

Professionally gay: the workforce of gay male educators.



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Introduction

After 17 years of highly effective gay community intervention and response to the HIV epidemic in Australia, there is a large gay male workforce of educators whose job it is to work with gay and other homosexually active men in education programs. These men work *as* gay men, *for* gay men.

This gay male workforce and the job it does is not only large and complex, it is also effective. Over 17 years it has been pivotal to the development and execution of community sector education programs. These programs have increased the health literacy of gay men and helped contain the spread of HIV and decrease rates of sero-conversion among gay male populations throughout Australia (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1998). Success and failure have been born of passion and a zealous commitment to a gay male response to what has largely been, in Australia, a gay male epidemic.

The impact of these gay men on educational work in the HIV community sector has been great, in fact, essential to its effective development and operation. The impact of their work on themselves and their lives has also been significant.

The HIV epidemic in Australia and the culture of gay men has changed significantly in the last five years. Accordingly there has been a great shift in the role, purpose and centrality of the community sector's work in HIV for gay men. This shift is still taking place. At its centre are changes to educational work, and central to this work are the gay men who do the educating, and who have, over the years, factored their gayness into HIV education.

This paper attempts to provide a stimulant to discussion and a set of ideas and arguments for the necessity of the *professionally gay*.

This paper draws on several years of research concerned with gay men's HIV education and gay community responses to the HIV epidemic in Australia (Dowsett et al 1996a; Bollen et al 1998).

These projects include larger-scale analyses of community formation and operation (McInnes et al 2000) and several projects focussed on day-to-day professional pedagogical work in the community sector (McInnes et al 2000; and in press). The paper also uses material gathered from discussions with gay educators during professional development activities and consultations.

Each section of this paper will finish with a set of key questions which emerge from the discussion. These will be drawn together in generating recommendations at the close of the paper.

What's at stake?

In this discussion paper, I attempt to provoke thought and discussion about the role of the personal and lived experience of gay men who develop and run educational programs for gay men in community based organisations. These men are educators, outreach workers, counsellors and educational managers in community-based organisations. Most of these organisations consider themselves to be and actively promote themselves as 'gay' community organisations. The gay educators who work in these organisations provide a vital articulation to gay communities for their organisations and their gayness is one of the most vital ingredients of the educational programs they run.

The role of gay men educating gay men is described as the involvement of affected communities in health promotion or as the value of having peers involved and central to the education of peers. As explained in the 1998 national review of gay men's HIV education (Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services 1998: 67-68):

The strength of the Australian response to HIV/AIDS has been attributed to the central involvement of affected groups in planning, designing and implementing health promotion activities targeted at them.

Within Australia this has meant that many of the educators working with gay men tend to be

gay-identified themselves. This approach has been reinforced by health promotion theory that emphasises the importance of genuine participation and partnership by affected communities in developing health promotion activities. However the involvement of 'peers' in education has increasingly led to a debate about the need to professionalise the HIV/AIDS workforce. This debate about professionalisation of the workforce is not isolated to the HIV/AIDS field but has also been occurring in the broader health promotion field.

There is a growing recognition that being a peer, while still essential, is in itself no longer enough. Professionalisation of the work is required. This will mean ensuring educators have the knowledge and skills required for the task. The increasing complexity of the task and increasing demand for better performance mean that professionalisation of the work is a high priority.

The role of gay men as gay educators needs to be considered in ways that do more than just augment peerness by professionalising the work and the workforce. The personal gayness of the men who educate gay men is an intricate set of things which are integrated into work practices. This integration happens not simply by the presence of gay men in work contexts, nor by their use of professional modes of educating, but through a range of specific and often idiosyncratic activities.

A complex integration

This makes gayness in gay education more than peerness. It makes gayness an educational component and resource. But it is not just a content or a set of knowledges. Gayness is comprised of ways of being in the world and understanding the world. It is this complex of things that is used in making program decisions, in deciding which content to offer and in making choices about how to interact. It is also this complex of things that is involved in how you respond to a story of coming-out, or a story of homophobic abuse or violence. It is also this complex of things that informs how an educator reacts to tales of sex or how they choose to tell their own tales of sex, or even to respond to or tell stories of sero-conversion. Gay or gayness as used in education figures as experience, 'knowledge', role modelling, a sense of what is relevant, an understanding of aesthetics, a sense of shared processes such as coming-out and relationships, and an empathy with politics and political issues.

