CCIG Psychosocial Programme event, in collaboration with the Social Psychology Research Group

**Affective Activism: a symposium**

**Tuesday May 14th from 14:00-17:00**

Christodoulou Meeting Room 11, The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA
Maps and Directions: [http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/locations.aspx](http://www3.open.ac.uk/contact/locations.aspx)

This symposium will be chaired by Professor Paul Stenner and comprises presentations from two speakers followed by discussion.

The social sciences and humanities have witnessed a surge of interest in questions of affectivity and emotion in the past decade or so, and efforts have been made to address the affective and psychosocial dimensions of a range of social and political issues. The two speakers in this symposium are in the process of rethinking a number of key dilemmas associated with transformative action in the LGBT context (including issues of gay marriage, mental health and bisexual ‘invisibility’). Some of this work is clustering around the new concept of affective activism.

Programme:

- **14.00 - 15.00** ‘Affective Activism: Gay marriage, mental health and queer lives after the affective turn’
  Katherine Johnson, School of Applied Social Science, University of Brighton
  (including 10 – 15 minutes for questions)

- **15.00 - 16.00** ‘Bisexual invisibility and mental health: A specific arena for affective activism?’
  Meg Barker Department of Psychology, The Open University
  (including 10 - 15 minutes for questions)

- **16.00 - 16.15** Tea break

- **16.15 - 17.00** Discussion
Title: Affective Activism: Gay marriage, mental health and queer lives after the affective turn.

Abstract:
In the last 20 years, driven by an equality agenda, LGBT identity politics have been successful in transforming the public policy landscape in a number of western countries. Key areas of debate include the highly contentious status of relationship and family rights, including ‘gay marriage’, access to reproductive technologies and adoption, and the inclusion of LGBT specific vulnerabilities (e.g. HIV and mental health) in state-based health policies. Focusing on the contemporary tropes of ‘gay marriage’ and ‘LGBT mental health’, this paper covers familiar ground by considering the potential of identity politics and policy initiatives for reducing inequalities and improving the quality of queer lives, as well as their ‘risks’ in terms of reification, normalisation, assimilation and repathologization. In addition, by drawing on feminist and queer perspectives, the paper asks what the ‘affective turn’ brings to the politics of sexuality and attempts to rethink the dilemmas of transformative action based on identity categories through concepts such as affective activism and affective solidarity.

Dr Meg Barker
Department of Psychology
The Open University

Bisexual invisibility and mental health: A specific arena for affective activism?

Abstract:
This paper focuses in on the B in LGBT to further explore the constructions of sexuality, relationships and mental health present in recent policy initiatives and in wider discourses surrounding sexual equality. As part of a consideration of biphobia and bisexual invisibility, I examine ways in which bisexuality has been sidelined and excluded from many of the key political initiatives regarding equalities and inclusion. Returning to the issues of equal marriage and LGBT mental health, I touch upon the framing of marriage debates to reinforce a gay/straight dichotomy, and stigmatise certain relationship forms, as well as examining mental health research regarding LGBT people and the problems inherent in combining such categories in both research and practice. Turning to the concept of affective activism I consider constructions of mental health within current bisexual communities and the ways in which these echo wider societal understandings. Cognisant of the risks of further exclusion and invisibility involved in binary approaches (either identity politics or queer agendas; either victimisation or empowerment narratives of mental health), I suggest an alternative affective activist approach combining resistance (towards internal explanations of mental health problems) and compassion (towards self and others within communities). This paper draws upon The Bisexuality Report (2012), the use of creative research within sexual communities, and critical mental health perspectives including mindfulness. It also speaks to wider considerations about combining academia and activism in our work.

To register please visit the CCIG website http://www.open.ac.uk/ccig/events and complete the registration fields. There are limited places therefore places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Any queries please e-mail socsci-ccig-events@open.ac.uk (Sarah Batt, Research Secretary)