

Dame Eileen Younghusband Lecture

Promoting the dignity and worth of *all* people: The privilege of social work

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 Title slide [*If you are viewing this with the accompanying PowerPoint, which is recommended, transition to the next slide or section of the slide on the 'sunburst' ☀️*]

 안녕하세요, Kia ora, and warm Pacific greetings to you all. Tena koutou katoa.

It is a tremendous privilege to stand before you today, and I thank the Board of the IASSW for the confidence they have shown in me. As Treasurer of the IASSW I must also thank the Board for their good financial sense, since we did not have to pay for an extra flight for the speaker for this lecture.

Introduction

 The Eileen Younghusband Lecture, on a topic of relevance to international social work, was established in 1984 in honour of Dame Eileen Younghusband who was a strong advocate for social work education, and president of the IASSW from 1961 to 1968. Dame Eileen began her work as a social worker in 1924 in settlement houses in South and East London. She was a very private person who remained single her whole life, according to the accepted biography. Her life was tragically ended by an automobile accident in the US state of North Carolina, just before her 80th birthday, and the IASSW Board commemorates her contributions to international social work education with this lecture. Although records are far from complete, speakers since 2000 have included Jim Ife, Cecilia Chan, Peta-Anne Baker, Linda Briskman, Sibin Wang, Walter Lorenz, and Vishanthie Sewpaul, and I acknowledge and honour their leadership in international social work. As far as I can tell, I am the first openly gay person to have the privilege of delivering this lecture, and it is to issues of sexual and gender minorities to which I wish to draw your attention this morning.

 Now I am perfectly aware that I am in East Asia, in Korea, and that some of you may be thinking to yourself in your various languages 'Why is he talking about this? We know such things exist, but we never, ever talk about it. Surely there are more important things for social work today!' And perhaps you are right: the refugee crises in Europe and Australia, internal refugees in northeastern Africa, terrorism, income inequalities, inequality in women's rights and women's pay, child poverty, sex trafficking of women and children, the rights of indigenous peoples and the perpetuation of colonialism through neoliberalism, climate change and sustainability—add your own urgent issue here. And I will grant without question that all of these are critically important concerns in developed and developing nations. But, it seems, there are *always* more urgent concerns than sexual and gender minorities. And so sexual and gender minority persons defer to our other oppressed colleagues and interest groups. Being silent, staying hidden, and putting others' needs before ours is something sexual and gender minorities are very good at. Not today. I am also aware that some delegates to this conference will have read the abstract of this talk and found somewhere else to be this morning—talking about queer people is too provoking, too uncomfortable, too challenging to hardened personal or religious values. I have been asked by international social work colleagues why we need to keep talking about this issue- after all we don't have to be so obvious. That is not how I understand human rights and social justice that we claim lie at the heart of the international definition of social work.  if social workers cannot talk about sexuality with our clients or students or colleagues, then we communicate that sexuality is unspeakable, and that sexual and

gender minorities can be ignored. So I thank you for being here. I am very aware that you could have found somewhere else to be, but you are here.

Challenging the binary boxes

☀️The words *male* and *female* carry with them the assumption that people's genders are binary, that is, that people are either one or the other for their whole lives. This notion is challenged by social work theorists (Alleyn & Jones, 2010; Markman, 2011; Teich, 2012), who propose that sex (that is, biology and anatomy), gender identity (the individual experience of femaleness and maleness), and gender expression (behaviour) can best be expressed as continua☀️, rather than as binary categories. ☀️Some people experience themselves as gender syntonic, or cisgendered, that is, their experience of their gender matches the biological sex which they were assigned at birth (Teich, 2012, p. 15). Some people experience themselves as gender dystonic, gender dysphoric, gender variant, transgendered, or transsexual: that is, they do *not* identify with the sex which they were assigned at birth. Some people are born with unambiguous sexual characteristics, and others are born with ambiguous sexual characteristics (Cornwall, 2010), some of whom identify as intersex, or 'gender fluid'. Transgender, intersex, and gender fluid people may or may not choose to present or express themselves consistently as male or female, and may or may not choose to modify their bodies with clothing, hormones, transformation surgery, or other means. In the same way that gender is understood as a continuum, so also sexual behaviours, attractions, and emotions are also more appropriately understood as continua rather than binaries. ☀️This is why I now most often use the language 'sexual and gender minorities' rather than the more historical labels of gay, lesbian, bi and so on, and I invite you also to discard the old binary vocabulary. When even well-meaning social workers reproduce those labels they adopt the power of labelling the 'other', and thereby privilege cisgender heterosexuality as normal. I resist the well-intended United Nations categories of 'SOGIE' (sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression) because that language is used to talk about minoritised others: the reality is that every single one of us has a sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression! Using that language prevents a critical gaze from turning on cisgender heterosexuality and heteronormativity. It is, after all, not sexual or gender minorities who are the problem: most of us just want to get on with our lives. It is the demand that we conform to some heteronormative standard long past its use-by date that creates the problems. I rejoice that so many young people today are identifying themselves as gender diverse, and supplying the pronouns by which they would like to be referred. They have moved beyond the binaries, and are waiting for the rest of us to catch up. I've posted three simple guides for people who are anxious about all this.

