

Beyond Opposition

ERC Midpoint Academic Report 2022

Summary of the context and overall objectives of the project

This project investigates the dramatically altered social and political landscapes in the late 20th and early 21st centuries created through the development of legislation advancing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and women's rights and protections. Whilst there is significant research investigating the limitations of such legislation and related social changes, as well as how this might create new forms of marginalisation and exclusion for LGBTQ people and other social groups, there has been no academic work considering the impact of these changes on those who are concerned about and/or oppose these changes.

Contemporary polarisations indicate a pressing need to understand the position of those who experience new social orders around sexualities and genders as a loss. It is clear that social polarisations are dividing Europe and beyond, creating key social issues for our era. Divisions increasingly arise because there are those who feel that they are 'losing' in the face of rapid socio-legal change in sexual and gender relations and understandings. Beyond Opposition addresses the dearth of scientific research seeking to understand what is happening for those who are concerned and in turn how these resulting polarisations might be addressed. In the first part of the project, Beyond Opposition has gathered data exploring the experiences of such individuals in their use of everyday spaces, be that work, home, school, shopping or social spaces.

Work performed from the beginning of the project to the end of the period covered by the report and main results achieved so far

Work performed to date has focused on project set up, website creation, project team organisation and training, social media creation, GDPR training and process creation, server setup, ethos development and social media creation and maintenance. Secondly, the project has focused on data collection and preliminary dissemination of some initial findings.

Data collection was undertaken from late February 2020 to 31st March 2022 and consists of 125 interviews, 24 events attended, 4712 engagements with the questionnaire (948 of which were full responses), and 11 formal meetings with international experts, on various aspects of the project.

Preliminary findings were released in October 2020, and sent to those who had signed up to receive news about the project. These were also circulated to groups, organisations and

media outlets in Canada, the UK and Ireland. Thirteen academic presentations/publications have been developed to 31st March 2022.

This is a significant achievement as COVID lockdowns and public health measures prevented face-to-face data collection and engagements, resulting in changes to recruitment possibilities and anticipated face-to-face interviews.

Progress beyond the state of the art and expected results until the end of the project

At this interim stage, Beyond Opposition has focused on project set up and data collection. It is anticipated that the second half of the project will develop state-of-the-art findings, dissemination and methodologies. It is anticipated that this will offer cutting edge insights into the everyday experiences of those who are concerned about and/or opposed to changes to sexual and gender legislation and cultures. This stage will also develop new knowledge regarding polarisations and if/how these can be addressed when exploring differences regarding sexual and gender issues.

To date, the project is advancing understandings of sexual and gendered landscapes and how to study them. Key progress includes:

Engaging across difference to collect interviews and questionnaires with those who are opposed to/concerned about changes to sexual and gender legislation and cultures. This is significant because it is the first research of its kind so it was unclear if it would be feasible when the project was initially developed. Reflections on undertaking this research in respectful ways pushes our understanding of approaches and perspectives on collecting data from participants who hold these views.

The project has found that COVID affected the activism engaged with by some of our participants. The majority suggested that nothing had changed for them, but then went on to indicate that work around sexualities and gender became less important. Others indicated that the time they had and what happened over this period increased their activism. Beyond Opposition and the PI, Prof. Browne, have begun discussions with a range of audiences asking them to consider how we treat each other if we cannot change everyone's mind to an alternative point of view. These conversations will be continued for the remainder of the project and will inform data collection and experimentation.