

Critical social psychology and mainstream approach sociology essay



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In order to discuss the ways in which critical social psychology views the discipline differently to the mainstream approach, it is first necessary to define the terms “critical social psychology” and “mainstream approach”, what they each look for and the limitations of both. This will then be followed by a discussion of how the critical approaches view lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) research. The essay will then conclude by summarising the essay and how both approaches can work together to bring a varied and whole view of social psychology.

According to Allport (1985) social psychology is interested in how the social environment and group interactions affect people's attitudes and behaviours. The discipline uses scientific methods to understand and explain social phenomena. There are two approaches associated with social psychology, the mainstream and the critical approach. Rogers (2011) claims the mainstream approach is preoccupied with looking for explanations in what makes people, cultures and social groups different from each other, while also attempting to discover 'laws' that establish how and why people behave in the way they do, this can then be generalised to the whole population. She states this approach is comparable to the natural sciences, as they use similar experimental methodologies. They use a hypothetico-deductive method which makes decisions by changing one variable and testing a hypothesis. They are also similar as they both state there is one true knowledge, both are also objective, neutral and value free. The critical psychology approach largely evolved from mainstream challenges. Gough & McFadden (2001) state that critical psychology challenges social institutions and practices who contribute to forms of inequality and oppression, it

emerged and is constructed from other theories such as feminism, Marxism and the social constructionist theory. Rogers (2011) argues that the experimental method is not the only way to gain knowledge, in contrast to the mainstream approach she claims that there are no such things as 'universal laws of human nature' and that human nature varies from time, place and sociocultural positioning. The critical approach is ideologically positioned in that there is no one truth. One of the factors that brought about this approach is that the mainstream has an elitist ideological position where it focuses mainly on western white middle class participants, it claims findings are universal, however the participants are only in the minority of the population; this then exploits and oppresses less powerful social and cultural groups. Critical psychology is committed to a social justice ideology that attempts to gain knowledge from all social groups and questions the objective claims of the mainstream approach.

Mercer & Clayton (2012) state the mainstream approach uses quantitative methods when carrying out research, which produces objective knowledge, facts and statistics irrespective of politics and values; it is often associated with nomothetic approaches where findings can be applied universally.

Whereas the critical approach uses qualitative methods, in which they seek better understanding and are not objective. It concentrates more on the interrelationship of the individual and social context. It looks to produce idiographic explications, in which it recognises broader social structures and searches to unfold the meanings of particular situations. Gough and McFadden (2001) suggest the best way to study social psychology is for the researcher to situate themselves within society and develop a critical

attitude. Hepburn (2003: 1) defines critical social psychology as being critical of society, the institutions and practices within it, It is also critical of psychology itself. It questions the assumptions made, its practices and its broader influences.

Sapsford & Dallos (1996: 198) state that the mainstream “ scientific” approach has been widely used throughout history, suggesting how we should deal with the major social problems at that time. For example Milgram’s (1961) electric shock study was motivated by world war two, it looked into the conditions in which people will obey and torture others.

Critical psychology argues that there is no one true knowledge; there can be multiple views on reality, although these are dependent on time and culture. Feri et al (2003) British longitudinal study on attitudes to relationships used participants born in 1946, 1958 and 1970, when followed up in 2000 all had very different attitudes and behaviour towards relationships. Time and cultural differences had a big impact, such as those born in 1946 were mostly married by age 31 whereas it was more common for those born in 1970 to be cohabiting and often on their second relationship by age 31. However all the participants were from the UK and the results of those not married or cohabiting could of been influenced by the divorce laws that came in to place.

Critical psychologists have adopted the framework of social constructionist’s. Willig (2001: 7) defines social constructionist research as identifying the variety of ways of constructing social reality, exploring the conditions of their use and to locate their consequences for human experience and social

practice. Basically how people experience and perceive the world that they live in and how it effects the way in which we behave. Mercer and Clayton (2012) claim research starts at the heart which is the society not the individual. Meanings and practices which are socially and culturally organised impact human nature and behaviour, these meanings are constructed and re-constructed through the use of language which is of central importance in this perspective as researchers listen to how people explain their world.

A great deal of social influence research, such as conformity and obedience were based on the perception of the individual within society, however social influence should be viewed as social practices in which people engage in as well as the interactions between people. Asch's (1951) line study is taught in institutions as part of social influence, however Mercer and Clayton's (2012) claim certain points to consider are how was the 'social' represented in these experiments, there were only small samples of people in each trial, and the actual participants within the small group had never met before therefore no relationships were established, this is not a true representation of society. The findings showed that the participant conformed to the others, however this could have just been the effect of that situation and they probably would have interacted more and not conformed if they all knew one another. Also if you look deeper into the results the 33% conformity rate vs. 5% conformed on each trial, this means that 95% were not conforming however the way the researcher interpreted and presented the data was biased as it showed a higher conformity rate than what was actually true.

