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Public Duty and Private Prejudice: sexualities equalities and local government

Abstract: Rather than critiquing social institutions and practices that have historically excluded them, as did earlier social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, since the 1990s the politics of sexuality has increasingly been about demanding equal rights of citizenship. These citizenship demands have, at least to a degree, been answered via a raft of recent legislation in the UK including the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Gender Recognition Act 2004 and the Civil Partnership Act 2004, and by associated changes in policy making and practice that emphasize 'Equality and Diversity'. In this article we consider how the implementation of sexualities equalities policies is related to processes of privatisation and individualisation. This is illustrated by using sexualities equalities work in local government as a case study to indicate how both processes of change and resistance are aided by these processes. The article draws on findings from an ESRC funded study of LGBT equalities initiatives in local government in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which examined the views of those who now have a public duty to implement recent legislative and policy shifts and are obliged to develop equalities initiatives concerning 'sexual orientation' and gender reassignment.

KEYWORDS: Sexuality, Equality, Citizenship, LGBT, Lesbian, Gay, Local Government.

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Introduction

Since the 1990s a rights-orientated assimilationist agenda has dominated lesbian and gay movements both in the UK and many other parts of the world. This is a sexual politics that is characterized by a language of citizenship and a discourse of equal rights (Bell and Binnie, 2000, Phelan 2001, Richardson 2005). It is in the name of equality that demands have been made and, to a certain extent, met (Weeks, 2007). Moreover, it is an equality defined primarily in terms of similitude. The equality that dares to speak its name is one of sameness with (some) heterosexuals. In what some writers refer to as a 'politics of normalisation', social acceptance is largely sought through emphasising the continuity of lesbian, gay and heterosexual lifestyles and values (Cooper, 2004).

The changing policy landscape in the UK over the last decade reflects these contemporary sexual citizenship demands and political agendas; with the repeal of Section 28(1) and the introduction of a raft of new legislation, including the Adoption and Children Act 2002, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Gender Recognition Act 2004, the Civil Partnership Act 2004, and associated changes in policy making and practice more generally that emphasise 'Equality and Diversity'. These developments in the legal regulation of sexual minorities, also evident in North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia, have prompted research into the likely effects of such policies on social institutions like family and marriage (Weeks et al, 2001; Stacey and Davenport, 2002; Meeks and Stein, 2006), on individuals

sense of belonging and identity (Richardson 2004), as well as debates concerning governmentality, intersectionality and models of citizenship (Plummer, 2003; Cooper and Monro 2003; Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2010).

Underlying many of these debates is the broader question of how in increasingly diverse/plural neoliberal democracies a model of universal citizenship based on equality as similitude can be maintained. As we will go on to argue, this involves a complex economy of 'seeing and not seeing' difference (Brown, 2007), where two forms of recognition are in play. Recognition of the right to belong and to be assimilated into public life as part of the 'common good' and, at the same time, recognition of difference that is typically privatised. In the UK policy context this is encapsulated by the term 'Equality and Diversity', where diversity is generally used as an 'umbrella concept' under which individual characteristics can be subsumed. Specifically, diversity acknowledges difference 'while at the same time homogenizing it' (Zanoni et al, 2010: 18) through the inscription of difference within the model of equality as sameness. That is, recognition and inclusion is established through a model of equality based on sameness, yet with respect for diversity as a cultural norm and core aspect of good citizenship underpinning rationales for 'tolerance' and 'acceptance' of new forms of inclusion.

This is a neoliberal formulation of equality in which access to new forms of citizenship relate to claims of universal belonging and, connected with this, the belief that it is not the individual's belonging to a group that confirms 'worth' in terms of belonging and recognition as equal citizens, but the worth of every individual as an individual (Phillips,2006 [1999]).These policy shifts in relation to sexuality and transgender equalities are, then, associated with a particular model of citizenship and 'politics of recognition', where there is an emphasis on individual and not group rights and the mobilisation of particular forms of governance of difference that perpetuate individualism (Englund, 2004). As various writers have argued, linked to this, 'the making of citizens' has become increasingly privatised (Phelan, 2001; Phillips, 2006), within a liberal discourse that depoliticizes as it individualises and privatises. Thus Brown (2007:17-18) states that this contributes to: '…personalization of politically contoured conflicts and inequalities. These tendencies eliminate from view various norms and social relations-especially those pertaining to capital, race, gender and sexuality-that construct and position subjects in liberal democracies.'

