

# Getting to know you? Reflections on Researching LGBT Ageing

Dr Andrew King  
University of Surrey

# LGBT Ageing Research

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- ▶ Gaining momentum
- ▶ Reflecting on three projects
- ▶ Methodological futures



# LGBT Ageing Research – gaining momentum

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- ▶ ‘Queer Absence’ (Cronin, 2004)
- ▶ Multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary knowledge production
  - ▶ Gerontology, Sociology, Social Work, Health and Social Care, Psychology
- ▶ Activists, Advocates, Charities



OPENING DOORS  
LONDON



# Knowledge production and results

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- ▶ Mostly qualitative or small scale surveys
- ▶ Some secondary analysis/reviews
- ▶ Generally pulls out key themes, including:
  - ▶ Older LGBT people more isolated and fearful about getting older
  - ▶ To some extent, strong friendship networks
  - ▶ Actual or perceived prejudice from service providers
  - ▶ Intersection of multiples forms of inequality/oppression
    - ▶ Intra-group differences!
  - ▶ Significant knowledge gaps



# Three projects: methodological issues and reflections

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- ▶ Older LGBT Matters
- ▶ Putting Policy into Practice
- ▶ Minding the knowledge gaps



# Older LGBT Matters

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- ▶ **Small qualitative scoping study for LGA**
  - ▶ 2008-2009
  - ▶ Interviews and focus groups
  
- ▶ **Drivers for research**
  - ▶ LGA pro-active in LGBT issues
  - ▶ Equality and Diversity monitoring/equality strands
  - ▶ Sexuality and Gender Equality Schemes
  
- ▶ **Outputs: Report for LGA with recommendations**



# Concerns about older LGBT Matters

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- ▶ A ‘sociological queasiness’
- ▶ Production of ‘older LGBT’ as a collection of categories with certain attributes
- ▶ Lessons from Queer Theory and micro-sociology (ethnomethodology and conversation analysis)
  - ▶ The contextually specific production of intersecting identifications, drawing upon but transforming discourses (knowledge) related to sexuality, age and gender, amongst others
  - ▶ ‘culture in interaction’
    - ▶ Focus on what people are doing in the inter-action



# Queer(y)ing categories in research, policy and practice

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- ▶ Categories (of identification) are not neutral (carry knowledge)
- ▶ They have attributes/activities 'attached' to them, which reproduce and transform taken-for-granted understandings (knowledge)
- ▶ People use categories in 'skilful' ways, making their own meanings, but within limits
- ▶ Need to be mindful of this categorisation work
  - King A and Cronin A. (2010) Queer Methods and Queer Practices: Re-examining the identities of older lesbian, gay, bisexual (OLGB) adults. In: Browne K and Nash C (eds) *Queer Methods and Methodologies*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 85-96.
  - King A. (forthcoming) Queer Categories: Queer(y)ing the identification of 'older lesbian, gay and/or bisexual (LGB) adults' and its implications for organisational research, policy and practice. *Gender, Work and Organization*.



# Categorisation work

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Int: “We all use different terms to describe our sexuality so it would be helpful for me if you could tell me how you describe yourself”

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



## Categorisation work

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



## Categorisation work

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Int: “What about service provision for older people do you think?”

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

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# Implications / reflections

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- ▶ Knowledge production (in research, policy and practice) uses categories but doesn't always show/enable complexity or active production
  - ▶ Fitting into place
- ▶ 'Older LGBT' is regulatory collection
  - ▶ Comes with assumptions and inclusions/exclusions
  - ▶ Are we, inadvertently, excluding some older lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans lives and ignoring difference, diversity, intersectionality?
  - ▶ How can we ensure diversity and complexity of experiences/voices are heard?
  - ▶ Who 'counts' and 'how'?

The image shows a portion of a registration form. It includes fields for personal details and a section for sexual orientation with radio button options.

