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Intersectionality and Sexuality: The case of sexuality and transgender equalities work in UK local government

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E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

Structure

- Introduction
- Aims
- Methodology
- Policy context and key findings
- Intercategorical complexity
- Anticategorical approaches
- Intercategorical analysis
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Expansion of intersectionality studies
- McCall's typology of intracategorical, anticategorical and intercategorical intersectionalities useful?
- Application to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Equalities
  - The relationships between L, G, B and T
  - Do we need categorisation?
  - LGBT and other 'equalities groups'

Aims

- To explore one approach to intersectional analysis
- To ground the discussion in contemporary empirical research concerning LGBT equalities work in UK local government
- To address two gaps in intersectional research (sexuality, institutional level analysis)

Methodology

- Large ESRC funded study of local authorities in Northern Ireland, England and Wales
- Interviews with stakeholders (local/national)
- Participative Action Research

Policy context and key findings

- Tranche of recent legislation and policy directives
- Normalisation of sexuality equalities work within Local Authorities – but some overt institutional homophobia
- Term ‘intersectional’ not widely in use
- But, shift towards integrated frameworks nationally
- Ongoing debates concerning need for LGBT-specific initiatives, as opposed to generic provision

Intracategorical complexity

- Stems from feminist engagement with complexity rather then eliminating categories or maintaining group boundaries
- Often involves examining neglected interstices (following K.W. Crenshaw)

How does intracategorical intersectionality apply?

- Tensions between different sections of the LGBT ‘communities’
- Particularly marginalising intersections
- Local authorities and the LGBT acronym

Illustrative quote

- *The LGBT community, it's not actuality a community, we know that, but it's the phrase we use because it's become part of the way that we talk, but we obviously recognize that it's not, by saying the LGB or the LGBT or the BME community, that we're not implying that it's one community where all the needs are the same and all the issues are the same* (David, Officer North East)

Anticategorical approaches

- Stem from critiques of homogenous forms of identity
- Involves:
  - Challenging set categorisations
  - Revisioning existing categories into other, or more finely delineated categories

Critiques of categorisation

- Critiques vary across the LGBT ‘communities’ with some bi and trans people seeking to dismantle categories
- Some local authority actors disliked labels but it is hard to know if this is based on emancipatory politics or prejudice

- *When I hear 'LGBT' I think "Oh God", I should think it's, again, it's a label, and I know LGBT named themselves as that, but I think it makes you think "oh right, LGBT" and I think it might get people's backs up but I don't know why, that's just how I feel, it's a bit, I'm not keen on labels and that is a label, but I suppose you've got to call it something.* (Jan, Officer, North East)

Intercategorical analysis

- Focuses on relations of inequality between already constituted groups
- Not challenging to categorisation itself

Relationships between the Equalities strands

- Hierarchies of equality
- Equal equalities
- Specific areas of tension between equalities strands

- *I would be lying if I said it* [LGBT equality] *had equal status*. (Sam, Manager, North East)
- *…[the council] sent everybody on um, equalities and diversity training, um, about, I think that was about two years ago, and that, sexuality was a major thing in that, it wasn't just about racism, sexuality was a big part of it and everybody got, everybody who worked at the council got that training which fully took into account sexuality…*(Megan, Officer, North East)

Conclusion

- McCall's typology provides a device for understanding LGBT equalities work in local government
  - Differences within the LGBT acronym
  - Critiques of categorisation
  - Tensions between different 'equalities' groups