The national review's discussion of gayness, whilst raising the issue of professionalism and highlighting the value of gay identity, focuses on the work or workforce and not on the worker and their professional use of their gay identity. These considerations

also position gayness as something that can be contained by or off-set by a process of professionalisation. I would want to ask, is the use of one's sexuality as knowledge, skill and experience a teachable and professionalisable skill in itself, rather than one that might be off-set by a process of professionalisation?

A changing context

At the outset of the HIV epidemic in Australia and the community's response to it, the gayness of the prevention focus and funding arrangements was essential. The epidemiological spread of the virus (within groups of inner-urban gay men, particularly in Sydney), the most common paths of infection (anal sex) and the political fight that was necessary to resist conservative reactions (AIDS-as-gay-plague) all made a 'gaying' of the epidemic essential and expedient. This was true not just in political terms, but true also in terms of effective educational targeting and in the deployment of educational techniques (Altman 1986; Ballard 1988; Dowsett 1988).

In recent years, the changes in many of these dimensions of the epidemic in Australia have been significant. In a period that has been described as Post-AIDS (Dowsett and McInnes 1996a and b; Dowsett et al 1998; McInnes et al 1998, 1999), there has been an easing of the sense of crisis, an easing of pressure in terms of rates of sero-conversion, and shifts in the salience and relevance of HIV/AIDS in gay men's lives. This has all meant that HIV is generally less central to gay men's lives. It could also be argued, that the changing context and cultural significance of the HIV epidemic for gay men has seen a lessening of the impact of gay on HIV. In other words, given that HIV is now less a part of being and living as gay and given that gay is now about a whole range of other things (lifestyle, consumerism, party culture etc.), the social and political determination that gay, gay politics and gay community provided the HIV epidemic in Australia has shifted.

What is at stake in all of this is the assumption that certain styles and methods of education are most appropriate and that the educational role of gay men is essential. Educational styles and program design preferences, and arguments about these have shifted. Ultimately, as the climate changes, the importance of HIV in gay men's lives and the stability of types of gayness within education have meant that the program logic that links gay men, HIV risk and the need for specific, attuned education is getting faulty.

Important considerations

An analysis of how being gay is used as a skill, as capacity or as knowledge is necessary. This includes:

- The professional use of gay identity in educational work;
- The personal benefits and costs of being a gay professional;
- The relationship between gayness (of various kinds) and the processes and practices of education in community sector organisations.

Why?

The community sector's work is politically important. The politics of self determination in relation to health education extend and are valuable beyond HIV. However, without adequate consideration of the impact, value and costs of professional gayness, and the implications of such a confluence to those professionally gay, it will be increasingly difficult to argue against the mainstreaming of educational work.

The workforce which has developed over the period of the epidemic and which continues to develop is a strong and valuable one. However, its very uniqueness and specificity renders it at risk to arguments and moves toward generic professionalism. A shift to increased professionalism of these men which does not include a professionally framed account of (or a professionalising of) their gayness will have a reflexive impact on the sector's vitality. The source of an essential educational knowledge and skill cannot be neglected.

If educational effectiveness relies on gayness being a part of an educator's professional qualities, skills, and capacity, then this must be understood, utilised, supported and monitored for effective educational delivery.

If attention is not paid to gayness as an aspect of professional educational work, the impact will be felt by educators, by organisations and by the sector. Ultimately, the impact will be seen in the diminished effectiveness of the work done by those who are *professionally gay*.

Key questions

The following are key questions which emerge from the discussion so far.

Is it too hard to consider gayness as a professional capacity?

What is at stake in such considerations?

How and in what ways is the educational work done by these men affected by the fact that they are gay?

What are the ways in which gayness as a part of an educator's professional qualities, skills, and capacity, can be understood, utilised, supported and monitored?

What does it mean to be professionally gay?

I want to consider the way gayness can be understood as a element of professional educational work. I will do this by considering what 'gay' might mean and then by considering how this relates to ideas of professionalism, thinking about the meanings and implications of being a 'professional'.

What does 'Gay' mean and what does it account for?