In this article, we consider how processes of privatisation, personalisation and individualisation are entailed not only in the construction of new citizen subjects, but also in the implementation of 'equality and diversity' policies. We illustrate this by using sexualities equalities work in local government as a case study. Research on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) equalities work provides a useful prism through which to examine these issues. The shift in the policy landscape is particularly apparent in the local government arena as lesbians and gay men, and transgender and bisexual people are becoming more fully included in the local authority equalities agenda as a result of statutory changes and local government modernisation. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature concerning the emerging LGBT equalities agenda, in particular the differences between local government rhetoric and practice concerning equalities (Mitchell et al, 2008).

The article draws on findings from an ESRC funded research project, which examined the views of those who now have a public duty to implement recent legislative and policy shifts and are obliged to develop equalities initiatives concerning 'sexual orientation' and gender reassignment. In the following discussion, we use the data first to consider how processes of privatisation are entailed in 'delivering' equality. We then go on to indicate how both drivers of and barriers and resistance to change are connected to processes of personalisation and individualisation. Where direct quotes are given this refers to different individuals in each case. The acronym LGBT is the term used for sexualities and trans equalities policies and work in local authorities. The benefits as well as the problems associated with using this collective term were recognised by participants in the study (see Author and Author, 2010; Author, Author and Author, 2010). It is also important to note that responses tended to focus on lesbian and gay and, albeit less so, trans communities; many of the participants made no specific reference to people who identify as bisexual. In this article the term LGBT is used however reflecting these findings, and in the context of the themes that are addressed, some of the discussion is more specific to lesbian and gay communities.

Methodology

To date, previous research in the UK has tended to focus on local authorities where a substantial amount of work concerning sexualities equalities has occurred, including councils with a long history of work in this area that predates these recent shifts in the policy landscape: for instance in Brighton, London and Manchester (Cooper 1994, 1997; Cooper, Carabine and Monro, 2003; Browne 2007; Lim and Browne 2009). Yet historically the majority of authorities have been inactive or minimally active in this field. In the research reported on here, a key objective therefore was to include authorities that were relatively inactive or resistant to conducting work in this field in order to understand both drivers of social change in relation to sexualities equalities work and forms of resistance. In particular, how both change and resistance is legitimated, both in terms of organisational cultures and at the individual level. As previous work has also highlighted how LGBT equalities initiatives tend to be concentrated in urban areas, a further aim was to include rural as well as urban contexts for investigation. The study is also distinguished from earlier work in that it was conducted at a time (2007-2010) when the field of LGBT initiatives in UK local government and equalities work more generally was going through a period of rapid change, including the establishment of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (ECHR) in 2008 and the introduction in 2010 of the *single* Equality Act, which replaces previous legislation such as the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. (2) (For a more detailed discussion charting research on LGBT equalities in the 1980s and 1990s through to the more recent work that is emerging see Authors , forthcoming). Another important aspect of the methodology in terms of developing previous scholarship in this field was the choice of fieldwork sites. In examining the implementation of sexualities equalities policies in Wales, Northern Ireland and England the research allowed comparisons to be made within the UK context. (See Carabine and Monro (2004) and Rahman (2004) regarding developments in Scotland.)

The study employed qualitative research methods, including a participative action research approach (PAR). Qualitative PAR approaches can be included under the

'action research' umbrella to describe 'approaches to enquiry which are participative, grounded in experience, and action-orientated' (Reason and Bradbury 2001: xxiv). Semi structured interviews were carried out with a sample of thirty seven officers, community members and partner agencies, focusing on a range of service areas, in four local authorities located in the case study areas: Northern and Southern England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These sites were purposely sampled to select authorities of different types according to political party, levels of performance, type of authority (size and structure), levels of deprivation, activity concerning equalities (3) and urban/rural settings. A further twenty interviews with key national stakeholders and councillors across the three countries were also conducted. The PAR aspect of the research involved running Action Learning Sets (ALS) in each of the four case study areas. Action Learning Sets are now used in a variety of settings, including local authorities, where groups meet regularly to discuss issues and problems with the potential for learning arising from the process (Dilworth 1998). Each ALS met four times over a period of six months, sixteen group meetings in total, with members of the ALS representing different local authorities, community organisations and partner agencies across each region.