Kitzinger (1997) states the majority of psychological research regarded homosexuality as a pathological condition; Kitzinger observed a shift in the 1970s towards the formation of a lesbian and gay psychology which emerged as a protest against heterosexist views. This shift confronts the perception of homosexuality as pathology. It investigates the reasons behind the prejudice and discrimination, while attempting to generate effective changes in the world.

Morin (1977) reviewed studies on lesbians and gays; he found 70% of the studies focused on issues such as whether homosexuals were mentally ill, the causes of homosexuality and the ways in which it could be identified. He found 82% compared homosexuals against heterosexuals, which has been objected to strongly as it assumes that gays and lesbians have certain characteristics such as personality and attitudes which differentiate them from heterosexuals. Overall, homosexuality was seen as an illness that needed to be cured.

Burr (1995) quotes "our ways of understanding the world come not from objective reality but from other people, past and present. We are born into a world where the conceptual frameworks and categories used by people in our culture already exist."

Hooker's (1957) paper "The Adjustment of the Male Overt Homosexual" in which self-identified homosexuals and heterosexuals groups participated in several psychological tests, experts then had to identify the homosexuals. Results found there was no detectable difference in terms of mental adjustment. It was of great critical importance that she established that

homosexuality is not a mental disorder, as it shows homosexuality is not developmentally inferior to heterosexualism. Hooker's work influenced further quantitative measures to assess human personality such as Eysenk Personality Inventory, Catell16 PF, and the MMPI.

Kitzinger & Coyle (2002: 2) define lesbian and gay psychology as “ psychology which is explicit about its relevance to lesbians and gay men, which does not assume homosexual pathology and which aims to counter prejudice and discrimination against people who are not conventionally heterosexual and to create a better world for lesbians and gay men. As such, lesbian and gay psychology is both a scholarly scientific enterprise and, equally, a clearly policy-oriented, practical, real world undertaking.”

Clarke, Ellis, Peel & Riggs (2010) define LGBTQ as “...a branch of psychology concerned with the lives and experiences of LGBTQ people. Although LGBTQ psychology is concerned with sexuality, it has a much broader focus, examining many different aspects of the lives of LGBTQ people including prejudice and discrimination, parenting and families, and coming out and identity development.”

Stein (2004) claims that the stonewall riots were a significant point in gay and lesbian history. At the stonewall inn in New York City during the early hours of 28th June 1969 members of the gay community participated in a series of spontaneous, violent demonstrations against a police raid. After the Stonewall riots, gay rights organizations were founded across the U. S. and the world. The first Gay Pride marches took place in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago on June 28, 1970 to commemorate the anniversary of the riots.

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Gergen's (1973) argues that the driving forces of human behaviour changes over time. He also contended that social psychological theories tend to be a product of historical and cultural circumstances. Additionally he states 'truth' and the ability to generalise becomes misguided if the information produced by social psychology only makes sense within specific contexts, for example findings in western culture.

Boehmer (2002) argues that public health research has ignored LGBTQ populations as they are underrepresented as research subjects. After looking at the articles on the MEDLINE database only 0.1% focused on LGBTQ individuals over the past 20 years, the majority of these articles was based on LGBTQ participants with sexually transmitted diseases such as 52% on the context of HIV or AIDS.

Homophobic bullying is regularly used to demoralize gay and lesbian parents. Clarke, Kitzinger & Potter (2004) analysed 11 documentaries and 11 semi-structured interviews with gay and lesbian parents by using discourse analysis. They concluded that one possibility in reporting no bullying or minimise the effects of bullying is plainly because they are unaware of the bullying their children face. It could be argued that parents refuse acknowledgement of the reality of their oppression. Additionally they found gay and lesbian parents face a dilemma of stake and accountability. By taking wider discourse and analysing the talk of gay and lesbian parents it is possible to see the dilemma they face. If the parents acknowledge the bullying and report it, it could then be used to undermine them, however if they refuse to be aware of the bullying then this can also be used against them by portraying them as an unfit self interested parent, this is <https://assignbuster.com/critical-social-psychology-and-mainstream-approach-sociology-essay/>

problematic as homosexual parenting is profoundly judged by the larger society than for heterosexual parents.

Fish (1999) claims that there are difficulties in finding lesbian and gay participants. Dunne (1997) state many participants are recruited through personal contacts or from 'friendship pyramiding'. However this sampling method is restricted as it only provides access to a small discrete network of participants. It is also problematic as it tends to exclude less advantaged homosexuals. Kitzinger (1987) has found lesbians and gays only agree to be participants because the interview was also a homosexual.

