

<b>Institution:</b> Sheffield Hallam University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UOA23 – Education		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shifting the Discourse around LGBT+ Lives through Sociological Research		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2007 – 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Dr Eleanor Formby	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Reader	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  2003 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		

## 1. Summary of the impact

Dr Eleanor Formby has developed new and broader sociological understandings of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT+) lives, challenging prevailing and dominant psychological accounts. Formby's work has created new spaces for debate around LGBT+ lives - at the personal and individual level, within schools, in public policy, and within professional practice. Formby has directly challenged received understanding of LGBT+ lives amongst policymakers, LGBT+ civil society organisations, and within LGBT+ media. Her advisory role to a touring play, 'The Talk', demonstrated the use of the arts alongside social science in stimulating debate and reaction.

## 2. Underpinning research

Formby's work examines LGBT+ people's life experiences from a sociological perspective, moving beyond common individualising and psychologising approaches which tend to render LGBT+ lives as homogenised, and often victimised. Taking issue with the notion that LGBT+ people can be understood as a singular 'community', her research offers a nuanced, yet applied, contribution to the study of LGBT+ existence. This has contributed understanding in two linked sub-areas: the experiences of young LGBT+ people, particularly regarding homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying; and LGBT+ people's understandings and experiences of 'community'. Experiences of inequality and prejudice underscore both, hence research which can help combat this is important. The body of work stems from a range of research led/conducted by Formby over more than a decade. Related publications emanate from varied external research income sources, including AHRC (research grant, Formby PI, £29,000), statutory (three different local authorities and an NHS Foundation Trust), and voluntary sector organisations seeking to better understand their clients and/or the impact of their work.

The first sub-area of research, published across five peer-reviewed journal articles (**R1-R4, R6**), has evidenced young people's experiences of school, youth work and university settings, based on both self-completion survey and in-depth qualitative methods. This identified LGBT+ people's poor experiences of school-based sex and relationships education (SRE) (**R1, R6**), and building on this, has examined LGBT+ young people's experiences of SRE within youth work, which can fill gaps left by mainstream schooling contexts (**R6**). The research suggests that more inclusive SRE can support the mental health of LGBT+ young people, tackle sexual health issues, and address concerns about violence and abuse within young people's sexual encounters and intimate relationships.

Addressing young people's negative experiences in and out of school, Formby has identified that the notion of bullying is too limited and narrow when thinking about homophobia, biphobia and transphobia (**R3**). This is highlighted by examining experiences beyond bullying, by challenging the perceived inevitability of bullying, and by looking at responses to negative experiences. Formby has linked LGBT+ invisibility in the curriculum to experiences of homophobia, suggesting

that there is more at play than individual experiences of bullying, and that homophobia can be understood as an absence of something (i.e. inclusion), as well as an active hostility (**R2**, **R3**, **R6**). She has demonstrated that some school responses can appear to 'abnormalise' LGBT+ identities, for instance in referrals to counselling that young LGBT+ people can interpret as apportioning blame. Importantly, barriers and facilitators to schools and youth services addressing issues about sexuality, homophobia and transphobia have been identified (**R2**).

Using qualitative research methods, Formby has also examined LGBT+ perspectives on university, to look at the implications for pastoral care and other service provision on campus (**R4**). In doing so, she departs from previous scholarship that has tended to understand LGBT+ students as 'vulnerable' and needing 'support', arguing instead that university spaces should be (re)framed in a way that moves beyond (only) personal or individual 'care'. Within this, she outlines some of the issues that LGBT+ students face, regarding curriculum and course content; discrimination, prejudice and bullying; and facilities and service provision on campus.

In the second sub-area of research, stemming from the AHRC-funded study on understandings and experiences of 'community' among LGBT+ people, Formby identifies a range of concerns about use of the term 'LGBT community' (**R5**). Based on a mixed methods design, this monograph details, for example: LGBT+ people's diversity, and related experiences of prejudice and discrimination from both non-LGBT+ people and LGBT+ people; the importance of 'safe' space, such as Pride events and commercial 'scenes'; contested notions of belonging and 'imagined' community; and how all of these issues impact upon LGBT+ wellbeing. Formby foregrounds the lived experience of LGBT+ people to offer a wide-ranging and critical analysis of commonalities and divergences in relation to LGBT+ identities, emphasising the variety and complexity of contemporary LGBT+ experience. In doing so, she has stimulated debate about what 'community' means, and what it means to be LGBT+.

