think that people would think that I am jumping to conclusion or making presumptions. You never can tell, people might feel offended.'

Quote B

'It's a very, very sensitive, it could be a very sensitive area but I think one of our jobs is to illuminate the difficulties a child is experiencing so if part of the reason for the difficulties is because of sexual preference or the way sexual preference is dealt with then EPs are in a good place to talk about it.'

Quote C

'We've got a responsibility. We should have anyway, to sort of promote and ensure that the adults understand where the young person is coming from and their views and perceptions. Somebody who's a bit of an advocate for making sure that they're not some sort of invisible person … making sure their views are heard.'

Quote D

'I think that psychologists have got a responsibility to difficulty messages.'

Quote E

'I think we've got a role in some sort of training. I don't know what that would look like'

Quote F

'Its not a big issue with the service, then erm … I'm not looking out for it.'

Quote G

'No it wasn't mentioned to me (in schools) so I wouldn't have brought it up.'

Quote H

'A challenge might be persuading schools possibly that that's what they need.'

Quote I

'In terms of sexuality, I don't deal with children's sexual identities unless it's raised by the young person or the adult around them. Erm … but then I've not dealt with other issues either that I thought I would like friendship and bullying generally. I haven't dealt with a range of social issues as I thought I would as an EP.'

Quote J

'I need to know how much it is affecting young people before I can think whether it is something in which we should be engaged in.'

Quote K

'Maybe that I have not explored it. There may be evidence out there. I just haven't looked you know. It's never been brought to my attention and I have never thought to explore it.'

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

1. Overview of the conclusion

This chapter reflects upon the author's personal learning gained as a result of the research process and findings. Reflections are also provided regarding the impact of the research on the participants and the author's service.

1.1 Reflections on the findings of the research and personal learning

My research journey mirrors the contradictions and tensions reported in the findings. Throughout the process, I experienced cognitive dissonance as I grappled with various research decisions, for example, the labelling of SMYP, how to frame questions for the interview which would reflect the participant's constructions rather than knowledge of the literature in the area of sexuality and considering my researcher position in relation to a subjectively emotive topic. Although these tensions were resolved practically, it is acknowledged that alternative actions may have been undertaken and resulted in different findings and effects on the researcher.

Self-change as a result of the research process has been evident in several ways. Firstly, understanding of and the application of discourse analysis has increased my awareness of the influence of discourse in my daily practice as an educational

psychologist. The usefulness of such social constructionist tools has been highlighted by Moore (2006) who notes the value of multiple understandings in work-related social situations. I have developed meta-level appraisal of discourse in the moment rather than post-meeting reflections. For example, awareness of other professionals' discourse and parental discourse in meetings has resulted in greater consideration of the functions and consequences of the constructions for stakeholders. This has enabled new outcomes which are more sensitive to their experience of the world.

Familiarisation with discourse analysis and findings from the research have also influenced my own assumptions in the area of sexuality and how this may influence my practice in terms of how I construct others' understandings of sexuality. In particular, my expectations regarding EPs' knowledge of heterosexism have shifted as the findings indicate that there may be more awareness of this in the profession than the literature has indicated (e.g. Williams 2008 and Ben Ari 2001). Also, the fluid and context-dependent nature of the constructions produced in the research have also reframed my assumptions regarding others' attitudes to sexuality, providing evidence that opening dialogues about sexuality can reconstruct new realities in this area. As an EP, I am in a strong position to open dialogue and co-construct knowledge about sexuality equality in schools which would directly impact on outcomes for SMYP.

Lastly, engagement in the research process has developed my researcher: practitioner skills and increased the value and use of research in my role as an EP.

My knowledge of epistemological, methodological and ethical issues has become embedded within my practice as I consider planning, implementing and evaluating interventions at different levels for different stakeholders. Through a broad contemplation of different paradigms and methods and the decision to focus specifically on social constructionist and discursive psychology, I have developed a consideration of the need to establish a 'goodness of fit' between knowledge of research tools, previous research evidence and the real world context. This knowledge is crucial as EPs struggle in the current context of children's services to establish a distinct role (Cameron 2006). Supporting McKay (2000) who states, '*psychologists* in their action must be firmly grounded in the principles and methods of psychology and in its evidential base' (McKay 2000 p33), I consider that the researcher: practitioner role enhanced by the doctoral level studies required may protect a role for EPs in the future.

1.2 Impact of the research on the participants

Participation in the research may have had several effects on the participants. Although the sample is likely to reflect EPs who are more comfortable with and have greater awareness of sexuality equality, it is possible that greater reflexivity may have occurred as a result of co-constructed conversations in the interview which may impact on practice. Evidence to support this point is provided by a comment by one participant who stated, 'I am going to incorporate sexuality diversity into my planning meeting … if I highlight the needs of looked after children then I should do the same for other vulnerable groups.' This shows that exploring their own narratives has

challenged participants' values, frameworks and thoughts about their practice. Several of the EPs also indicated that they would like to explore the literature in the area of sexuality (through the request of a copy of the research) so that they could influence outcomes for SMYP based on evidence.

1.3 Impact of the research at the service level

Through carrying out research within my service, it is envisaged that this will increase the saliency of sexuality equality and thus impact on EP practice. Through sharing the public domain briefing at a service CPD day, this already highlights the subject, opens dialogue and challenges existing thinking and practice. As the research is framed by the social constructionist paradigm, explicitly sharing the research would certainly concur with Moore's (2006) point that social constructionism is a tool which could provide alternative understanding of marginalised groups in relation to EPs' practice. It certainly exposes a power imbalance in current realities (Willig 1999) for SMYP which should provide a starting point for action as highlighted previously by Robertson and Monsen (2001). Dissemination of the research and the practical implications highlighted regarding sexuality diversity training and policy change may also lead to service level changes in prioritising sexuality equality. This would support the work of the existing equalities group within the service.

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