Gay marriage has been a controversial issue within society. Baunach (2011) examined the attitude trends towards gay marriage, she concludes that attitudes have significantly liberalised over time; in 1988 71% were opposed to gay marriage compared to only 52% opposing in 2006. Even though there are more people supporting gay marriage findings from a Gallop poll found in 2004 64% of Americans did not support equal marriage rights for lesbians and gays. (Gallup Poll News Service, 2007). Baunach (2011) suggests this change could be down to individuals' adapting their attitudes over time, and from later cohorts replacing earlier ones. These findings were replicated across various subgroups of the U. S. public.

Firebaugh (1989) suggests as birth cohorts replace older cohorts social attitudes change slowly overtime. These long term ideological changes are due to various long term social and cultural developments. Individuals throughout their lives are exposed to various socialising experiences and different people and events that may impact on their opinions, those who

have greater contact with lesbians and gays increases identification and therefore it weakens the prejudice against them.

According to research Herek (2000) & Olson, Cadge, and Harrison (2006) claim that younger individuals, females, those who live in cities and the more educated are more accommodating of homosexuality and gay marriage. On the other hand it was found that those less supportive of homosexuality are African Americans, southerners and republicans. However most research has come from the general social survey (Davis, Smith, and Marsden, 2008) which is a national probability sample of non-institutionalized English speaking adults, where the sample sizes varied from year to year. Therefore this method of collecting data cannot be used to generalise to the whole population as it excludes non English speaking participants and only targets adults leaving out adolescent opinions. Although contrary to the small sample size, the data provided is from the earliest national level sample on the subject matter.

Lewis (2003) states that blacks are more homophobic than whites, results from 31 national surveys found even when educational and religious differences are controlled blacks are still more disapproving of homosexuality. Blacks are 11% more likely to express disapproval of homosexual relations as "always wrong" and that god punishment will be in the form of Aids. Therefore Cohen (1999) claims that homosexual African Americans are under more pressure to hide their sexuality, they engage in more risky sexual behaviour and tend to have lower self esteem. Lewis (2003) found that support for homosexuals and gay rights are decreased by attending religious services on a weekly basis. However it was found by <https://assignbuster.com/critical-social-psychology-and-mainstream-approach-sociology-essay/>

Ellison and Musick (1993) that education and more interactions with lesbians and gays leads to greater acceptance.

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Wilson et al (2011) recruited self identified heterosexual men aged 18-30 years old from a southern eastern United States city. They found a combination of sexual prejudice and antigay anger increased the effect of anti-femininity on aggression. Franklin (2000) notes that cultural values related to sexual prejudice can manifest into aggressions against homosexuals.

Effects of Traditional Gender Role Norms and Religious Fundamentalism on Self-identified Heterosexual Men's Attitudes, Anger, and Aggression Toward Gay Men and Lesbians

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Participants completed a questionnaire battery self-administered on a computer via MediaLab, 2000 (Empirisoft Research Software, Philadelphia).

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For each questionnaire, instructions and items were presented sequentially on the computer screen. Measures were administered in a fixed order as presented below.

complete computer-administered measures of adherence to traditional male gender norms (i. e., status, toughness, antifemininity), religious fundamentalism, sexual prejudice, and frequency of aggression toward gay men and lesbians.

Additionally, participants completed a structured interview designed to assess anger in response to a vignette depicting a male-male intimate relationship (i. e., partners saying “ I love you,” holding hands, kissing).

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These data provide multivariate evidence from a nonprobability, community-based sample that extreme internalization of dominant cultural values can set the stage for violence toward marginalized groups. Implications for intervention programming and future research are reviewed.

Women were excluded because, relative to men, they report lower levels of sexual prejudice, and men are more likely to engage in aggression toward gay men and lesbians (Baker & Fishbein, 1998; Lim, 2002; Polimeni et al., 2000; Whitley & Kite, 1995). In addition, men between the ages of 18 and 30 were recruited because perpetrators of hate crimes toward gay men and lesbians are typically men in their late teens and early to mid-20s (Harry, 1990; NCAVP, 2009). Because the metropolitan catchment area is comprised of a high African American population (i. e., 57% per 2006 Census estimate),

we sought to obtain a sample with approximately equal representation of White and African American men.

Participants completed a questionnaire battery self-administered on a computer via MediaLab, 2000 (Empirisoft Research Software, Philadelphia). For each questionnaire, instructions and items were presented sequentially on the computer screen.

Assessment of heterosexual men's state affect toward gay men typically involves the presentation of video clips or photographs that depict same-sex intimacy, followed by the administration of a self-report measure of state affect. Given that stimuli used in past research are sexually explicit, concerns about the ecological validity of such stimuli have been raised for two reasons (Hudepohl, Parrott, & Zeichner, 2010). First, heterosexual men are rarely exposed to sexually explicit male-male interactions (e. g., nudity, male-male oral or anal sex). Second, participants are not asked to assume a first person point of view in the situations depicted in these videos/photos (e. g., imagine themselves in the situation rather than passively watching the situation presented on a computer screen). The present study aimed to rectify these limitations by (a) using a vignette that depicted a public situation that could feasibly be experienced by a heterosexual man in real life, and (b) asking participants to imagine that they were in that situation.