### 3. References to the research

- R1.** Formby, E (2011). Sex and Relationships Education, Sexual Health, and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Sexual Cultures: Views from Young People. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 11 (3), 255-66. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2011.590078>
- R2.** Formby, E (2013). Understanding and Responding to Homophobia and Bullying: Contrasting Staff and Young People's Views within Community Settings in England. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 10 (4), 302-16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-013-0135-4>
- R3.** Formby, E (2015). Limitations of Focussing on Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic 'Bullying' to Understand and Address LGBT Young People's Experiences within and beyond School. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 15 (6), 626-40. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2015.1054024>
- R4.** Formby, E (2017). How Should We 'Care' for LGBT+ Students within Higher Education? *Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development*, 35 (3), 203-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2017.1363811>
- R5.** Formby, E (2017). *Exploring LGBT Spaces and Communities: Contrasting Identities, Belongings and Wellbeing*. Routledge. Available on request.
- R6.** Formby, E and Donovan, C (2020). Sex and Relationships Education for LGBT+ Young People: Lessons from UK Youth Work. *Sexualities*, 23 (7), 1155-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460719888432>

All articles were rigorously peer-reviewed prior to publication in leading journals in the field. **R5** is a monograph, published by Routledge. All of Routledge's books are peer-reviewed at proposal and manuscript stage by respected academic specialists, who provide rigorous independent scrutiny of their quality. **R5** has been reviewed as being "meticulous" (Professor Donovan, Durham University), and "important... innovative and rigorous" (Professor Browne, University College Dublin).

#### 4. Details of the impact

The body of work has impacted upon public debate and understanding, on professional practice, and on policy development.

##### The Arts and Public Debate

Formby's research has informed public discourse on LGBT+ identities and relationships. For example, drawing on R1, she acted as advisor in the development of a play, 'The Talk' (Highly Commended at the VAULT Festival, London, 2018), which examined relationships and sex education (RSE). Subsequently she was also a Q&A panellist during its English tour (2018). The playwright said that Formby aided her understanding of the history of RSE, and the impact of recent policy changes, particularly on LGBT+ inclusion. The playwright commented:

*"100s of people saw the play in cities around England... Eleanor's voice in the production (and as a panellist) was a very important one... trainee teachers often left the performance more inclined to want to be trained in RSE and to take an active role in teaching it [and] I know... schools are currently teaching more RSE than they were before" (E1).*

An audience member at a 2018 ESRC Festival of Social Science event in Huddersfield commented:

*"I went along to 'The Talk' with my 23-year-old daughter and we both found it moving. We had one of the best chats about our sex and relationship experiences. I really felt that the play allowed us to discuss things we ordinarily wouldn't have even thought about discussing. Genuinely one of the most touching things I have seen in a LONG time" (E2, emphasis in the original).*

Similarly, dissemination related to R5 included a public book launch event (in 2018) and several public blog posts, the most widely read in The Conversation (2017, over 51,000 reads by 2020). This generated a considerable volume of public debate within LGBT+ media forums and involving LGBT+ members of the public. This included media coverage in Gay Times, The Gay UK, Gscene, and Pink News, resulting in online Facebook and Twitter interactions. Attitude conducted a poll on the issues raised, leading to further debate amongst readers. Throughout 2018, Pink News cited the research in five different articles about LGBT+ people, contributing to more nuanced public views about LGBT+ language use and identities. Significant public engagement has therefore informed social attitudes.

##### Professional Practice

Formby's research has impacted on professional practice. For instance, CEO of SAYiT (a Sheffield-based charity that supports LGBT+ young people) explained how R2 and R3 impacted on their work:

*"[Formby's] research has impacted on me professionally and personally in the following ways, [it has:]... informed funding bids with local evidence of the need to support young LGBT+ people; informed the work which we do and the services we provide for LGBT+ young people... [and:] enabled us to provide evidence of the importance of our training and awareness raising in terms of improving the environment in which LGBT+ young people still experience LGBT+ phobia... [Her] work [also] led to us developing work around LGBT+ domestic abuse. We now run an innovative domestic abuse awareness and support project across the whole of South Yorkshire having secured government funding. [Formby] was a catalyst in this process of learning and the development of the project" (E5).*

Public engagement events designed to disseminate research and stimulate discussion have also led to professionals reflecting on their practice. As one audience member explained (in relation to R5):

*"[The end of project event in 2015] enhanced my existing knowledge and awareness on aspects of sexuality, current research findings and hearing people's perspectives on impact on their lives... I've shared this with professionals on my training courses and with colleagues within my service. We have looked at our paperwork and practices... and how we can strive to make our services and resources more inclusive" (E2).*

## Impact case study (REF3)

Similarly, Sheffield City Council's (Children's) Equality Lead commented: *"Eleanor's research has been particularly helpful to us in increasing our awareness of the experiences of LGBT+ identities, relationships and life experiences in supporting our work as Stonewall Education/CYP Champions, identifying and developing local projects to help ensure equality and inclusion for LGBT+ young people"* (Stonewall are a leading UK LGBT charity) (E3).