Gay accounts for sexual identity and sexual practice. Fucking men or wanting to fuck men is covered by the term 'gay'. But we all know being gay means more than this. What exactly does identifying as gay or being designated gay account for? Doubtless this is different for all of us, but there are elements to gayness which are consistent across our experience, or may form part of a shared understanding of what gayness is.

In specific terms, gay accounts for the experience of sexual processes. Beyond fucking, there are experiences of marginality and oppression, and the detailed politics of 'living gay'. This is especially consistent around coming-out and the idea of the closet. These experiences of marginality, active oppression and vilification and of processes like coming-out, generate a sense of being outside of the mainstream or of straight society, but also of belonging to this outside, as a kind of inside of its own.

In these political experiences and at various levels, gay men share and work with ideas of liberation, that is, ideas of how freedom or liberation is achieved in the process of coming-out and in the process of coming *into* gay, *into* gay culture, gay life, gay community. For some gay men, the experience

of coming into gayness generates another sense of exclusion — a feeling of discontent with what gay culture or community may offer, or a sense of outsider-ness from what is expected or assumed of someone who identifies as gay.

Rather than work with an idea of a single 'outside' to which gay men and other queers belong, Elspeth Probyn (1996), suggests that there are many outside belongings. The experience of outsiderhood, while similar for lots of gay men, is different in terms of how gay men might belong to these outsides. Belonging is a process, produced through a series of things that one might do, feel, think and say.

Beyond sex and politics, gay also describes the contemporary experience of being positioned as a market group, as a strong political lobby force and as something which is 'tolerated' as a part of the diversity of contemporary culture, at least in large cities in Australia.

Along with the sexual culture of gay men, and the relations of gayness to mainstream culture, there is the experience of gay as a kind of sociality. Being in a variety of social relations *with* other gay men, or being in social relations *as* a gay man, is central to many men's experience of their gayness. This sociality, these social relations, not only contribute to gay experience, they also help determine its limits, and the values that operate as part of men's gay lives (McInnes et al 2000; McInnes 1997; Edwards 1994; Simpson 1996).

I have been using the term 'gayness', rather than gay or gay identity. I use this term to evoke a sense of the qualities of both *being* gay, that is, identifying as gay, and of *doing* gay, experiencing life as a gay man and being involved in an ongoing practice of living gay in various ways, and across a range of life contexts.¹ Gayness, then, suggests the process perspective of active belonging(s) described above (Bollen et al 1998; Bollen 2000).

So gayness is about being and doing. A gay educator or a gay man is gay, that is, they identify and explicitly acknowledge that their sexual orientation is something we call, in our culture, gay. But being gay does not account for the specifics of the ways in which gayness is lived and experienced, nor does it account for the differences between gay experiences or lives, that is, the 'doings' of gay. It is these experiences and the differences between them that are drawn into and used in educational work in the HIV community sector.

Gayness can be considered as *embodied* sexuality. What I mean by an 'embodied' sexuality is one that is developed through the social experiences of gayness and which is valued and understood within shared social understandings of gayness.

Sexuality cannot be considered a singular or individual experience; nor is it about a simple set of practices. Gayness is lived, expressed and developed socially through a range of experiences. It is not so much a discovery as a formation of oneself in relation to others socially, interactively (including sexually).

Embodied sexuality describes the practice and experience of your sexual self and includes sexual practice, fantasy, imagination, the processes of declaration and other processes of both experiencing, describing and reflecting on your sexualised experience. This idea of embodied sexuality extends then to a consideration of a sexualised disposition towards and within the world. Thinking of sexuality as embodied especially gayness helps us to think about what might be drawn into and embedded within educational practices and processes.

The other very important aspect of an embodied sexuality is that it understands gayness as being valued and understood within shared social understandings of gayness. This social constitution of a sexuality accounts for not only the expression of sexuality but also its lived dispositions and the ways in which boundaries are produced around ideas of sex and sexuality. Gay life, gayness, gay sexuality and gay culture are all connected to social systems of power. This means that they are expressed through systems of value and of preference; what's good, bad, tacky, tragic, bitchy, full of attitude, stylish, pretentious. In terms of gay and the ways in which gay life is lived and understood, these are often expressed in terms of authenticity and legitimacy.

The ways in which gayness is deployed in education cannot be systematised or schematised — not because these deployments are hard to identify or locate, but because the specifics of embodied sexualities differ from person to person, and are idiosyncratic. So too are the ways in which embodied sexualities are deployed within a professional educational context.