The focus of analysis in this article is at the individual level, examining the ways in which individualising approaches to implementing LGBT work emerged in the data and how this was linked with processes of privatisation. A central issue for the study, as noted above, was to identify drivers and barriers and resistance to change in relation to promoting equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans users of, and employees in, local government and other services. We can think about this in a number of different ways and at different levels and scales for instance in terms of broader social and cultural change, organisational change and in terms of individual actors. There was a clear sense from the research that legislative and policy changes introduced over the previous decade were viewed as the key drivers of sexualities and trans equalities, alongside wider social and cultural change that had led to greater 'visibility' of LGBT issues and people, especially in terms of representation in the media and through the introduction of civil partnerships (which were seen as both reflecting and driving change). At an organisational level, cultural changes in the workplace, including forms of performance assessment associated with local government modernisation, were also identified as significant. The study also identified various barriers and forms of resistance to implementing LGBT equalities. The picture that emerged was that despite some degree of 'normalisation', the implementation of sexualities and trans equalities work was uneven and inconsistent across different authorities. At the level of institutional factors, obstacles that were identified included cultural resistance, impact of structural changes, a lack of evidence base for such work (leading to a focus on the need for benchmarking), and capacity issues in terms of resourcing equalities initiatives generally and LGBT equalities in particular, especially in the current economic climate (Author, Author and Author, 2010, Authors, forthcoming). The study also demonstrated the importance of spatial factors in structuring LGBT work, in particular issues concerning rural and small town communities and cultures (see Author 2010 for a discussion of these aspects), which other writers have also noted (Binnie 2004).

In the following discussion we are not, then, arguing that there has been a shift towards greater individualisation, and related to that privatisation, *per se.* Along with those who took part in the study, we acknowledge the attempts made by the post 1997

New Labour administration to mainstream equalities so that this was not individualised but culturally embedded in local authorities through the introduction of forms of performance management such as, for example, impact assessments and Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA). (4) What we do want to argue is that associated with this push for equalities is a shift towards individuation that can be observed in a variety of ways. This article develops this argument first by considering the trajectory from privatisation to greater public visibility of 'sexual minorities'. Connected with this, it is claimed, is a dissociation of 'being' and 'doing'; a desexualisation of identity and a (re)privatising of sexual desires and practices (Warner, 1999). This represents a new 'politics of privatisation' to that in the past, when both 'the homosexual' and (homo)sex were constructed as 'properly' located in the private and there was a notable absence of the topic in public discourse.

We then go on to discuss how the acceptability of LGBT equalities, and practices of acceptance, were related not only to processes of privatisation, but also to processes of individualisation. The latter is examined in three key respects: first in terms of how new 'boundaries of belonging' and forms of citizenship status were framed; second in terms of how problems in implementing sexualities initiatives were generally understood; and third in relation to how ways of solving implementation gaps and overcoming forms of resistance and inactivity were conceived.

Privatisation

Many of the liberal arguments for civil rights for sexual minorities in the past were couched in terms of respect for rights of privacy (Richardson, 2000), which amounted to a model of tolerance bounded by an expectation of responsibility to remain 'privatised' and stay in 'the closet'. In the context of recent legislative and policy changes that have made sexualities equalities a 'public duty' and afforded greater public recognition of LGBT communities a number of questions arise. What kinds of LGBT subjects are constructed through new forms of civic inclusion? What kinds of values and practices are associated with equality as 'sameness'? And of particular relevance to the discussion here: What processes of privatisation continue to operate?

The conferring of eligibility for new forms of citizenship status to LGBT people clearly goes beyond the privatised tolerance exemplified in the 1967 Sexual Offences Act (5). It represents a significant change in what is acceptable in certain public spheres and, moreover, of moral discourses constitutive of public life, in this case local authority contexts. Although difference is retained via the LGBT acronym and associated equality strands, it is now relocated from a 'counter public' position to one of a new status and location where the threat of difference to moral and social order is 'managed'. As Seidman remarks in his analysis of such trends in the US, within this discourse the 'normal gay' is: '… presented as fully human, as the psychological and moral equal of the heterosexual, and accordingly gays should be integrated into America as respected citizens' (Seidman, 2002: 133).

