Bi ageing:
What do we know
and why should we care?

Dr Rebecca L. Jones
Faculty of Health and Social Care
The Open University
rebecca.jones@open.ac.uk
Overview

• What do we know about ageing and bisexuality?
  – That we can’t generalise from gay and lesbian ageing
  – The literature: 2 empirical studies + informed speculations

• Muriel: a case study

• Why should we care?
  – Academic implications
  – Practical implications
  – Political implications
Definitions
How many bi older people?

• Some recent general surveys:
  – Bi attraction: 13% women, 6% men?
  – Bi behaviour: 16% women, 10% men?
  – Bi identity: 3-5% bi, 1-3% L&G?

• Not many bi-identified people in groups for older LGBT people

• Not many older people in organised bi communities.

• Bi older people – a hard-to-reach group!
The distinctiveness of bisexuality

- *The Bisexuality Report*
- Things we don’t know yet about bi older people:
  - Rates of living alone
  - Experiences of health and social care services
  - Bereavement experiences
  - Family of choice
  - Intersectionality
Empirical studies

- **56 San Francisco bi-identified people, aged 35-67**

- **33 BiCon 2010 attenders, aged 20-66**
Informed speculations


Muriel at 78

• ‘Crushes’ on older girls but then married, has 3 children
• Divorced early-30s
• late-30s, attends women’s consciousness-raising group. Meets Pat, a lesbian, starts relationship with her
• Pat dies. Muriel supported by lesbian friends and a voluntary organisation for bereaved L&G people
• Falls in love with a man, Colin. Friends disapproving.
• Mid 1980s started calling herself bisexual.
• Relationship with Colin ends, meets Joan, thinks of self as lesbian again – expecting this to be final relationship
• Joan dies, needs home care, carers judgemental
Muriel

- born 1932
- married, children
- divorced
- c. 1970 consciousness raising group, Pat
- Pat died, Colin
- c. 1980 idea of bisexuality
- Joan
- c. 1990
- now starts home care, Joan died
- c. 1985
Muriel

- born 1932
- married, children
- divorced
- consciousness raising group, Pat
- Pat died, Colin
- idea of bisexuality
- Joan
- starts home care, Joan died

- straight
- lesbian
- ?
- bi
- lesbian
- ?

- c. 1970
- c. 1980
- c. 1985
- c. 1990
- now
What are the implications?
Who are 'we'?

- LGBT people:
  - older bi people
  - younger bi people
  - younger LGT people
  - older LGT people

- Activists
- Service providers
- Policymakers
- Opinion shapers
- Academics

• Academic implications
• Practical implications
• Political implications
Academic implication 1: Bisexuality is useful to the study of ageing

- Diversity of older people
Academic implication 2: Gerontology is useful to bisexuality
Practical implication 1: Service Users

- born 1932
- married, children
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- straight
- lesbian
- ?
- bi
- lesbian
- ?

- bereavement care
- home care

- c. 1970
- c. 1980
- c. 1985
- c. 1990
Practical implication 2: Ageing in bi communities

• Find out what bi older people want from bi communities!
• BiCon 2011 workshop
  – ‘Over 40s nice sit down and a cup of tea’
• Becoming a parent
Practical implication 3: Making work with LGBT older people more bi-inclusive

- Challenging casual biphobia
- Doing some direct work about bi (and trans) inclusion
- Be clear about remit
  - Don’t call yourself ‘LGBT’ unless you are genuinely welcoming to B (and T) people
- Benefits also to LG and T older people
Practical / political implication: 
Imagining old age

- Failure to image your own old age leads to ageism
- Roadmaps can help
  - especially if have untraditional life course features
  - not necessarily identical identities
Political implication 1: Activism around old age

- Variety among older people – counter ageist stereotypes
- Continuing importance of sexuality (for some)
- Coming out late in life
Political implication 2: Bi inclusion

- Inclusion in Equalities work
- Life course perspectives
Conclusions

• More research needed
• More practical work with bi older people needed
  – Bi communities
  – LGBT groups for older people
• More political work needed to challenge
  – Ideas about ageing
  – Ideas about sexuality in later life
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