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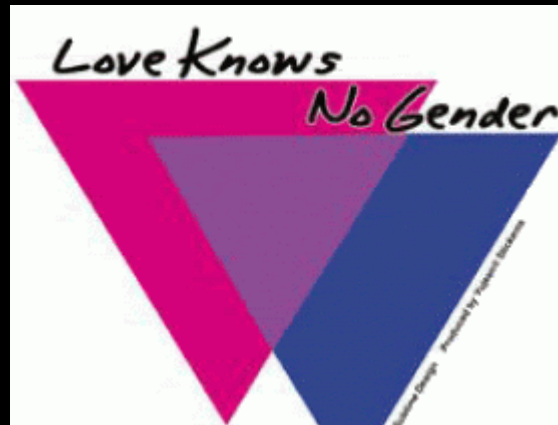
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BISEXUALITY: ACTIVISM, CITIZENSHIP AND QUEERNESS



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Aims and objectives

- ▣ To look at the ways that UK bisexual activists do and do not relate to citizenship claims
- ▣ To use indicative material from Columbia in order to provide some cross-cultural comparison

Methodology

- Bisexual Identities project:
 - Focuses on UK but there are cross-cultural aspects (Columbia, Israel, USA)
 - Aims to lay foundations for a political sciences of bisexuality – as there is a massive gap in the contemporary literature
 - I have done 25 interviews so far, with range of bisexual people (ages, ethnicities, class backgrounds, abilities and genders)
 - Camilo has done 6 interviews with a range of Columbian bisexual people and literature work

Acknowledgements to the people who have generously given their time and experiences, and to Camilo Tamayo Gomez

Bisexual Citizenship in the UK

- ▣ Trend in the UK towards use of 'LGBT' as an acronym for 'lesbian', 'gay', 'bisexual' and 'transgender' but this can be problematic:
 - There are bisexual-specific issues
 - Bisexual people have been substantially marginalised/stigmatised by gay men and lesbians
 - Bisexual people may benefit from heterosexual as well as same-sex citizenship rights
 - Some rights claims (such as for same-sex marriage) can be problematic for bisexual people
 - The bisexual population is submerged and fragmented

Bisexual rejections of citizenship

- ▣ Many in the organised UK bisexual community reject identity categories:

I think of it as an openness to all experiences and a rejection of binaries... a rejection of binaries in all aspects of my life really. I really abhor all kinds of conventional conformist categories, I really reject categories, I always have done (Lena)

there has been a shift in the last ten-20 years from an identity-type politics bi community in the UK to a queer, more queer agenda. I think the dominant agenda in bi UK communities now would be more queer, which would mean more about seeing sexual identity as more about something that is not necessarily about the gender – so that definition of attraction regardless of gender (Meg Barker)

Bisexual Citizenship Claims

- ▣ Little that is bisexual-specific in the UK in terms of political and legal dimensions except freedom from discrimination and hate crime
- ▣ In terms of social rights amongst UK bisexuals:
 - Visibility and acceptance
 - Acknowledgement of identity fluidity and relationship diversity
- ▣ The UK data mirrors the Columbian situation:
 - Contestation of term LGBT by some bisexual activists due to blurring of differences and marginalisation of bisexuals
 - Assertion of bisexuality as means of claiming recognition, visibility and protection in recent years

Are these assimilationist agendas or not?

Queer and strategic activism

- ▣ Several of the longer standing UK activists discussed queer agendas but a pragmatic approach, e.g:

Camel: Whilst there is a part of me that is a big shouty radical queer, obviously I am not twelve and I think that the structures in which we live are not the ones I would choose to work in, but there are things we can do in them and should do in them. Like in terms of hate crime, in [location] a coalition of organisations – the local bi group and others did, was get biphobia listed as a specific thing...In [location] most of the harassment that bi people got was actually from L and G people. And also being harassed for being bi, not one or the other, needs to be recognised...

Interviewer: How did you get it listed as a hate crime?

Camel: It was a long piece of work with [LGBT umbrella group]

Concluding thoughts

- ▣ Assimilationist-radical debate is especially marked in the organised UK bisexual communities
 - If range of bisexual identities and claims were addressed, impact would be radical
 - Bisexual activists and allies are actively wary of assimilation
 - Fragmented and queer/anarchist nature of the bisexual communities historically has weakened bisexual citizenship rights claims
 - Cross-cultural variations; Columbian bisexual activism appears more assimilationist and less anarchist but this is impressionistic

More information

- ▣ S.monro@hud.ac.uk
- ▣ <http://www.hud.ac.uk/ourstaff/profile/index.php?staffid=shumscm>
- ▣ Monroe, S. (forthcoming 2015) *Bisexual Identities*, Houndmills Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.