- ☀️ If you're out in public and you can't figure out a stranger's gender, follow these steps:
 1. Don't worry about it;
- ☀️ What pronoun do you use for a transgender person? Whatever they use for themselves; and if you don't know, just ask.
- ☀️ And if you're in a public bathroom and you think a stranger's gender doesn't match the sign on the door, don't worry about it: they know better than you do.

☀️Most of us sexual or gender minorities cannot be identified by the casual observer through any outward appearance or presentation (although if we can, it is because we are choosing to do so). ☀️Because we live in a heteronormative world, we must choose to disclose, either by a verbal statement or in some other way in each new environment, with each new person. That sexual and gender minorities must make a decision to disaffiliate with a cisgender heteronormative world

also shapes the way we experience and interact in the world. We have an entirely different epistemology than heterosexuals, a completely different and highly individualistic way of interpreting information and determining what is true. That's what makes us so challenging to collectivist cultures.

Heroes

💡 I am in awe of those sexual and gender minority persons who have paved the way over the last 60 years in order for me to stand before you. I am in awe of the courage of my spiritual siblings around the world who battle for recognition, justice and equality in their own lands today:

- 💡 Hu Mingliang and Sun Wenlin are a young male couple in People's Republic of China who sued their local government to recognise their relationship with a marriage license. Although they recently lost their case, the fact that the court chose to hear their case was a victory itself;
- 💡 Li Tingting and Teresa Xu created China's first public informal marriage between two women in modern times;
- 💡 Shribonty Roy Puja and Sanjida Akter, a young Hindu-Muslim couple in Bangladesh found love with each other. Yet they were torn apart by their families and communities, and Shribonty was forcibly married off to an older man;
- 💡 Sunil Babu Pant is the first openly gay member of parliament in Nepal;
- 💡 David Kato Kisule was a courageous advocate with Sexual Minorities Uganda who was murdered in January, 2011, after he was named by a magazine as a homosexual, and persecuted by police and local heterosexuals;
- 💡 Xualhaz Manan was the editor of *Roopbaan*, an LGBT rights magazine in Bangladesh; he and Tanay Mojumdar, a colleague on the magazine, were hacked to death on 26 April of this year.
- 💡 'Mr C', a transman in Guiyang, China, was fired for wearing men's clothes to work; although he lost his case in May, he has vowed to continue his legal fight for an apology from the company.

The courage of these brave people, and tens of thousands— millions— of others throughout the world, known and unknown, has fuelled a social and political transformation throughout the world that I never thought possible in my lifetime.

We have recently seen unimaginable victories for justice, human rights and social rights for sexual and gender minorities around the world:

- 💡 The Nepalese Constitution approved in September 2015 includes protections for the rights of sexual and gender minorities;
- 💡 In December 2015, the UNDP announced an 'LGBTI Inclusion Index' which assesses economic wellbeing, political and civic partnership, personal security and violence, and the health of sexual and gender minorities, in order to measure progress against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for these groups;
- 💡 Recently the Council on Social Work Education in the United States, the Council on Social Work Education in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers condemned so-called 'reparative' therapies, sometimes called 'gay conversion therapies' which claim to be able to 'change' or 'repair' sexual and gender minorities, as harmful and unethical. This brings some social work professional bodies in line

with psychiatry, psychology, medical and other professional bodies in the US and the UK which have condemned these dangerous and cruel practices. These practices have no basis whatsoever in science and are simply psychological torture; yet periodically they surface in conservative religious circles;