Embodied sexuality is also *always* historically located and understood, both for individuals and in terms of the broader history of gay male sexuality.

Gay educators whose gayness assists educational articulation into gay men's lives, can and need to utilise their gaynesses differently to adapt their educational work to changing contexts.

At an individual level, historic specificity is realised in the particular accumulations of gayness that are embodied by individuals. These individually accumulated kinds of gayness are lived and experienced as authentic and valuable by individuals. This sense of the authentic and valuable is supported by the

cultures and collectives (networks, social groupings and scenes) in which they live.

Keeping this individual history of experience in mind is useful when thinking about education and the use of individual gayness in education. It means we can be mindful of the relationship between one kind of gayness and another, and the way in which one may dominate or be privileged over others as more authentic or more valuable.

Adding into the mix broad historical shifts in gay and gayness means that consideration can be given to the relationship between the gaynesses produced, reproduced and assumed in education. Critical consideration can be given to these embedded gaynesses by seeing them in the broader historical conditions of how gay is understood and valued.

Key questions

What are gay, gayness and gay life, are they different?

Are these different for each gay man/educator?

How are gay lives and gaynesses differentiated?

How do you think about sexuality as knowledge or as skill and capacity?

Is the contemporary gay world the same as the one lived in, in the early eighties, early nineties?

Is a gay man's experience of coming-out now the same as it was five years ago?

Does coming-out into being a niche market make a difference to how you feel about your status and power in the culture as a gay man?

Is liberation still the dominant idea of what coming-out and into gay culture means?

Useful reflective questions for educators would be:

Who are you as a gay man?

How is your gayness (its doing and being) different from other gay men?

How does your gayness and its difference/similarity impact on your work?

Professional?

Profession 1. Vocation requiring knowledge of some department of learning or science, esp. one of the three vocations of theology, law, and medicine.

Professional 1. Following an occupation as a means of livelihood or for gain 3. engaged in one of the learned professions 4. following as a business an occupation ordinarily engaged in as a pastime.

(Macquarie Dictionary, 1985 edition, p.1356) These definitions of the words profession and professional provide a set of parameters for thinking about what is professional and what is not. The boundaries and categories represented by these definitions have been and are being troubled, in practice, in gay education.

The definitions of profession/professional position bodies of knowledge and disciplines as an essential component of professionalism. They also suggest that professional knowledge is something learned and that it has boundaries around it, suggesting a discrete body of knowledge. They also understand this knowledge, and by inference those that have it, as esteemed. The knowledge and those that hold it have a status in both their working contexts and more broadly as 'knowledgeable' and as professional.

Different kinds of knowing, doing, talking about and writing about work are valued differently. Some of these accord with generally understood ideas of what constitutes the professional. Others are harder to value as professional forms of knowing and doing work. There is an emphasis on 'doing' in the work of educators in community sector organisations. How they do their work is something about which they have a developed on-the-job capacity. It is something about which they do not talk in abstract, formal and theoretical ways. And, it is something about which they do not necessarily write. Seeing their educational work as 'professional', imbued with the status of a formal body of knowledge, understood, transmitted and esteemed in written formal modes is difficult

How might you recognise and value the blending of gayness into education, and education into gayness as *professiona*? A variety of frames may be used to 'position' and understand gay men educating gay men as professionals. Health promotion is one such frame. Do these frames produce tension, devaluings, and silencings around gayness when it is dealt with as a professional aspect and skill?

To be professional

7. As would be done by a professional; expert. (ibid)

Kurt reflects on his use of knowledge and the problem of gayness being used as a professional educational knowledge:

The way you might read or understand research is informed by your experiences. Research that makes sense to you is the research you are going to take up in your work.

This is also the case in program planning. If what is proposed doesn't make sense to you, in the way you understand sex, community, relationships etc. then it is unlikely that you're going to run with that project. Certainly, your capacity to do that project would be difficult. I did little work with sex on premises venues because I have rarely been in them and my knowledge is only informed by what I have heard from others. I suppose the difficulty is that in some ways you're set up or you set yourself up as knowledgeable in particular forms of gayness. And personally it's intimidating to work in an area that is beyond your personal experience - it's too easy to be out of your depth. (Kurt)

Joe reflects on the limits of gay as professional knowledge:

A large reason why we had to consider ourselves professionals is because our knowledge as educators and community activists was simply not recognised within our organisation. Education was viewed as very wishy-washy and our methods and approaches were seen as merely based on our own world/gay views. As a result it meant any gay man in the organisation felt they had just as much of an idea of what might be effective education. We were trying to argue that, yes, our own sexuality influences our work but so too does years of experience attempting to implement effective education programs. Even if it didn't look like it, we did develop specialist knowledge about education interventions that might be effective with gay men. (Joe)

Key questions

What does it mean to be a gay professional?

