

Heteronormative and Sexist Working cultures

As survivor academics we should be concerned about the accessibility of heteronormative and sexist working cultures for lesbian and bisexual women. Those concerned with intersectionality need to pay 'attention to the socio-structural analysis of inequality, and specifically to the organisational and institutional manifestations of power dissymmetries' (Bilge 2010 p.61) and be aware that 'normalising or regulating techniques of power infuse daily cultural practices and as they escape substantial contention, they reinforce socially constructed reality...' (Wilson and Beresford, 2000 p.564).

One aspect of normalisation and power relation regulation is the hidden operation of heteronormative and sexist dynamics between men and women in workplace structures and cultures that affect 'out' lesbian and bisexual women.

Hakim has argued that 'erotic capital is rising in social and economic importance today, gives women an advantage, and is a key factor in women's changing status in society and the economy' (Hakim, 2010 p.512). However this theory appears to rely on the operation of sexist and heterosexist norms. It does not account for openly non-heterosexual women who would be excluded from this form of emotional and social economy in heterosexual and male-dominated environments. There is emerging evidence of hidden and structural discrimination resulting from such working cultures.

Research has suggested that 'out' non-heterosexual women can challenge the workplace's 'symbolic heteronormative order' by their presence and though coming out as a strategy 'since silence is deemed as compliance with the heteronormative context' (Gusmano, 2010, p.38). Given this, LGBT+ and Disabled staff networks in Higher Education should collectively support lesbian and gay women who experience intersecting oppressions of sexism and heteronormativity, as well as sanism, to come out at work.

Bilge, S. (2010) Recent feminist outlooks on intersectionality *Diogenes* 57 pp.58-72

Wilson, A. & Beresford, P. (2000) 'Anti-Oppressive Practice': Emancipation or Appropriation? *British Journal of Social Work* 30 pp.553-573

Hakim, C. (2010) Erotic Capital *European Sociological Review* 26 (5) pp.499-518

Gusmano, B. (2010) Forms of Resistance to the Organization's Symbolic Heteronormative Order In Clarke, G. et al (Eds.) *Examining Aspects of Sexuality and the Self* Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press pp. 31-43

Reasonable adjustments

"I have only been able to continue with my PhD because my supervisors supported my right to work 4 day weeks whilst still earning a full-time stipend. I needed to not formally reduce my hours to be able to pay my rent etc, but also attend a day therapy group that is essential for my wellbeing. This is just one of a number of adjustments I've required, but has been the key difference between me dropping out and carrying on."

Where PhD students do have to take longer as a reasonable adjustment, should they retain the full time studentship payment for the longer period?

Loss of life years – disability - economic factors – mental distress

"I'm interested in the intersections between disabilities (as someone working within a disabled AHRC programme) and the parallel between this and service provision, re my embodied experience and spaces / places/ situations where I experience mind-body duality being supported."

"I'm interested in relation to loss of life years and the economic and environmental factors currently contributing to mental distress in higher education for students and staff."

Progression within higher education

"Many of us work outside of academic institutions or are on part time and temporary contracts. What's the impact on our wellbeing from being excluded from more stable opportunities? How do we progress our own skills and contribute to knowledge when we are outside of traditional environments?"

What should be done to promote understanding of the needs of staff and students with different Equality Act protected characteristics, interacting positively, and support for our career progression?

Hard questions and challenges for academic and survivor researchers

Universities perceiving mad knowledge and other experiential knowledge as 'difficult, troublesome and dangerous knowledge', as discredited through not conforming with traditional research values of neutrality, objectivity and scientific distance.

How can the emancipatory and democratic ideals, and the ethical claims to equality, diversity and inclusion underpinning service user/survivor research be reconciled with the hierarchical, exclusionary and largely non-democratic infrastructures, cultures and relations that characterise Academia?

How to do collaborative, relational and participatory research work (i.e. service user/survivor research) in Academia when individual success and competition dominate?

Negotiating the double and liminal identity of being an academic survivor researcher as a transgressive identity that breaks the cultural rules of Academia and hence may be less valued and perceived as a threat.

Peer support – making connections

We offer a community of support for survivor and service user researchers. SRN is developing a network of survivor researchers, interested in collaborative work based on our key values. NSUN campaigns and links with policy makers and others to ensure that the voices of people with lived experience of distress are included.

Further Information

About NSUN (National Survivor User Network):

<https://www.nsun.org.uk>

About SRN:

<https://www.nsun.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Category/our-sub-network>

Join NSUN and SRN:

<https://www.nsun.org.uk/member-join>

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