Second, we assessed participants' expectation of becoming angry rather than their actual experience of anger. Although this limitation may be addressed by manipulating anger in laboratory-based studies, such studies

are limited in their ability to examine mediational effects of state variables as examined in the present study (Lindsay & Anderson, 2000).

related note, this assessment approach was also limited because participants were asked to provide verbal responses of anger directly to a male researcher. Indeed, this assessment method might have elicited self-presentation biases, such that some men attempted to reaffirm their masculine identity in their presentation to the male interviewer by endorsing stereotypically masculine attributes (e. g., heightened anger in response to male-male intimacy). Alternatively, self-presentation biases may have been primed because measures of negative attitudes and aggressive behaviors toward gay men and lesbians were administered prior to participants' verbal self-report of anger. Third, while recruitment of a nonprobability community-based sample of men is a strength of this study, research with probability samples will be a decisive step forward in establishing the generalizability of laboratory and field studies to the rest of the male population. For example, given that the mean annual income of the sample was approximately \$27,000 and participants were all residents of a large, southeastern city of the United States, caution must be taken when attempting to generalize these results to individuals of different socioeconomic status living in different regions of the United States.

Fourth, it must be emphasized that we assessed sexual prejudice and aggression toward both gay men and lesbians, yet assessed anger only in response to gay men. Anger in response to lesbians was not assessed in order to avoid emotional responses related to heterosexual men's

eroticization of lesbians (Louderback & Whitley, 1997). Because of this
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methodological limitation, it is difficult to conclude from these data that anger invoked by lesbians would similarly explain aggression toward lesbians.

It should be noted that our sample was more racially diverse than the samples used to develop and validate the measures used in our analyses. As such, it is not entirely clear whether the measures we used were adequate for this diverse sample, because participants from different cultural groups may interpret items differently. Unfortunately, this is a limitation in many studies that are able to recruit racially and ethnically diverse samples. Related to this limitation, the variability of cultural experiences within such groups makes it difficult to detect cultural specific effects by simply examining racial and ethnic differences among participants. Clearly, future research that clarifies how cultural factors may moderate the present findings would advance this literature.

Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of examining critical cultural factors that influence aggression toward gay men and lesbians.

It has been asserted that aggression perpetrated toward gay men and lesbians reflects “ extreme manifestations of dominant cultural values” (Franklin, 2000, p. 340). Indeed, prominent theorists have argued that cultural ideologies and institutions (e. g., norms about gender roles, religion, laws, language) provide the basis for individuals’ negative beliefs and enactment of these beliefs toward gay men and lesbians (Herek, 1987, 2000, 2007; Kimmel, 1997).

numerous survey-based studies have demonstrated a positive association between sexual prejudice and both anger and aggression toward gay men and lesbians (Franklin, 2000; Parrott & Peterson, 2008; Patel, Long, McCammon, & Wuensch, 1995; Roderick, McCammon, Long, & Allred, 1998). Consistent with this research, experimental studies have demonstrated that male sexual prejudice is positively associated with increased anger in response to male homosexuality and aggression toward gay, relative to heterosexual, men (Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001; Parrott, 2009; Parrott & Zeichner, 2005; Parrott, Zeichner, & Hoover, 2006).

Numerous scholars (Brannon, 1976; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Herek, 1987; Kimmel, 1997; Kite, 2001; Pleck, 1981) agree that beliefs about the male gender role are culturally constructed from birth. Men learn from prevailing societal norms what they are expected to be (e. g., dominant, tough, heterosexual) as well as what they are not expected to be (e. g., submissive, weak, homosexual). Similar to male gender role beliefs, sexual prejudice is also culturally constructed (Franklin, 1998; Herek, 1990, 2004, 2007; Nielsen, 1990; Pharr, 1988). However, sexual prejudice emerges at the individual level via the internalization of sexual stigma during masculine identity development. Additionally, sexual prejudice functions to reinforce one's status as a heterosexual male (Herek, 2000)

Conclusion

-Can individual and social be separated?

what is the critical approach actually questioning in relation to the

mainstream approach and why?

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may have convinced some people who used to disapprove of gay marriage in 1988 to approve of it by 2006

Critical psychologist would agree with this as it is getting involved in “society” -Most research in LGBTQ psychology has relied on primarily white, middle class lesbian and gay men

-Located in western countries such as Britain and USA

-Knowledge largely constructed in a framework of ‘white middle-classness’