Within this new framework, access to 'equal rights' for LGBT people is contingent on conforming to a 'responsibilised' model of sexual citizenship that (re)asserts the idea of sexuality as a private concern and at the same time constitutes a normative public, where the 'appropriate' expression of sexual relations is located in long-term, monogamous, relationships modelled on (hetero) normative marriage and family values (Richardson, 2004). (6) Seidman (2002) makes a similar argument, claiming that the (re)making of lesbian and gay citizens is:

'…associated with specific social behaviours. For example, the normal gay is expected to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride .' (Seidman, 2002:13)

Being recognised as 'normal' 'ordinary' citizens is not simply, then, about being regarded as individuals with the same rights to others, it involves the (re)production of new citizen subjects (Taylor, 1994), who subscribe to homogenising, culturally unifying norms including, paradoxically, respect for diversity. Brown (2007), speaking of the privatisation of citizenship more broadly, identifies three forces at work in such transformations: recognition, remaking and marking. Recognition refers to rights of membership, remaking to the processes of incorporation as 'ordinary citizens' via normalization, as alluded to by Seidman, and marking as the construction of difference, through naturalizing and essentialising processes, as something that is a part of an individual's make up. In our case, the marking of difference as a matter of human sexual nature reflected in the use of the essentialist term 'sexual orientation' within equalities policies and organisations (see Mitchell et al, 2008).

According to various writers, this incorporation into the public/ civic inclusion represents a'domestication' (Phelan, 2001) and a 'desexualizing' of lesbians and more especially gay men, as well as a depolitization of 'difference' (Warner, 1999). Duggan (2002) links this to what she terms a 'new homonormativity' which '….does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatised, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan, 2002:50).

Along with new forms of belonging and citizenship status, then, can be observed a privatisation of lesbian and gay as *sexual* identities that is associated with the emphasis on 'ordinariness' and 'sameness'. There is, in other words, a de-emphasis on sexuality. Yet sexuality is (still) the location of difference. It is this which is the marker of difference that potentially troubles the claims to sameness that underlay the 'just the same as everyone else' model of inclusion and recent shifts in the policy landscape. Such trouble is managed, in part, through a bracketing off of difference in essentialist terms as 'sexual orientation'. Sexuality here is used to refer to a property of the person, something 'natural' and embodied, a personal characteristic, not as a social system that relies on socially constructed categories and distinctions that are productive of inequalities in the first place. The bracketing off of 'difference' highlights the continued relevance of sexuality at one and the same time as it is deemed to be 'irrelevant' in terms of this being about the rights of individuals as individuals.

This is relevant to interpreting the findings from our study because, as we go on to discuss, we found that there were a number of aspects which appeared to make sexualities equalities different from other forms of equalities work that were specifically connected to it being about sexuality, including affective issues and associations with immorality. As Humphrey (1999) points out, if professionalism is grounded upon erasure of sexuality in the emphasis upon the individual and universality, then this may make it difficult for both staff and clients to address such issues.

A 'bracketing off of difference' was apparent in the findings, in the representation of the acceptability of LGBT equality almost entirely in terms of the person, their individual rights, and not about sexual rights or what they 'do'. This is exemplified in the following quote from one of the stakeholder interviews.

> It's about who you are not what you do, so we don't get into what you do. Whether we would in future, I don't know, but we are, I think we are an assimilationist organization. We're just the same as you, and it's fine is kind of part of our message.

This was also expressed as one aspect of the 'discomfort' associated with LGBT equalities (discussed in the section on barriers and resistance below) particularly in relation to the boundaries of acceptability to forms of sexual conduct such as kissing in public. Here although there is discursive inclusion it is not an embodied visibility. As the following quote illustrates, for some there were felt spatial limits to the 'enfleshed' embodied presence.

> LGBT equality is becoming more accepted and understood, but at the same time there are still quite a lot of people who don't understand why we're doing it or have the attitude of "It's OK, so long as you don't kiss in front of me, or shove it in my face", who don't see equality as actual equality.

That local authorities now have a public duty to implement recent legislative and policy shifts that recognise the rights of LGBT people carries with it an expectation that staff will take such recognition into their public lives at work. However, it was clear from the findings that there were seen to be limits to this not only in terms of the kinds of barriers and resistance we found, which are discussed later, but also in regard to drivers in terms of the limits of acceptance that were also related to processes of privatisation. Some writers have distinguished tolerance, as an attitude and 'virtue', from toleration, as forms of practice (see Brown 2007). In our study *overt* homophobia, which might include the expression of negative attitudes about sexual minorities, refusal to provide services and work with such groups and 'office banter', was generally considered to be no longer socially acceptable in the workplace, even though it was clear from the data that homophobic practices still did occur and could lead to LGBT staff feeling it was 'unsafe' to come out at work.