Does it mean that you are impersonal and unengaged with things that affect you personally when you are educating?

Why is embodied gayness not considered a skill?

Is it because lots of people have it?

What needs to be the blend between generic professional attributes and the attributes of gayness?

If gayness is assumed to be non-professional and there are always knowledge gaps in people's own embodied gayness, how can knowledge of and around gayness be augmented to assist education when there are knowledge gaps?

Gayly professional

The bringing together of the personal and the professional, the remaking of the personal and of gayness as professional places in tension the differently valued knowledges and practices of professional education, embodied gay sexuality and more general ideas of professionalism. This kind of discursive tension is common in what Carmody, in reference to women working in sexual assault services, calls a 'contested environment' (1997). But rather than simply being a problem, a contested environment and the discursive tensions it produces provide opportunities for gay men to develop professionally. It gives them career opportunities and a 'leg-up' in terms of skills and knowledge, something they may not otherwise have. Whilst gay men may be able to progress in these ways in other fields, a 'gay' field such as HIV education for gay men allows for acceleration of careers *with* an embracing of their sexuality.

Increasingly, gay men working as educators are expected to have formal qualifications. This, as an explicit criterion for employment, emerged over time. Unlike other professional areas, there is no single degree which is called for in the way positions are advertised. Although, 'knowledge of health promotion or adult education' is often listed as a requirement in descriptions of education jobs in the community sector.

I was required or expected to have tertiary qualifications, which lead me to believe that I needed a certain level of

professional knowledge or expertise.
(James)

Whether demanded as a requirement in recruitment processes or developed on the job, this assumption of specific knowledges locates gay educators within professional and disciplinary bodies of knowledge.

Every interview I ever went for asked questions about gay men and the community. This knowledge was only really obtainable if you were a part of that community. In many cases only obtainable if you were also part of the Sydney gay community. (Joe)

Beyond, in and around professional and expert knowledges, gay educators are also positioned within and across other kinds of knowledges, sets of skills and expertise. These other knowledges have to do with sex, sexual practice, experiences of gayness, communities, ideas and experiences of the scene or scenes. These are drawn together, in various ways, in educational work.

Some of these knowledges and sets of skills sit together well, working effectively and supportively in work practice. For example, the use of ideas and experiences of the Sydney gay community work well in a peer education program like Fun and Esteem at the AIDS Council of NSW. Gay community is powerful and present in the culture of gay men in Sydney. Knowledge and experiences in moving into and around a large commercial infrastructure and social scene are a necessary part of how an educator is able to assist, inform and empathise with clients who are negotiating their gayness in the presence of such a community².

Conversely, tensions can be produced through the bringing together of these domains of knowledge in the same educational context or work culture. An example is the use of 'sex positivity', the idea that a positive approach should be made toward all kinds of sexual choice because of a sexual politics necessary both to counter homophobia and AIDS/sex phobia. Sex positivity can, at times, be alienating and demanding for gay men whose sexual experience is limited and for those in whose cultural backgrounds it is taboo to discuss sex.

At another point, the role of gossip and dishing (gossipy interaction which involves ritualised ridicule and insult), which can act as social policing mechanisms within gay culture and as a mechanism which cements and affirms social relations, is inappropriate not only in professional contexts, but with some paradigms of confidential, group-based work.

Many educators have, in their work cultures, developed highly effective ways of dealing with both these issues. What is important is that the tension, resolved or not, is produced by the bringing together of discourses and practices of gayness and other professionalised and unprofessionalised discourses.

The educator himself is the place of tension and has been the place of resolution or non-resolution of these kinds of tensions. The experience of educators takes place in this dynamic process of tension, and it is in their day-to-day work that problems are experienced and resolutions, or not, are found. The discussion below focuses on this dynamic tension.

