



— THE GUIDE TO —

**LGBTQ+ RESEARCH**

EDITED BY

**DR. ADAM BRETT & PROFESSOR CATHERINE LEE**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# INTRODUCTION

CATHERINE LEE<sup>a</sup> AND ADAM BRETT<sup>b</sup>

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This book started with a chat. We (Adam Brett and Catherine Lee) had only met once before but in 2023 found ourselves presenting in the same room at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) annual conference. A beer and a further conversation in the bar followed, and others, many of whom contribute to this book, joined us to create an impromptu BERA queer network who stuck together for the remainder of the conference.

Back at our respective universities, Adam, invited at BERA to pitch a book, reached out to Catherine to work together on something.

We both found our own lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) doctoral research a lonely endeavour and wished we had that queer network we found at BERA when we were doing our research. Ever the brilliant pragmatist, Adam had recently set up an LGBTQ+ research network, and over 200 researchers had joined. What a joy, after years of isolation as PhD students, to at last be surrounded by like-minded people all doing LGBTQ+ research.

What if then, we could bring together all that peer support, advice and sense of community we now have from our networks and offer it to those currently doing LGBTQ+ research? The idea for our book was born.

This book is designed to be your network of LGBTQ+ researchers in written form. It's not a 'how to' book; it is a collection of personal narratives from those with first-hand experience of doing LGBTQ+ research. Some contributors to this book are established LGBTQ+ researchers, some recently got their doctorates and many are currently working towards theirs. What every contributor has in common is that we draw on our own successes and failures to offer personal pieces of advice to help you feel supported during your studies.

The book has 37 different authors. Most are based in the United Kingdom and are part of the LGBTQ+ community, but we also have contributors who are conducting LGBTQ+ research internationally and contributors who are fantastic allies to our community. The voices in our book are therefore diverse, providing rich and varied accounts of their own research journeys. They each use their preferred language to refer to the LGBTQ+ community, and so this differs throughout the book. Whether you are at the initial stages of contemplating your master's or doctoral research proposal or preparing for your viva, this book aims to provide emotional encouragement, practical advice and theoretical insights to help you succeed.

Our book is structured as if it were a doctoral thesis. It begins with stories about getting started and ends with support for life after your research. Every contributor ends their chapter with key takeaways, the advice we wished someone had given us. Each chapter also features a reference list, signposting further useful literature that may support you in your studies. We hope of course you will enjoy our book from cover to cover, but if you are part way through your own LGBTQ+ research, we recommend starting from the part of the book that relates most to your current research focus.

The book is split into eight parts. In part one, we explore how to get started with your research. We cover initial feelings

of imposter syndrome when you enter academia and what you might do to find your supervisor and a research network. Tips for writing your LGBTQ+ research proposal follow, before we delve into the importance of language, stressing the need for sensitivity and inclusivity in your writing. Also, in the initial section of the book, we explore the challenges of writing about your own LGBTQ+ identity, before highlighting the role of social media and networks of support, illustrating how these tools can help you navigate and break down the sometimes intimidating barriers in academia.

A comprehensive literature review is crucial to your research. In part two, we examine how to maximise the potential of your literature searches, and we introduce you to the main queer theorists you will want to get to grips with. We then pick out the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler and explore in detail their theories that are useful in creating a framework for your research.

Understanding and reflecting on your positionality is complex but nevertheless critical in LGBTQ+ research. In part three, our contributors give personal insight into the intersectionality of identities and how personal experiences can inform and enrich your research. Insider and outsider research positionality follows before we discuss how LGBTQ+ research can be an opportunity for activism.

Ethics is a cornerstone of any research. In part four, we help you to navigate the ethics application process in your university. We also highlight the ethical considerations when working with LGBTQ+ children and young people.

Selecting and implementing the right methodology is vital to a good thesis, and in part five, we discuss the nuances of participant recruitment within the LGBTQ+ community. We offer strategies for gaining access to participants and stress the importance of quality over quantity when recruiting

participants. We look closely at conducting focus groups with LGBTQ+ participants and examine participatory action research and interviews tailored to LGBTQ+ research. We conclude this section by encouraging you to ‘queer’ traditional approaches and consider creative methodologies.

Once your data are collected, the task of analysis begins. In part six, we give advice about accurately representing LGBTQ+ participants in your research and the richness of your research when you consider intersectional identities in your data analysis. We provide guidance on conducting thematic analysis with LGBTQ+ data and delve into the intricacies of analysing narrative and discourse data. We conclude this section with a piece on handling quantitative queer data and challenging statistical assumptions.