- The head of the UK's GCHQ, the international intelligence bureau, issued an apology this year for its exclusion and prosecution of gay people up until the 1990s, and for its 'horrific' treatment of Alan Turing, the creator of the computer, who was forced into chemical castration in 1952 and hounded into committing suicide in 1954 (BBC News, 2016);
- In February of this year Schwulenberatung Berlin, an LGBT rights group in Germany, opened a 120-bed facility to shelter gay Syrian refugees. This doesn't seem like much of a victory; but these refugees have been subjected to psychological, verbal, and physical violence and abuse, including attempted murder, from security staff of mainstream refugee shelters, translators, and from fellow refugees, and this shelter is a major step forward in providing safe accommodation (Pink News, 2016);
- ☀In April of this year, the Supreme Court of India agreed to hear a curative petition of its 2013 decision that sustained the legality of Section 377 of the 1861 Penal Code, the part of colonial era Indian law which criminalises same-sex relationships and activity (F. India, 2016);
- ☀We have seen marriage equality achieved in all or part of ☀nineteen countries, with more to come next year. However recently a legally married British male couple was honeymooning in Australia (which does not have marriage equality), and one of the couple died in an accident. Civil authorities refused to recognise the legal marriage, and told the surviving husband that the death certificate would read 'never married'. This, of course, only added to his heartbreak and grief.
- And although marriage equality is now the law of the land in the United States, in 28 of those states it is still legal to discriminate against a gay person who is looking for accommodation, employment, or buying goods and services. Over 150 so-called 'religious freedom bills' have been introduced into state legislatures since the US Supreme Court decision affirming marriage equality nationally. These bills include North Carolina's infamous 'Bathroom Bill' requiring transgender persons to use the public toilet of the gender on their birth certificate, and Mississippi's religious freedom bill which allows anyone, including ambulance and emergency services, to refuse services to any sexual or gender minority person. Our victories are bittersweet while the hegemony of heteronormativity persists.

And as there have been victories, there is very much work to do. The British imperial colonial legacy lives on around the world:

- ☀Of the current 53 British Commonwealth nations, 38 still retain anti-homosexuality laws; these are in Africa, South Asia, the Caribbean, and the Pacific. (Stewart, 2016) (*Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia; Bangladesh, Brunei, India, Malaysia, Maldives, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka; Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & the Grenadines; Trinidad & Tobago; Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu*)
- There are 72 countries in the world where consensual adult same-sex relationship are punishable by whipping (e.g., Malaysia), imprisonment (e.g., Myanmar, Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya), torture (e.g., Uganda) and ☀10 countries where I could be arrested and put to death

if I were to visit (Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Mauritania, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, parts of Nigeria) (Rupar, 2014). Especially after today.

While many nations, like Korea, Japan and China, have long traditions of accepting same sex identities and relationships, it is the 18th and 19th century colonial hegemony of a certain kind of Christianity, and post-western contact which resulted in the current legal, political and social environments for sexual and gender minorities which is difficult or overtly hostile to those minorities. ☺If you think your culture doesn't have a history of same-sex love, then you don't really know your culture. If you think your country has 'always' had laws against homosexuality and gender non-conformity, you don't really know your history. Sexual and gender minorities have existed in all cultures in all times: it is only those power elites who wish to reinforce their own vision of 'normal' that have suppressed those histories; it is people who have an interest in preserving their own privilege and power who advocate for laws and sanctions against minority groups, and for repressive laws that criminalise sexual and gender minorities.

That is a very brief snapshot of the international legal situation, but the social situation is equally difficult:

- ☺Black lesbians in South Africa (despite constitutional protections) face the highest rates of rape in the world (Fletcher, 2016), an estimated one rape every 17 seconds in South Africa. Some of this is called 'corrective rape', under the assumption that once a lesbian or gender non-conforming person has had a taste of male sexual violence they will crave more of it. Since 2000, 31 lesbian women have not survived their rapes. The police rarely pursue these cases, and only 4% ever reach trial (Strudwick, 2014). So-called 'corrective rape' of lesbians and gender nonconforming women has also been documented in Angola, Nigeria and Jamaica;
- Half of bisexual women and one-third of bisexual men in Canada have considered or attempted suicide(San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 2011); 40% of clients of homeless service providers are sexual and gender minority young people who have run away from abuse, or been thrown out of their parents' homes (Durso & Gates, 2012);
- In Iran, where homosexuality is a capital crime, transsexuality is not; therefore Iran has the second highest rate of gender reassignment surgery in the world because many sexual minorities are forced to choose between involuntary gender reassignment surgery or death (Najmabadi, 2011);
- ☺On 12 February 2008, Larry King, a 15 year old student at E. O. Green Junior High School in Oxnard, California, was shot twice in the head by a 14 year old classmate in class, because Larry had asked the other student to be his valentine.
- In May, 2013, Gabriel Fernandez of Palmdale, California, was beaten to death by his mother and her then-boyfriend because they thought he was gay. He was eight years old. He was known to social workers, who had investigated the family four times, and did nothing.
- In May of this year, 19 LGBTI protesters were arrested at May Day protests in St Petersburg, Russia, for carrying rainbow signs and banners, while neo-Nazi groups were permitted to march.
- ☺UNHCR workers in Kenya have said that 'as Christians' they could not work with, or even talk to, gay men who were refugees from Uganda seeking safety and asylum. These refugees have resorted to sleeping in shifts in their UN refugee camp in order to protect their own safety (Igunza, 2015).