Key questions

When considering the ways in which various knowledges and skills are brought together in the work of the professionally gay, key questions would be:

What are the expert and professional knowledges that gay educators are expected to have?

What disciplines are called for in the work that they do?

How do professional knowledges and skills about sexuality and sexual health 'sit' with the embodied sexuality of educators?

Tensions

Expectations and kinds of gay

Once Nick started work for an AIDS organisation he 'felt a lot of pressure to become a 'proper gay man', to fit the label well, and to be allowed into certain work circles on an 'even footing'. This sense of expectation is reflected in Nathan's comments:

Particular forms of gayness are important. To be gay is not enough, you have to be the right kind of gay. (Nathan)

For some gay educators there is little flexibility about kinds of gay and 'levels' of gay experience. Some come up against the limits of their experience and this confounds internal organisational expectations that they will have more complete knowledge about gayness. Some educators reduce their understandings of gayness to those working in HIV education, often ignoring the detail of their own lives. There are few formal strategies within gay education programs for continual re-engagement with the lived experience of gay men. The expectations and limitations around kinds of gay have

implications for how educators see their communities and constituencies.

[your own gayness] may cause problems if it presents a form of gayness different from those you're working with. Usually sharing personal experiences is about credibility or a sense of connectedness - being viewed as a part of the community or part of the networks is important to being accepted. (Nathan)

Expectation and limitations have an impact on the resonance of education and its articulation to community. The credibility and connectedness that Nathan refers to are essential for community members to participate in and liaise with educators. They are necessary elements of promotional activity, used as a way of gaining a status and value for your work from those who are its intended consumers.

These issues of resonance and articulation mean that gay men need to be seen as audience, target group, consumers, clients, educational subjects etc., using these terms to recognise the ways in which gay men are articulated into education programs. In this way, gay men, their culture, lives and communities can be seen as not only diverse but dynamic in their cultural forms and cultural preferences.

While gayness might have been an important part of the work, we didn't use people's experience of gayness very effectively. The workplace paradigms and practices of gayness and community end up a more powerful force directing the work of educators than their own experiences. And these views are very entrenched in an early epidemic view of a gay community mobilizing together on Oxford St to fight AIDS and party at Mardi Gras. (Nick)

I felt AIDS was irrelevant to my life and yet didn't quite have a sense of where [community organisation] needed to go. (Joe)

Both these quotes express a tension around the role of gay men and their gayness in relation to HIV where the overlap between gay identity and practice and HIV has shifted. The demand for and reliance on gayness is still there, but the place of HIV has become differently relevant.

The relation of gayness to HIV is not interrogated systematically or critically enough to facilitate an understanding of what gayness might look like 'outside' of the stable ways it is seen inside the work of HIV education. This is as true about holding on to ideas of how relevant HIV should be

for gay men, (rather than thinking through its different, contemporary relevance), as it is about the ways health and disease prevention education is understood.

Boundaries

Boundaries of various kinds, their exploitation, crossing, confounding and the like are at issue in being *professionally gay*.

The guys you're working with [clients] want to know more about you, you become someone in the community so your life comes under constant scrutiny. (Nathan)

It is important and reasonable to expect to have a private life as a professional. But if the work you do creates an overlap between the sites of your personal and social life and the groups of people with whom you work, it becomes difficult to maintain the boundary between your professional and social life that many other professionals take for granted.

Everyone expects you to be working when you are out, even if you don't have to perform as an educator, you have to perform as a representative of an organisation. (Kurt)

This is especially true when the climate is politically charged and it is exacerbated by smaller sized communities in limited geographical locations. Size matters if you work with and socialise in the same community (Couch 2000).

I just don't go out any more. (Kurt)

The personal choice not to socialise in what was once 'your' community is a difficult and unfortunate price to pay for working as a gay man for gay men. However, this decline in participation runs the risk of dis-articulation with communities and those living the lives into which education expects to intervene. This could also have the effect of educators relying and being dependent on limited knowledge of target groups and their lives. This set of issues is quite complex, but important. Understanding the ways gay men, as educators, produce articulations into gay culture, and the way their personal choices about participation in gay culture impact in the work seems at first to be about personal choice and efficacy in maintaining boundaries. But there does need to be a way in which these issues and their personal and professional implications can be considered and processed.

