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Faith-Sexuality Intersections and the Rhetorics of Tolerance: The case of LGBT equalities initiatives in local government in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

Surya Monro, Diane Richardson, and Ann
McNulty



Aims

- To explore issues around the rhetorics of tolerance in relation to LGBT equalities work
- Focusing on different levels
- With attention to faith/sexualities intersections



Structure

- Methodology
- Policy context and key findings
- A discursive rhetorics of moderation
- Individual identities and moderation
- The professional management of divergence
- Democracy and civil society
- Conclusion



Methodology

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



Policy context and key findings

- Tranche of recent legislation and policy directives
- Normalisation of LGBT equalities work and emergence of notions of 'good gay citizen' BUT:
- Implementation patchy and cross-cut by spatial, political and differences between/across LGBT groups
- Tensions around sexuality, faith and sectarianism



Illustrative quotes

- *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 **"its 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*
- *I would say though that our society here in general is its pretty bi-polar in relation to sexuality there's much increased acceptance of different sexualities in one regard but there is...**bigotry towards people with minority sexualities or different sexualities hidden behind the face of religious freedom of expression***



Moderation at discursive levels

- Equalities policies and ‘box ticking’
- Blocking of initiatives despite rhetorical commitment
- Stigma and the limits to ‘acceptability’
- Bisexuality and trans more erased
- Tradition and nationalism reinforce discursive erasure
- The issue of ‘diversity neutral’



Illustrative quotes

- *I've had red lines through reports, where I've used the terminology, 'lesbian, gay, bisexual' (-)*
- *I think, from what I gather, that what they are trying to achieve or what they're assuming is that we are far enough down the line, that diversity is so embedded in everything that we do, that we don't necessarily need to specifically highlight it*



Individual identities and moderation

- Overt homophobia not acceptable (although overtly homophobic behaviour does take place)
- But tolerance framed in behavioural terms not attitudes, so that differences managed via professionalism
- Recognition that people might retain prejudices in private



Illustrative quote

- 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 its more a case that 'I can't do that or express my personal opinion because I'll get in trouble and it'll affect my career*



The professional management of divergences

- Leadership, rules and sanctions
- ‘Wrapping up’ LGBT equalities with other work
- Using professional discourses, structures and mechanisms in order to support equalities



Illustrative quote

- **Interviewer:** Sure. Ok. I'm just wondering what role, what you think the impact of the diversity champions scheme has had?
- **Interviewee:** *Oh huge. I mean it's the biggest, fastest growing employment forum. It works, people love it. It's good value for money, it's not extortionately expensive. People like it, they like using our logo, you see it on all their adverts. They advertise, they follow our recommendations and they really like it. Yeah, it's great and local authorities do quite well. I mean there's quite a few local authorities in the top 100.*



Democracy and civil society

- Recognition of multiple conflicting voices within local democratic processes
- Hierarchies of equality
- A tolerance of intolerance
- Unexpected alliances



Illustrative quotes

- *Don't touch sexuality because it might offend people who have strong Christian or Muslim views*
- *One of the really odd things that developed out of this homophobia, anti-homophobia protocol launch, both Bishops attended, to get the Church of Ireland Bishop there we thought was a major success but to have the Catholic Bishop attending as well left us slightly shell-shocked...even today the Bishop, the Anglican Bishop, the Church of Ireland Bishop might call in for a cup of coffee and a chat. Very few gay centres [in Northern Ireland] where you will call in and find the local Anglican Bishop having a coffee and a chat...*



Conclusion

- ‘Moderation’ is not equally spread
- Equality and diversity acknowledges AND subsumes difference, creating a ‘rhetorics of moderation’
- Individualising and depoliticising difference, within context of neoliberalism
- At the same time, the ‘rhetorics of moderation’ creates levers that can be used to support equality



Our outputs

- <http://research.ncl.ac.uk/selg/>
- *Sexuality, Equality and Diversity* (Palgrave Macmillan forthcoming 2012, paperback and hardback)