In part seven, we explore preparing for your viva. We discuss that setbacks are part of the research process and offer strategies for overcoming them. We examine how to make claims to knowledge and originality before providing practical tips for preparing for the viva voce examination.

The final part of the book, part eight, examines academic life after your doctorate. Completing your dissertation or thesis is a significant milestone but may be just the beginning of your academic career. We help you to navigate the process of publishing from your research and outline some of the challenges of sharing queer knowledge in a heteronormative world. Our book closes by helping you to navigate getting that first academic job and building your own supportive LGBTQ+ research network.

What every author in this book knows is that doing LGBTQ+ research is challenging. We hope this ‘network in book form’ will be an invaluable companion and source of motivation, encouragement and advice for you at every step of the way. What every author in this book also knows is what an incredible privilege it is to conduct LGBTQ+ research.

Elevating the voices of a community of people who have been historically silenced is both necessary and vital; as LGBTQ+ researchers, we have the power to influence and shape society to be fairer and more equal. By the end of the book, we don't just hope you feel like you've spent time with a supportive community of LGBTQ+ researchers; we hope that you feel part of this community.

But for now, it's time to begin doing some research. . .

# Part 1

## GETTING STARTED

In this opening section to the Guide to LGBTQ+ Research, authors offer their personal insights into getting started on your doctorate or master's thesis. Starting a large piece of work can be daunting. Lots of us harbour a dream of having the title Dr before our name but have no idea where to start. Many of us are procrastinators and struggle to begin the process of research, and some of us are just too scared of not being good enough, so never take the plunge. If you recognise yourself in any of these descriptors, then read on as experienced LGBTQ+ researchers draw on their own experience to help you to get started.

Former teacher and school leader, Adam Brett starts us off by reflecting on his own imposter syndrome as he tackled his doctorate. Recognising himself as an academic trespasser, he draws on Duff (2010) to describe how academic discourse can be a site of internal and interpersonal struggle for many people, especially for newcomers or novices. He then explores how he used his feelings of being an imposter to his advantage as it ultimately became his superpower, and reflects that finding his LGBTQ+ research community has really helped him to reinvent himself as an LGBTQ+ academic.

Lyndsay Muir follows Adam and describes how her experience in Brighton and Manchester helped her to find her academic trans community and ultimately the right

supervisor. Describing finding the right university and supervisor as like prospecting for gold, she advocates for attending events and conferences, and reading blogs, publications and research to find the supervisor who ‘gets you’.

In the third chapter, Kate Russell and Daniel Rogerson draw on their experience as doctoral supervisor and student to discuss how to get started with your research proposal. They outline what should go in your proposal and how to achieve a proposal that is authentic, empathetic, realistic and contributory while also meeting academic institutional expectations for doctoral level study.

Next, Rebecca House considers the use of language in LGBTQ+ research. She states that thorough considerations are needed to ensure language is contemporary, inclusive and appropriate. Rebecca explores language-based factors to consider when conducting LGBTQ+ studies and draws on her own doctorate experiences to examine the justification of language-based decisions in LGBTQ+ based research.

In chapter four, Catherine Lee draws on her own experience of autoethnography to ask those of us who identify as LGBTQ+, how much of our own identity we should include in our thesis. Catherine cautions that once you come out in print you lose control of who knows what about you and writing about your own adversity may be emotionally triggering. However, she also stresses the importance of contributing new knowledge to the field of LGBTQ+ research and the way in which sharing your own story can help you find your LGBTQ+ academic networks.

Charlotte Feather closes this section by reflecting on her experience as a queer early-career academic who, via social media and research groups, curated an indispensable network of individuals who have influenced her personal and professional journey. In this chapter, Charlotte highlights the power of connectivity and community.

# OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

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*Dr Adam Brett is a former secondary school teacher and leader of 15 years and now a lecturer and researcher in Education at the University of Derby. Adam researches and writes extensively on the topic of LGBTQ+ inclusion in education and is the co-founder of Pride & Progress. He is also co-author of the award-winning book 'Pride & Progress: Making Schools LGBT+ Inclusive Spaces'.*

## ACADEMIC TRESPASSING

I was never academic. I never intended to be an academic. I enjoyed school, but my love for prescriptive learning had waned by A-Level, resulting in some unimpressive grades. Following a gap year, I decided to go to university to study business. Business was far from my life passion, but as a 90's gay teenager who felt increasingly untethered from the world, university seemed the quickest route to leave home. After three years, I left university with a 2:2 (even this is a generous