Conversely, some gay educators like to take on their role as educator in a way that means they live their work without boundaries between their social lives as gay men and their work lives as gay educa-

tors. This approach is not without problems, because it inhibits the possibilities of distance and of understanding the ways different kinds of gayness relate to the work that an educator does.

Gay workplaces such as community organisations and their education teams often blend work contexts into social contexts, and this produces a problematic intensity. Drinking sessions at gay pubs that lead on after work and extend into long nights together are only superficially about community participation. This kind of work social culture, in a mixed set of personal and professional contexts, can be a healthy, team building experience. But it has to be accepted that even though they may happen in gay venues, the insider nature of such occasions produces an intensity that can mean groups do not get enough distance from work and work culture.

Sexual Work

Sexual attraction is played out in the workplace, with clients and with co-workers. (Kurt)

Working with clients because you share a sexual orientation, and when sex and sexual practice, sexual desire and other personal and intimate detail is the focus of your work means that, even if nothing sexual happens (no touching, flirting, kissing, fucking), environments are often sexually charged for educators and their clients. The 'buzz' produced by 'sexual work' is often a motivator and incentive at the outset of a professionally gay career. When the buzz dies down after an initial period, motivation and incentive need to be generated and maintained in other ways.

This sexually charged environment is both a benefit and problem for education. It heightens and creates an intensity for the participation of all involved, but it emerges as problematic in terms of work focus, and the maintenance of boundaries. Balance of focus in groups and other contexts can also mean that some clients receive more attention, while others are ignored.

'Sexual work' of this kind can also have an impact on your sex life and sense of sexual self. Kurt reflects on how his work as a group leader impacts on his inclination for sexual choices.

Rimming just isn't the same any more when you've been talking about Hep. A in a group. (Kurt)

Other gay educators talk about a decline in their sex drive which they consider stems from 'talking about sex, all day, every day.'

An educator once recounted a story to me in which he outlined how he learned of the existence of a muscle in his groin that would, if he exercised it, help him 'shoot' further and more spectacularly when he ejaculated. He had learned of this in a training workshop. His sexualised workplace helped him develop his own sexual capacity and skill. He applied this idea, and he was pleased with the results.

Working as a gay educator can increase your own sexual knowledge and skill. But, it can make you feel inadequate to the task, highlighting the limits of your knowledge and skill and this can impact on your own sense of sexual esteem.

Personally, it's intimidating to work in an area that's beyond your personal experience. (Kurt)

Passion and commitment

Passion is an element of educational work which is at the core of gay men's motivation to work with and for gay men. Yet, though it may be an essential ingredient, it is also a continual tax.

An early reliance on passion in the HIV epidemic didn't just mean that gay men would accept fairly low rates of pay, even if they had worked in higher paid professions. It also meant that there was a high level of commitment and dedication even in the face of a lack of career opportunities. Beyond this though, the way models of education work and the way educators as human resource are deployed within programs relied heavily on a commitment, dedication and motivation that is impossible to sustain long-term. The implicit assumption that you, as a gay man who is passionate about things gay and HIV, will want 'to chat to a group of gay men every fortnight about the same stuff and answer the same questions, and give up your time and ...' (Nick) still operates in some gay education programs.

Vigilance about working conditions, action to increase rates of pay and to argue for career opportunities creates tension in an environment where your gayness is assumed to mean you will be passionate enough to accept less.

The future

Professionalism, gayness and education are all inherently *political*. Each of these has its own logics, values and common senses. They produce preferences and demand certain kinds of skill, capacity and knowledge. When they are brought together in the production and execution of gay education, and in and through gay educators, their respective values, logics and common senses are in tension.

The inherently political condition of the domains brought to bear, embodied and enacted in gay

educators and their educational work, means that considering the professionally gay educator is a central political concern.

One way to think of what is at stake here is the question of generic professionalism. If a generic professionalism, which does not account for and value gayness as a professional capacity, is adopted in the community HIV sector there will be an impact on the place and status of gay in the community sector's work. Consequently, demands for uniqueness in the way the sector fulfils its role will be weakened.

At a larger political level, this shift and the weakening of claims on (embodied) gayness in educational work will impact on the sustainability of a gay community infrastructure. As a still marginalised group, and as a group whose self determination in terms of health and well-being, this 'gay community' infrastructure is vital. However, sustaining it requires that it do a job that only it can do. Central to the job it is best suited to doing is gay (health) education, and central to this are the professionally gay who do the educating.