- I acknowledge with grief the countless and nameless men who have been identified as homosexual and thrown off buildings, hanged, or otherwise executed by adherents of Daesh, so-called Islamic State, simply for being who they are, and women who have been forcibly partnered with these militants. I am well aware that similar events have also occurred in Western Christian history, a history that is equally horrific and unforgivable, but from which we appear not to have learned anything.
- ☀ El 22 de mayo, hombres armados irrumpieron en un bar gay en Xalapa, México, matando a 7 personas, e hirió a 12.
- And less than two weeks ago, in Orlando, Florida, a shooter who claimed so-called ISIS affiliation killed at least 49 sexual and gender minority people and injured another 53 in the worst mass-shooting in US history. That same day, in Los Angeles, a man with multiple assault weapons, ammunition and explosives was arrested on the way to the Los Angeles Gay Pride parade.

☀ The situation for transgender people also remains dire:

- Between January, 2008 and December, 2015, 2,016 transgender people were killed in 65 countries around the world, including 1,500 killed in North and Latin America (803 in Brazil, 229 in Mexico, and 132 in the US) (Transgender Europe, 2016). In the first 26 days of 2016 alone, 57 transgender people were killed in Brazil.
- 41% of transgender people in the US have attempted suicide (vs. 4.6% in the general population (Haas & Rodgers, 2014).

☀ The late lesbian writer Adrienne Rich noted that “heterosexuality has had to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandized and maintained by force” (Rich, 1980/1986). It is no surprise that the neoliberal response to the increasing visibility and demand for equal rights and opportunities by sexual and gender minorities throughout the world has been increased efforts to stigmatise, criminalise, and control these transgressive, disruptive groups who do not conform to compulsory heteronormative roles and expectations.

Rights and dignity

☀ The conference theme, taken from the *Global Agenda* focus for this year, is ‘Promoting the dignity and worth of people’. This theme sets out the ambition of our profession to promote the dignity and worth of not just some people, not just people like us, or people we like, but *all* people, including all genders and sexualities.

- Civil rights emphasise what is *different* about us.
- Human rights emphasise what we share in *common*.
- Human dignity emphasises the *worth of every single individual*.

☀ If we get human dignity right for sexual and gender minorities, then we will get it right for indigenous peoples, refugees, immigrants, ethnic and cultural minorities—everyone. As we have seen, in many places around the world sexual and gender minorities are *not* treated with dignity, and our worth is *not* promoted. And where there is not dignity and worth for all of us, there is dignity and worth for none of us.

So what's a social worker to do?

☀ Social work practitioners, educators and researchers are privileged in that we have the power either to reproduce or to challenge oppressive social norms. The role of social work is clear: where social norms are oppressive we challenge them, and speak out on behalf of those who are prevented

from speaking. Sexual and gender minorities are accused of being disruptive and transgressive, of upsetting the social order, of being perverse, sinful, and worse. Speaking out on behalf of sexual and gender minorities can therefore be risky and dangerous. Yet our profession requires that we challenge all oppression and seek justice for all people. What we must *not* do is collude with oppression. If your religious beliefs conflict with your social work ethics, then find another religion or find another profession. I fully acknowledge that in some countries it is very dangerous for social workers to speak out against oppressive governments and policies, but that's why we have international organisations: so that we can use our international colleagues to speak out when we dare not.

💡 When you go home, I invite you to reflect on your experience here, and to continue to learn as much as you can about sexual and gender minorities in your country. Learn and use the new vocabulary. Challenge your traditional notions. Seek out and support sexual and gender minority colleagues. Do better research; ask better questions; use classroom examples that do not problematise sexual and gender minorities, but celebrate our strengths and our resilience. Don't assume anything about your clients' or students' identities, sexualities or relationships—ask them. Work with schools to challenge bullying behaviours by students, teachers, and administrators. Work to create environments in health and mental health care settings where people can safely disclose their identities so that they can receive appropriate care. Work with child protection agencies to ensure that sexual and gender minority children are in safe and secure environments that respect their developing identities and ensure that sexual and gender diverse parents and foster parents are well-supported. Work with domestic violence shelters to help them cope with domestic violence among same-sex and gender diverse couples and families. Recognise the special needs of sexual and gender minority refugees. Work with politicians to overturn outdated and oppressive laws and statutes that criminalise identities. Recognise and celebrate relationships, strengths and victories when they occur, no matter how minor they may seem.

💡 We social workers and social work educators can choose to collaborate with oppression and require that individuals and groups conform to dominant cultural expectations of what is normal, appropriate or legal. Or, we can choose to exercise a different kind of privilege: to learn from gender and sexual minorities and their families and communities, so that we continue to be an active, dynamic and living profession that recognises and celebrates human diversity. We can be inspired by the courage and the sacrifices of sexual and gender minorities around the world so that we can speak out on behalf of all peoples. We social workers can, and occasionally must, be disruptive and transgressive. If social workers are to live up to the values that lie at the core of the international definition of social work—social justice, human rights, respect for diversity—our pathway is clear: to promote the dignity and worth of *all* people.

No reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa. 고맙습니다

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