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Transforming Citizenship?: (Re) making sexualised borders of in/tolerance

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Policy Context

Range of LGBT equalities legislation introduced in the UK includes:

- Adoption and Children Act, 2002
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations, 2003
- Gender Recognition Act, 2004
- Civil Partnerships Act, 2004
- Equality Regulations (Sexual Orientation), 2007
- Single Equality Act, 2010

Social Change

Substantial change in social attitudes towards LGBT people:

"We've commissioned a voluntary sector organisation to set up a consultation network with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people … and I've only been able to do that really because the law's changed and because I can see in all the documents coming out on comprehensive performance assessment that they're explicitly going to be targeting these issues, so now if I get challenged, "Why are you doing this?", I can say very clearly "You cannot be an excellent council if you're not doing this".

"We've probably arrived at the stage where all people would recognise that there are gay people in their community and accept fully that they have a duty to support them, which I think is probably a progression. I think in the past certain people would have had difficulty being involved with people from those communities"

LGBT Equalities Initiatives in Local Government

- Large ESRC funded study in local authorities in Northern Ireland, North and Southern England, and Wales

- Interviews with local authority officers (at different levels, different services) and partners in voluntary/community organisations (37)

- Participative Action Research, Action Learning Sets in each of the 4 case study areas (40)

- Interviews with key national stakeholders and councillors (20)

Research Themes

- Drivers of sexualities equalities work in local authorities
- Resistance to sexualities equalities work in local authorities
- Citizenship issues
- Organisational change
- Tensions between equality strands
- Tensions within the LGBT equality strands

Privatisation/Individualisation

- How new 'boundaries of belonging' and forms of citizenship status are framed

- How ways of driving forward change and overcoming resistance are conceived

- How problems in implementing sexualities equalities initiatives are generally understood

Group or Individual Rights?

"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…" (Local Authority Officer)

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…we're closed in on neutrality" (Local Authority Officer)

Public Duty and Private Prejudice

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. (Local Authority Officer)

Public Duty and Private Prejudice

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. (Local Authority Officer)

Privatisation

- Privatised Tolerance
- Public Recognition
- (Re) Privatising of Sexuality
- Privatised Prejudice

Find out more

Website: http://research.ncl.ac.uk/selg/

Richardson, D. and Monro, S. (2013) 'Public Duty and Private Prejudice: Sexualities Equalities and Local Government', *Sociological Review*, 61(1): 131-152.

Monro, S. and Richardson, D. (forthcoming 2014) 'Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Populations: the Role of English Local Government', *Local Government Studies.*

Find out more

Sexuality, Equality
and Diversity (2012)
D. Richardson and
S. Monro
Palgrave Macmillan
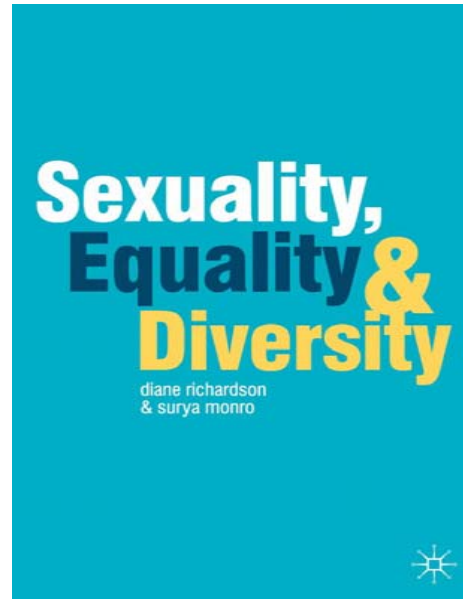
Barriers and Resistance

- Newness and limitations of legislative changes
- Affective Issues (sexuality private and/or embarrassing issue)
- Organisational Cultures
- Attitudes and norms about sexuality and gender
- Hierarchy of equalities strands
- Value attached to such work
- Relative invisibility of LGBT population compared to some other equalities groups (benchmarking)
- Resources Stretched

Forms of Resistance

- Proactive: This is something we positively support and champion

- Compliance
- Omission
- Erasure
- Active Resistance

Compliance

- You know, we'll do what we have to, we'll tick a box if we have to.

  And so what they'll do is they'll comply, but they simply can't go beyond that and, you know, compliance is just the beginning of it. In fact, you can be very effective in complying with something and do quite negative practice. (Manager, Southern England)

Omission

- ## We would if we could

I think what makes it difficult is there are still limited resources to do the work…so you always feel like you're overstretched in all you do, and that's quite hard. You know you're very motivated, but also very tired.

(Local Authority Officer, Northern England)

- Wide variation: implementation uneven

- Direct and indirect discrimination in some cases

- The importance of affect: Nervousness, embarrassment; 'privacy'

- A hierarchy of equalities strands ('a pecking order') evident in all local authorities

- Notions of worthiness and 'deserving' and 'underserving' inequalities

Lack of challenge as a form of resistance to change.

When you're a councillor you see all kinds of discrimination and you get people who say "I would never work with a person like that". OK, that's entirely up to them, you're not going to change that person.

Erasure: As a form of not seeing

- ## Is there a need?

It's very important to me from a HR point of view to make sure that those people [LGBT] are not discriminated against, but I cannot think of any incidence where anyone has been discriminated about, against, and if they had been surely I would have known because it would have come to me as a case. (Councillor, Southern England)

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'?*

Iinterviewee: *And just use 'different communities'.*

(Equalities Manager, Wales)

Individualisation

- Individual rather than Collective Rights
- Individual Actor as Agent of Change
- Individual Actor As Agent of Resistance

Active Resistance

- We don't really want to know, we oppose LGBT equalities

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 the suggestions and then sending the memo to line management and it didn't go any further…politically handcuffed.
(LGB Community Worker, Northern Ireland)

Current Context

Coalition Government; Austerity Measures

- Adequate Resources
- Value given to such work
- Processes of monitoring equality measures
- New forms of resistance

I mean, it's the only prejudice I know where people can make a homophobic comment and at the same time make some kind of claim about their moral character

Implementation

- Legislative and policy drivers
- Leadership/Proactive Approach
- Local Government Modernisation (performance measures)
- Adequate Resources
- Local partnerships

- Intersections
- Areas of Resistance
- Agents of Resistance

Individual rights/Sexual rights?

- 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 organisation. We're just the same as you, and it's fine is kind of part of our message. (Stakeholder Interview)

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.

Organisational Change

- *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'm very aware that if I take action in one place, it will have a ripple effect.*

- *People might say that legislation doesn't have an impact on the grassroots, but it does because it creates that lever where you can say 'You need to do something about this'*