From one perspective, this is an argument for 'gay exceptionalism'³, that is, it argues that gay men are a special case, exceptional in their health and other needs. This was certainly true in the height of the HIV epidemic in Australia, and provided an opportunity for self-determined sexual health education *for* gay men *by* gay men. But the epidemic has shifted and the exceptionalism it provided is no longer as strong. This, unfortunately for larger gay political agendas, works with ideas of genericism and mainstreaming and provides potential reasons for why gay men may no longer need to 'own', control, develop and execute their own education.

Quality is also an issue. If the best kind of education for gay men is that which is attuned to their culture and lives and this 'tuning' relies on gayness embedded within education, then gay men, as educators, may be the best at providing the embeddedness. As I have suggested, this is done in the educational deployment of their own embodied gayness, and their knowledge and experience of gaynesses.

If gayness is so vital to effective work and sustainability, then the professionally gay need attention, development and support. This all raises the issue of training and educational management and demands consideration of how educators are recruited, trained and managed. In a contested environment, the professionally gay embody and live, in their professional and private lives, discursive tensions. This challenging of the professional and the personal, and the valuable resolutions of this, cannot be overlooked or neglected.

The embedding of a singular/homogenised gayness can only be avoided if gayness as a professional capacity and knowledge is taken into account.

Joe left his job as a manager of gay education programs in a community organisation because he 'couldn't cope having to think about gay men 24 hours a day'. Ways of dealing with the problems produced by boundary crossing and other tensions lived by gay educators are the responsibility of the organisations for which they work. If working as a gay educator makes men 'not want to be gay any more' and if 'full-time gayness gets tiring and boring', the role and use of gayness in education and the reflexive impact this has on these men needs to be a focus of professional development.

Gayness, as professional capacity and skill, and as an embedded element of gay education also provide grounds and scope for re-articulation into gay communities and the lived experience of gay men, into whose lives education is intended to intervene and on which it is expected to impact.

One of the reasons I left was because I couldn't cope having to think about gay men 24 hours a day. Particularly when it no longer had such an important meaning in my life and particularly when I realized most of what we were doing was irrelevant to gay men's lives. It's hard to be motivated when you realize most gay men are indifferent to what you are doing. (Joe)

The professionally gay are a resource, both for themselves as professionals and for their organisations. This is especially true in terms of re-articulation with constituent communities, especially in terms of organisations and their relationship to communities in a rapidly changing epidemic and culture. The educator as enactor of education is vital, and their embodiment and performance of culture is an invaluable resource for continued development of educational programs.

Notes

¹ I am indebted to Jonathan Bollen for this useful distinction between being and doing as a way of considering gay identity and practice. The distinction is explained in Dowsett et al 1998.

² For a more detailed discussion of how gayness is utilised as a professional capacity in peer education see McInnes et al in press a and b.

³ The term gay exceptionalism as used here comes from discussions with Murray Couch, whose articulation of this has been fundamental to the development of ideas discussed here.

Recommendations

Following the discussion here it is recommended that:

1. the questions emerging from this discussion paper be pursued through a set of professional development and research/evaluation strategies. The most crucial of the questions emerging from this discussion paper is:

What are the ways in which gayness as a part of an educator's professional qualities, skills, and capacity, can be understood, utilised, supported and monitored in relation to continued educational effectiveness?

Recommended strategies include that:

2. in-service and professional development strategies be developed to enable educators to consider and critically evaluate their professional gayness across the following areas:
 - critical understandings of professionalism;
 - discussion and instruction regarding educational frameworks and theories applied to sector-specific programs; and
 - introduction of critical theoretical work regarding sexuality and sexual identity.

These three cannot stand in isolation. It is recommended that in-service programs be developed which examine each of these, but which also work at the relationship between these areas focussing on the educator as critical point of articulation between the three.

3. supervision and management strategies be developed which provide opportunities for educators and their managers to both discuss and support the use of gayness in educational work, and that provide some documentation of the use of gayness in educational programs.
4. research and evaluation processes be developed which will document and analyse the use of gayness as a professional skill and capacity, its costs and benefits and, most importantly, its relationship to educational effectiveness.

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