Another local authority inclusion lead (in Kirklees) reported that she used *"content and thinking"* from one of Formby's (2016) events in her training delivery (E3). A Sheffield-based safeguarding advisor also reported improved awareness and understanding, saying they felt *"more able to talk to colleagues about the issues and more able to signpost to services"* (E3).

Other public research dissemination events have generated impact and garnered positive feedback. An academic from the University of Birmingham suggested *"Things have really changed in terms of awareness of LGBT issues in HE... [R4] was an important part of that change"* (E4). Similarly, a consultant working with universities said:

*"Really helpful... [R4] covers such a broad range of student experience. I've used it in workshops for universities... as I find most unis are (a) complacent, (b) very unaware as to what faces LGBTQ students and staff... I've not found anything like it in the UK"* (E4).

A PhD student at Birmingham City University commented:

*"The [2015] event had a huge impact on me... I changed my personal practices and my work practices, and have briefed colleagues on issues arising from the event... [It was] such an inspiring day. It was life affirming and fascinating. It made me see the differences I could make to help LGBTQ+ students feel better supported in HE"* (E4).

### National and International Policy Engagement

Drawing on R2-R3, Formby has contributed to various policy debates, nationally and internationally. This has included an invited talk on HBT bullying at the European Parliament (2014), feeding into the international guidance on 'Minimum Standards to Combat Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying' (E9), and an invitation to join the international steering group for the LGBTQI European education index project. Similarly, an invitation to meet with MPs (including then Minister for Women and Equalities) and senior civil servants at a Westminster 'academic experts' seminar (2014) resulted in a Government Equalities Office (GEO) published report 'The Watched Body' on gender stereotypes (E6). This body of research (R2-R3) has also directly informed Government-funded practice on addressing HBT bullying: it informed the 2014 GEO report about 'What Works' in tackling these forms of bullying (E6), and then in turn the design of their £2 million grants programme to address this issue (2016-19), which was subsequently evaluated by Formby. In a related policy initiative, Formby was invited to be Advisor (both interviewee and peer-reviewer) to the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology in the run-up to Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) becoming statutory in England (from 2020), resulting in their 2018 Parliamentary research briefing on RSE (E6).

Similar research-informed advisory work has also resulted in changed practice by Ofsted, ultimately designed to improve the schooling experiences of LGBT+ youth. As they detailed:

*"Eleanor's research and feedback have improved our awareness of issues surrounding LGBT+ identities in education. This has had a direct impact on fine-tuning our data collection instruments. Fine-tuning them was crucial not only because it allowed us to get better data, but also because the topics are quite sensitive"* (E7).

Formby's input therefore directly influenced the design of Ofsted research (2019-20). Other organisations engaging with the UK government have also used Formby's research within their advocacy, for instance NUS drew on R4 in their 'LGBT manifesto' leading up to the 2015 general election (E8).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

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- E1. Quote from 'The Talk' playwright
- E2. Quotes from event audience members

**Impact case study (REF3)**

- E3.** Quotes from local authority practitioners: Sheffield City Council's (Children's) Equality Lead, a (West Yorkshire) local authority inclusion lead, a (West Yorkshire) safeguarding advisor
- E4.** Quotes from those in Higher Education: an academic, a consultant, a PhD student
- E5.** Quote from the voluntary sector: a charity CEO
- E6.** Compiled UK Government publications: 1) Government Equalities Office - The Watched Body (2014), 2) Government Equalities Office - What Works in Tackling HBT (2014), 3) Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology - Relationships and Sex Education briefing (2018)
- E7.** Quote from Ofsted
- E8.** NUS - Up and Out (2018) <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/up-and-out-nus-lgbt-manifesto>
- E9.** Minimum Standards to Combat Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying (2014) <https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Minimum-Standards.pdf>