Getting On? Doing Sexuality Then and Now

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Twenty years ago, I had barely started my undergraduate degree at The University of Edinburgh; this was before UK Universities competed for Stonewall recognition as the most 'Gay Friendly' institutions, a somewhat awkward recognition, at least initially revolving around proximity to commercialised scene spaces, rewarding elite institutions for 'doing diversity' (without necessarily *being* diverse) (Ahmed, 2006, 2012; Taylor, 2013; Falconer and Taylor, 2016). But the story of getting out, getting to a 'big city', to 'come out' resonated then (Weston, 1995), as it likely does now, even as these stories are questioned, in their reproduction of specific mobile raced-classed-gendered sexual-subjects. A sense of having arrived in place, with or without Stonewall Diversity Champions to mentor and guide us (see: http://www.stonewall.org.uk/diversity-champions-programme), continues to be celebrated – as well as rendered insecure in the face of continued discrimination and inequality experienced, differently, by LGBTQ groups and individuals.

Just before leaving Edinburgh to go to York in pursuit of postgraduate studies in gender, Section 28/Clause 2 was being heavily debated: the Clause had stated that a local authority 'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. It was repealed on 21 June 2000 in Scotland by the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. It one of the first pieces of legislation enacted by the newly devolved Scottish Parliament, and on 18 November 2003 the rest of the United Kingdom followed suit (Taylor, 2005). In quite a short period of time the landscape of 'sexual citizenship' was changing at in was in that climate that I undertook my PhD on *Working-Class Lesbian Life* (Taylor, 2007). Highlighting the particular intersections of class and sexuality would likely look different now compared with then, but it would likely still be 'what I do'; I've felt this labour as a privilege and a condescension ('are you still doing that') (Taylor, 2012a).

The *World We've Won* (Weeks, 2007), marked by legislative changes, protection and recognition, is as McDermott (2011) points out, an uneven one, and one which 'we' might not be, want or easily fit into. The terminology found in equalities policies and official guidance on LGBTQ inclusion can gloss over the evidently enduringly controversial nature of sexualities and gender intersectional issues. Indeed, such terminology and policy never names class as a 'protected characteristic', unable to reconcile profound social-economic injustice within a frame of recognitions, however many academics debate the intersection between social-economic-cultural. Often evidence of cultural transformation around sexual politics and identities form a narrative of progressive change, but what is also found woven through the same works is an accompanying narrative of partial 'stasis', or 'lack of change' (Ekins and King, 2006: 222). In the context of Brexit, we now see a polarisations of Englishness/Scottishness/Britishness vis-à-vis sexual and gender rights.

This backwards-forwards motion, in research reflections, embodied in research labours and careers, in institutional and disciplinary knowledges, create spaces even as these are consented, restricting as well as stretching. Sex education is another messy field, where sex and relationship education is neither consistent nor systematic (Youdell, 2005, 2011). Whether or not questions of, for example, gender identity, including non-binary and trans identities, are included in the classroom falls to individual schools, and/or individual teachers, with research showing that 90% of primary and secondary school staff have had no training to support LGBT students (Stonewall, 2017). There are still many inconsistencies surrounding the provision of sex education in schools, even tough it is globally accepted that young people have a right to school-based sexuality education (WHO, 2010). And there are huge gaps between official sexuality education and diverse young people's lived experiences (Sundaram and Sauntson, 2016). Anxieties about youth 'at risk', now sit alongside digital anxieties, with social media also used as a place for learning about sexualities, genders and relationships – often reproducing heteronormative versions of these. Still, the drive to include diversity on school curriculum, can be a specific neoliberal drive to get this 'right' as a matter of measurement (e.g. fewer teenage pregnancies as a measure of success) and technocratic efficiency. Again, we see the problematic return to, and perhaps inevitable use of, liberal notions of progressiveness and recognition (Binnie, 2011).

I'm now a Unit Lead for the Athena Swan application at my current institution. Gender equality agendas continue to gain momentum across UK HEIs through strategic intervention programmes, such as Athena SWAN and the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan (GAP), which requires universities to develop their own action plans to achieve the target and training our teachers to address gender stereotyping. Yet the discourse of 'gender equality' most often practically translates to simple binary conceptions, assessed by the number of women in leadership roles, which risks a simple count and understates the complexity and intersectionality of gender, at play in institutions and scholarship. Such policies arguably also undermines the existence and lived realities of trans and gender diverse students and scholars, whose gendered narratives are less linear, but multifaceted and complex (Hines, 2006; Morgan and Taylor, 2016). This conceptualisation of 'protected characteristics' as set out in the Equality Act 2010 – of which 'gender reassignment' is one – as discrete categories of implicit and one-dimensional difference has been largely absorbed by the public sector, where legislative requirements often sit alongside easy rhetorics and uneasy realities (Taylor, 2012b). Increasingly visibility and legal status, characteristic of progressive neoliberal forms of legitimacy such gay marriage, often fails to trouble on-going established norms and discriminatory practice. Often, there is a re-appropriation of diversity and difference as marketable commodities (Duggan, 2003; Elliott, 2014; Talburt and Rasmussen, 2010).

The identification and articulation of 'lesbian' has become, it seems, a rather unfashionable one, giving way to the 'queer citizen', and we can pause on what the next 20 years of *Sexualities* might look like with such shifts: will the language of 'diversity' also be rendered redundant? Will there be a shift in the sense of what sexuality studies is doing, beyond proliferating more case study examples? Will there be generational and geographical tensions or resolve in having 'been there and done that' (Arondekar and Patel, 2016)? Will significant challenges from the Global South, shift Anglo-American domination, or will citational practices still orientate towards a USA

landscape? 20 years of *Sexualities*, is something to celebrate with such temporal markers offering a sense of legibility, even if this is unsettled by enduring questions.
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