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Horncastle, J (2008) 'Queer Bisexuality: Perceptions of Bisexual Existence, distinction and Challenges' In: *International Perspectives on Bisexuality* Vol. 8. Nos 1 / 2.

Bisexuality continues to be a much misunderstood and maligned sexuality. Representations in popular culture and, in particular, popular media, continue to reinforce stereotypical and pathological views of bisexuality. People who self identify as bisexual or are identified as bisexual because of their sexual behaviour are variably portrayed as 'confused', 'undecided', 'greedy', 'promiscuous', 'non-monogamous' (Udis-Kessler:1996). These constructions are rooted in and reinforced by both heteronormative and homonormative notions of sexuality. In her article, *Queer Bisexuality: Perceptions of Bisexual Existence, Distinction and Challenges*, Julia Horncastle introduces the notion of 'a kind of bisexuality' or a 'queer bisexuality', which offers the potential to challenge these dominant constructions / perceptions.

Horncastle draws on the concepts, 'Queer' and 'Sexgender', as key for thinking through queer bisexuality. While the term queer has multiple meanings as well as a diverse range of uses, Horncastle employs it in two specific manners. On the one hand, it is embodied, for it represents "a sensibility – a way of being in the world" (p.26). On the other, it can be used as a theoretical tool to articulate non-normativity. Queer, she suggests, has to be understood both ontologically and epistemologically. 'Sexgender', as a concept, is utilized to productively problematize the sex/gender distinction. It illustrates both the separateness of sex and gender, whilst simultaneously demonstrating their "mutability" (p.26) and changeability. It also contextualizes the material conditions through which we live and feel sex and gender. Horncastle argues that it is the 'in-between-ness' or interstitial location of bisexuality, something that exists between heterosexuality and homosexuality, that leads to a queering of bisexuality. Thus, her concept of queer bisexuality is not an attempt to reinforce binary constructions of sexuality or to create oppositional categories of bisexuality (bisexuality v queer bisexuality). Instead, she hopes to re-conceptualize what bisexuality is through the "logic of interstitiality" (p.28); that is, through an

analysis of the non-normative space bisexuality occupies between heterosexuality and homosexuality.

In order to go about this, Horncastle explores dominant constructions of bisexuality by referencing two examples from the popular media. The first comes from a 2005 New York Times article entitled: 'Straight, Gay or Lying? Bisexuality Revisited' (cited on p.28). Based on 'scientific research', the article claimed that bisexuality in men was non-existent and that men who stated to be so were, in fact, either gay or straight. The second example, again in 2005, comes from a queer community newspaper in Perth, Western Australia, which also draws from 'scientific research' to attack bisexuals, and more specifically, bisexual men. What connects these examples is the fact that both were based on the same 'scientific research', both provoked similar responses from pro-bisexuality activists and both were noticeable for the lack of consideration of bisexual women. She later refers to this absence as an illustration of how the existing unitary model of bisexuality demonstrates different ways of knowing about bisexual men and bisexual women. She suggests that whilst the counter-attack from pro-bisexual activists against these media representations was not surprising, "the absence of articulating a bisexual complexity that might, for example, mention queerness" (p.30) was remarkable. She proposes that bisexual politics / activism needs to move beyond a narrowly defined defensive and reactionary position to one that is proactive, portraying the complexity of bisexuality and offering the possibility of a queer bisexuality. In doing so, not only does this challenge discriminatory and pathological constructions of bisexuality, but it also expands the epistemological terrain of sexuality.

However, it is not enough to simply problematize popular constructions of bisexuality. Queer ontology (ways of being) needs to be linked to a queer epistemology (ways of knowing). Horncastle proposes both a proliferation of categories of sexuality, as well as an increased movement across and between sexual categories as a way to strike at the foundations of the inflexibility and rigidity of those categories. Ultimately, she argues for an expansion of the "existing pool of sexgender knowledge" (p.33).

If there is to be an expansion of ways of knowing about sexuality, then there also has to be an expansion in the ways of talking about sex and sexuality, what Horncastle calls: "a

concepto-lingual boom” (33). This is a distinctly queer way of communicating which is not reliant on, nor limited by heteronormative language. Articulating a notion of queer bisexuality would at least offer the possibility of opening up what is known and what is knowable about bisexuality. It offers the potential to transcend the hetero-homo binary and bisexuality’s relational position within it. That is, instead of being understood in a heteronormative or homonormative framework, it allows bisexuality to be articulated non-normatively. Nevertheless, in proposing this shift, Horncastle is mindful of the barriers that need to be overcome. Mainly, dominant models of sexuality emphasise essentialism, fixidity and dichotomy, presenting sexuality as an ‘either/or’ binary. This dominant hetero or homonormative framework continues to regulate, discipline and contain non-normative sexualities, whether it be queer bisexuality or some other form of queerness.

By queering bisexuality, a number of sexgender categories are disrupted. Firstly, it questions privileging gender as sexual object- a formula that typically defines a person’s sexuality according to their partner’s gender. Not only has this conflation of sexuality and gender / sexual object choice limited the perceptions of bisexuality and served to maintain bisexual invisibility, this unitary view has also oversimplified the complexity of sexual desire and masked the plurality of determinants in sexual object-choice. Secondly, it would undermine the notion of a unified form of bisexuality (which has limited the nature and form that bisexuality is perceived as taking), opening up the space for a multiplicity and heterogeneity of experiences. Lastly, it critiques and challenges the taboo of polyamory or nonmonogamy. For Horncastle, polyamory differs from nonmonogamy in that where the latter represents a challenge to monogamy, the former “critiques monogamy (in terms of practice and ideology) and nonmonogamy (the term)” (p.45). By suggesting ways in which queer bisexuality troubles sexgender categories, she clearly and articulately makes the case for the necessity to link queer ontology and epistemology and, perhaps, this is the greatest strength of this piece. By criss-crossing sexgender categories, Horncastle not only queers the category of bisexuality, she also makes the unfamiliar familiar.

There are people the world over leading queer lives or, in Horncastle’s words, “queer sex gender self-knowledge exists” (p.46). The challenge lies in how this gets articulated and disseminated. What lies ahead is confronting how notions of queer bisexuality can be expressed



and experienced in ways that expand the sexgender knowledge pool, rather than being (mis)interpreted as yet another fixed category of sexuality within the existing hetero / homo normative framework. While the parameters of this article, arguably, preclude a detailed analysis of the ways in which queer communication can actually lead to an expansion of sexgender knowledge, it does raise important, thought-provoking questions about the relationship between the ontology and epistemology of queer bisexuality.

References

- Udis-Kessler, A (1996) 'Challenging the Stereotypes.' In: Rose, S, Stevens, C et al (eds) *Bisexual Horizons Politics, Histories, Lives*. London, Lawrence & Wishart Limited.
- Carey, B. (2005) Straight, gay or lying? Bisexuality revisited. *New York Times*, 5 July 2005 (Late Edition (east Coast)), p. F.1.