Although many of those we interviewed expressed desire for change through winning 'hearts and minds', it was recognised that one was often more likely to be dealing with behavioural change to be addressed through putting professional mechanisms in

place, including training opportunities and personal performance management. In other words, 'acceptance' of LGBT equality was framed predominantly in behavioural terms rather than in terms of a person's attitudes and beliefs: what was considered acceptable behaviour in the public spheres of local authority work. Although it is important to acknowledge that some contexts of work could be regarded as less public and more 'off-duty' than others. These tensions were managed in some authorities through reference to professionalization. LGBT equalities work was framed as part of professional norms and duties, an ethic of public service and care that is typically associated with public sector organizations (Humphrey 1999), regardless of a person's private beliefs. Related to this it was also, in part, about the management of prejudice through privatising it. Several participants, for example, recognised that some staff may retain their prejudices to LGBT people despite the new public duties associated with the single Equality Act. However, they frequently emphasised a workplace culture modality that rejected prejudice being enacted or voiced publically with potential negative consequences for a person's career if this did occur. There were, then, acknowledged differences between public normalcy of LGBT equalities and private practice, as the following quotes illustrate.

> you might put a policy there but if someone's homophobic it's not going to change the fact they're homophobic, um, I think it's more of a case that 'I can't do that or express my personal opinion because I'll get in trouble and it could affect my career'

> I think the council, you can't change people's minds necessarily but you can change their behaviour in terms of what you accept and what's acceptable behaviour and what's manageable…as an employer the council has an absolute role in doing everything it can to remove those issues from the workforce and from the delivery of services, but there's a reality to that in that you can't change an individual's personal view and thoughts, all you can do is determine what is acceptable behaviour on their part in those situations.

> It's about people being given very clear parameters, you do that ever again I will sack you, I don't care what you think when you go home or what you say when you're down the pub, well I do but nevertheless I can't legislate against that but when it's reported to me [at work] that's a clear example.

What this suggests is that the increased public acceptability (if not acceptance) of LGBT individuals/issues also represents, in this context at least, a shift from a previously privatised tolerance to a privatisation of intolerance. What we have referred to as public duty occurring alongside private prejudice.
In the following section, we go on to discuss how drivers of, and barriers and resistance to, implementation of sexualities equalities policies were related not only to processes of privatisation, but also to processes of individualisation.

Individualising Rationales of Change

In attempting to understand drivers and barriers to change it is first important to contextualise what those in the study perceived as the rationale for recent legislative and policy changes.(7) At the time fieldwork was carried out the single Equality Bill was going through parliament, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission had recently been established. Several participants, both in the Action Leaning Sets and in

the interviews, were of the opinion that this was a positive move and one that could act as a driver in promoting LGBT equalities.

> If you actually say "We are going to look at all the different
> equality strands, including LGBT", that is an immediate driver
> …you know, this is not making sense from the perspective of a
> citizen, people with all sorts of factors and facets, considering
> them only under a disability scheme, where is that taking us?
> ....Why would you focus on one aspect of a person rather than
> look at them in the round?

Others, however, expressed a number of concerns over the move towards an integrated equalities approach, in some respects mirroring those associated with the use of the LGBT acronym, that it would dilute the specificity of issues pertaining to different equality strands; what one participant described as the risk of becoming 'diversity neutral'. Another similarly commented:

> So we don't talk about being gay and we don't talk about gay rights and
> we don't talk about different races..so we're closed in on neutrality.

We have discussed the wider intersectionality issues raised by the research elsewhere (see Author and Author 2010; Author, Author and Author, 2010). Here the point we want to address is how this shift towards an integrated approach might pertain to the individualisation of rationales for equalities work. If we interpret this shift as emphasising the importance of looking at a person 'in the round', as the quote above suggests, then it perhaps makes it easier to think of a more individualised /personalised notion of delivering services. On the other hand, one could argue that such an approach might be understood as de-individualising equalities work, captured nicely in one person's description of this as 'sheep-dipping'. As we have outlined in the introduction, within this rhetoric of unity individualism is tempered through constructions of 'sameness'. As Brown (2006:36) notes: 'Liberal equality is premised upon sameness; it consists in our being regarded as the same or seen in terms of our sameness by the state, and hence being treated in the same way by the law.' Associated with this, we have argued, is that 'difference' is rendered 'private' and 'individual'.