2 Title	3 First Name	4 Middle Name	5 Surname
6 Known as	7 Sex		8 Date of Birth (dd-mm-yy)
	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>		
9 *Sexual Orientation			
01 Heterosexual <input type="checkbox"/>	02 Gay Man <input type="checkbox"/>	03 Gay Woman/Lesbian <input type="checkbox"/>	
04 Bisexual <input type="checkbox"/>	06 Prefer not to say <input type="checkbox"/>	05 Other <input type="checkbox"/>	

# Knowledge exchange, impact and austerity

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## ▶ Putting Policy into Practice

- ▶ ESRC Knowledge Exchange Project
- ▶ 2010-2011
- ▶ Developed methodology 'Knowledge exchange action research' (KEAR)
- ▶ Using research findings (from older LGBT Matters and existing studies) to create impacts on policy and service practice with older LGBT service users in mind
  - King A. (2013) *Prepare for Impact? Reflecting on Knowledge Exchange Work to Improve Services for Older LGBT People in Times of Austerity*, in *Social Policy and Society* (onlinefirst)
  - King A. (2013) *Knowledge Exchange Action Research: Creating Impact with Social Science Research*. SAGE Research Methods Cases. SAGE Publications, Ltd, London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Ltd.



# KEAR: 'Putting Policy into Practice'

## Stage One

- Awareness raising conference and workshop (75)
- Impact measured by questionnaires

## Stage Two (a)

- Development and use of SAFE 'toolkit' (24)
- Workshop and action points

## Stage Two (b)

- Regrouping to discuss experiences
- Impact measured by questionnaires

## Stage Three

- Final end of project conference/workshop (101)
- Impact questionnaires
- 6 month follow up survey

# Knowledge production and impact

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- ▶ Service providers knowledge about LGBT issues
- ▶ Development and use of 'equality toolkit' (SAFE framework) and action points
- ▶ Social networks
- ▶ Service Provider Reflections:
  - ▶ "I'm being honest, I'd never thought about the possibility that someone in my care might be LGB or T"
- ▶ Action points included:
  - ▶ Holding staff meetings about older LGBT issues, using Age UK older LGBT health and social care checklist, awareness raising session by ODL, training session for staff, being a 'champion'



# Prepare for Impact?

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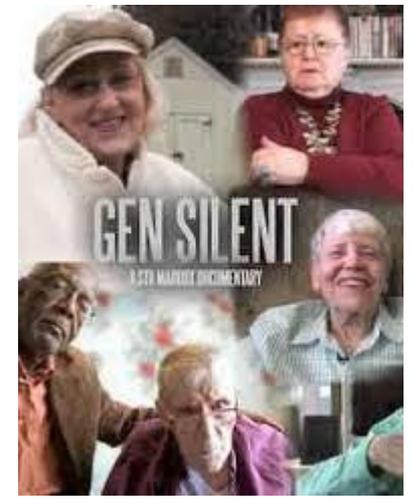
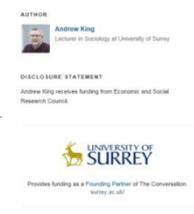
- ▶ Effects of austerity on project objectives
  - ▶ Willing but unable to attend
  - ▶ Magnification of structural issues
  - ▶ Restructuring of services
  - ▶ Where does change happen?
  - ▶ Experiential/identity labour
    - ▶ Being 'the champion'
- ▶ Evidence emerging from service providers and studies e.g. NatCen (2013) report
- ▶ Older LGBT people at a range of intersections that austerity will exacerbate e.g. 'cuts' to health, housing, care, supports etc





# Methodological futures

- ▶ **LGBT ageing research still developing/emerging**
  - ▶ Range of different methods not yet fully utilised
    - ▶ Social simulation, media analysis, institutional ethnographies, creative/active, visual, others?
- ▶ **Methodology isn't just about sampling, research design, analysis etc**
  - ▶ How knowledge is produced/used
- ▶ **Importance of challenging existing knowledge about LGBT ageing**



# Thank you! Further info

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- ▶ [andrew.king@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.king@surrey.ac.uk)
- ▶ [http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sociology/people/king\\_andrew/](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/sociology/people/king_andrew/)
- ▶ @andrewdhking

**Seminar Six: Wednesday 26th November 2014.**

**New Directions in Health, Housing and Social Care: What do older  
LGBT people want?**

Rik Medlik Building, University of Surrey, Guildford.

Programme:

9.45 - 10.30 Registration and refreshments

10.30 - 10.45 Welcome and introductions

10.45 - 11.30 **Dr Kathryn Almack**

University of Nottingham

"I didn't come out to go back in the closet": Ageing and  
Care towards the End of Life for older LGBT People.

11.30 - 12.15 **Dr Paul Willis**

Swansea University

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*"There could be someone in here that's gay..."  
Accounting for older LGB people in the provision of  
residential care services in Wales*