It was clear in the research findings that recent legislative and policy changes were typically framed in this way, not as about advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights, but as individual rights. That is, about extending the same rights and entitlements to LGBT people as those shared by other (heterosexual) citizens.

> We don't provide services because people are lesbian or gay or
> bisexual …what we do is provide all services….all of it is
> open to people who meet the criteria…

As various authors have documented (Phelan, 2001, Cooper 2004, Weeks 2008), and was noted in the introduction, such understandings of equality mirror the dominant political discourse of LGBT movements in recent years. Claims to citizenship have predominantly been articulated in terms of 'sameness' rather than 'difference', a 'just

like you' model of equality, often referred to as a politics of 'normalisation' or 'assimilation' (Richardson, 2004, 2005). That is, an asserting of commonality over and above group difference, a shared belonging to an imagined wider community.

Individualising Barriers and Resistance to Change

Barriers that were seen as preventing or slowing down organisational change included lack of or poor leadership, again underlying the importance placed on key individuals and personal characteristics. Various individualised forms of resistance were also identified. For instance, barriers and resistance to change were frequently explained in psychological terms as the effects of 'discrimination' and 'prejudice', the latter term used more frequently in Northern Ireland, as well as 'homophobia' and less so transphobia (biphobia was referred to hardly at all and lesbophobia never), terms that are often used to describe prejudice and discrimination against LGBT people. This focus led to an emphasis on resistance to sexualities equalities as a consequence of individual discriminatory practices. For example, a substantial number of research participants referred to the negative impact of certain managers and councillors who were unsympathetic to LGBT equality issues. Attitudinal resistance of this kind was sometimes seen as linked to political parties and faith communities that had in the past been unsympathetic to LGBT 'equality', and where active resistance could be seen as a matter of 'pride', though several participants recognised that this was not inevitable giving examples where such expectations had been contradicted. Within public sector organisations a substantial number of participants referred to older, white, male, heterosexual staff, often in senior positions as managers –as well as elected members- as being 'homophobic'.

Forms of resistance ranged from omission to erasure through to the active blocking of LGBT equalities initiatives, both administratively and politically, as is illustrated in the following quotes. In the first case all reference to sexualities is effectively removed by substituting the more 'diversity neutral' term 'different communities'. In the second quote resistance is through more direct blocking.

> Interviewee: I've had red lines through reports, where I've used the
> terminology, 'lesbian, gay, bisexual' (-)
> Interviewer: Right, so they want you to take out that?
> Interviewee: Yes.
> Interviewer: And use 'sexual orientation'?
> Interviewee: And just use 'different communities'.

> Initiatives were blocked, basically stopped above my head
> and didn't go any further within the Council. I just remember
> sitting down with them (local voluntary sector organisation)
> and making a note of all their suggestions and then sending
> the memo to line management and it didn't go any
> further…politically handcuffed.

In addition to not being afforded the same level of consideration as other equalities strands, typically being seen as at the 'bottom of the pile', what was also evident from the data was that sexualities equalities work was understood to be about 'sensitive

issues' in ways that did not appear to characterise other areas of equalities work. Colgan et al (2009), in exploring factors encouraging 'good practice' in 'sexual orientation' equality work, also highlight how such work continues to be perceived as a 'sensitive' area, posing a significant challenge to getting organisational as well as individual commitment to sexualities equalities initiatives. Similarly in our study we found that views about sexuality more generally –and LGBT issues in particular- being 'personal' and belonging in the 'private sphere' were particularly salient barriers to sexualities equalities work. In both the interviews and the Action Learning Sets such issues of 'appropriateness' and being 'out of place' were seen as leading to people being generally much less comfortable talking about these aspects of equality. Levels of personal discomfort were frequently described in terms of feelings of nervousness and embarrassment.

> Interviewee: Erm, I mean that again was, you could see people squirming in their seats, you know it was something that I've, you know, 'do we really need?' [laughs], 'do we really need to discuss this?' sort of thing [laughs], without saying it, but you could tell (-)
> Interviewer: Yeah.
> Interviewee: You could see, you could hear people sort of starting
> to shuffle in their seats, and you know, suddenly the eyes are sort
> of on the floor [laughs].
>
> Interviewee: I have been told, 'oh my god, how far does this
> damned equalities gender agenda go?' You know, 'for goodness sake,
> is nothing safe?'. And (-)
> Interviewer: And what do you think that's about?
> Interviewee: I think it's about perhaps people being embarrassed,
> I think it's about, 'we got this far without thinking about that', you know,
> 'oh, we're a local authority for goodness sake, leave that to Stonewall
> or somebody', 'we can't go out to families, we can't put that sort
> of [inaudible] on our website, we can't put a link, a link to Stonewall off
> the council's website' [tone of disbelief]. (8)

A further barrier to this area of equalities work was the stigma attached to it. This, combined with the fact that sexual identities may be 'hidden', led to fears about reputation amongst some staff if they were seen to be carrying out such work, in particular that their heterosexuality might be under question. As one person stated, 'I don't do this because I am gay'. There were also fears of a different nature. A significant number of respondents talked about fears about 'not knowing' about LGBT issues and the risk of being ignorant in working with LGBT people, talking almost as if they were 'a race apart', which seemed in stark contrast to the equality in sameness model of citizenship underpinning contemporary equalities work. Acknowledging such factors, several participants ventured that doing sexualities equalities work 'takes a lot of guts', demanding 'bravery' and 'courage'.

So far I have discussed how barriers and resistance were linked to personal characteristics in terms of forms of leadership skills and affective issues influencing sexualities equalities work. The importance of personal value systems and beliefs was something that was also evident. In the final section we examine these factors in relation to ways of solving implementation gaps, and overcoming barriers and forms

of resistance and inactivity. As we shall see, here again we can observe an individualising of processes associated with implementing sexualities equalities initiatives.

Individualising Drivers of Change

Although legislative and policy changes, as well as local government modernisation, were identified as the main drivers of change, what the findings also clearly demonstrated in line with other studies was that there is an 'implementation gap' between policy and practice on sexual orientation (see, for example, Colgan et al 2007), which often manifests as the inclusion of LGBT equalities in high level policy documents with little being done 'on the ground'. The most common articulation of this was through the frequent reference in the interviews and the Action Learning Sets to a 'tick-box approach' to LGBT equalities work. Therefore, even though most of the participants in the study identified institutional and organisational changes as key to taking the LGBT equalities agenda forward, and some could see certain benefits even with a 'tick-box approach' in getting the issues on the agenda at least, they also expressed the view that the extent to which this was likely to be 'made real' was largely dependant on key individuals proactively 'championing' LGBT equalities initiatives.

The emphasis on the individual actor as an agent of change took a number of forms. There was a substantial amount of data that illustrated the perceived importance of leadership, both in terms of senior management roles within local authorities and from outside in particular via the public political support of elected members. In this sense the findings suggested a 'top down' model of social change, via individuals who demonstrated strong leadership and commitment, and who could act as a 'catalyst' to bring others on board to implement equalities policies.

> If people are using language that's inappropriate here (at work)
> they'll use it elsewhere, so we've got to tackle it…I'm not a manager
> who will just listen and put it to one side. It will be tackled…
> and I am very aware that if I take action in one place,
> it will have a ripple effect.

This emphasis on individual 'champions' was also reflected in how the role of LGBT communities in driving change was described in personalised and depolitized ways. There was discussion in both the interviews and the Action Learning Sets of LGBT community members having influence via community engagement structures and processes such as membership on Local Strategic Partnership Boards, however the role of LGBT movements in campaigning for 'equal rights' was hardly ever mentioned. Only a handful of people talked about the 'bottom up' approach to social change, and associated with this, the role of the 'grassroots' in making change possible.

> I think in my heart of hearts, that a lot of people get given
> the credit for it, and I think that that is big agencies like Stonewall
> do a lot of the pushing and therefore get a lot of the credit, but
> I think that the impetus for change always comes from the community,
> and I think that that's very, very rarely acknowledged.

Front line workers as well as managers were also seen as important actors in some instances. The importance of having committed staff to champion the LGBT equalities agenda was seen by some as a rationale for having dedicated LGBT officers within local authorities charged with a specific remit to advance such agendas. At the same time, it was acknowledged that this held a number of risks, which for some meant they were opposed to LGBT staff taking on this role. As Humphrey's found in her study of lesbian and gay employees in public sector organizations in the UK, such a policy could also 'ghettoize' lesbian and gay staff and their clients (Humphrey, 1999). The data from our study suggested that a primary concern was that it could sediment individualisation of such work and make mainstreaming of LGBT issues more difficult to establish, as well risking a lack of continuity if staff left due to over reliance on one person/post. Related to this, there was also reference to people becoming exhausted and 'burnt out'. In considering how taking forward LGBT equalities was individualised, it is important therefore to consider the constraints on individuals in taking on such roles and carrying out such work. Findings from the study also showed that this was work that was generally seen as 'low priority', as well as coming with certain risks. Indeed, one interviewee went so far as to say it would represent 'career suicide'. As Humphrey (1999) also alludes to, where there is reliance on key managers, staff and community activists to implement equalities policies this can 'spell trouble' for local authorities. Indeed, we would argue that this is likely to be one of the reasons why we found implementation uneven within organisations and inconsistent across local authorities.

Conclusion

In this study it was clear that both the policy and legislative change and local government modernisation associated with increasing managerialism, as well as wider social and cultural change, were seen as significant drivers of the sexualities equalities agenda. Nevertheless, alongside this, there was a dominant framing of LGBT equalities in terms of individual actors. We have detailed in this article, how in the implementation of sexualities equalities policies the importance of individuals who championed such agendas was frequently highlighted by those who took part in the study, especially in local authorities where such work was not yet embedded. There was an emphasis on the 'personal' and affective aspects of such equalities work, described in terms such as it being 'sensitive', involving personal discomfort and fear, as well as prejudice and 'homophobia'. We also see this in the emphasis on individual and not group rights, reflected in the lack of a visible role of LGBT movements in the data apart from rights based 'assimilationist' organisations such as, for example, Stonewall. This therefore indicates that individualisation is at the heart of the processes involved in the rollout of the sexualities equalities agenda.

The focus of analysis in this article has been on examining the ways in which such individualising approaches to implementing LGBT work were apparent in local authorities. We have also sought to show how this was also closely linked with processes of privatisation. While for the purposes of this article we have dealt with these separately, we recognize the limitations of doing so. The important question that we also need to address is how are the two interlinked? Do these processes work in parallel, mirroring each other, or is there a directional influence in one leading to the

other? Does, for instance, privatisation automatically produce individualisation? And, if not, is this what is being resisted sometimes? It would seem from the analysis of barriers and resistance to sexualities equalities that processes of individualisation and privatisation were interlinked. Whereas in terms of driving change they were often not; what is significant here is public visibility and commitment of individuals. These inter-relationships require further analysis than is possible within the scope of this article and will be addressed in future work.

Footnotes

1. Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, which banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities and the teaching in maintained schools of the acceptability of homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship', was repealed in 2000 in Scotland and in 2003 in the rest of the UK.

2. The Equality and Human Rights Commission was established by the Equality Act 2006, unifying the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Disability Rights Commission, with responsibility to promote equality in relation to age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, ethnicity, religion and belief and sexual orientation. It came into being in October 2007, exactly the same time as the project started. Fieldwork was carried out from February 2008 through to October 2009. The single Equality Act became law in October 2010.

3. The Equalities Standard, launched in 2001, was developed as a tool to facilitate local authorities to mainstream equalities work and is assessed on a five point scale, with 5 being the highest grading.

4. In England, Best Value was replaced with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2002-3, followed by the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in 2009; however the CAA was abolished in May 2010[i]. [1] http:www.audit-commission.gov.uk/localgov/aaudit.caa/pages/default.aspx (accessed 01.07.2010).

5. The Sexual Offences Act (1967) decriminalised consensual sexual acts between men over the age of twenty-one in 'private'. The law applied only to England and Wales; and did not become law in Scotland until 1981 and in Northern Ireland until 1982.

6. The primary focus of same sex recognition has been on civil partnerships (Taylor 2011). However, in so far as such forms of liberal inclusion are understood to be about individual 'choice' associated with personal feelings of love for another, there is an individualisation in claims for the public recognition of certain forms of coupledom.

7. There were three main ways in which sexualities equalities initiatives were framed. First, in terms of better service provision and, related to this, modernisation; second, social justice models and third, the least commented upon, the business case focused upon potential economic benefits.

8. Stonewall was founded in 1989 as a cross party lobbying group to put the case for lesbian and gay equality on the mainstream political agenda. Since then it has become

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established as a national voice of lesbian and gay politics, and has expanded its activities to include work that involves promoting research into LGB discrimination and ''partnerships with organisations outside of Parliament''. These ''partners'' include the police, local councils, health trusts and others through their ''Diversity Champions''scheme see www.stonewall.org.uk

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