**The Equality Act 2010: refracting the hierarchies and norms in equality and diversity scholarship**

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to highlight the hierarchical, unequal treatment of the different equality groups evident in the scholarly literature. The UK Equality Act 2010 (EqA 2010), where nine ‘protected characteristics’ are given legal parity, provides a frame for this.

An examination of the literature reveals a ‘canon’ of discursively constructed core strands, namely gender, race and class, a second stratum comprising disability and sexuality, with religion and age consigned to the margins. The historical and persistent absence of discussion regarding the ‘non-core’ strands in the mainstream of equality and diversity research denies how these identities impact on individuals, on organisations and on our understanding of employment.

Existing equality group categories are criticised for inadequately reflecting heterogeneity within groups (Healy et al, 2011; Woodhams and Danieli 2000). Counter to this is the argument that, in recognizing subgroups, we risk overlooking common patterns of disadvantage (Healy et al, 2011: 9). Similarly an intersectional approach to research raises issues of dilution and feasibility, although the traditional ‘silo’ approach can be argued to over-simplify the myriad plurality of our identities and encourage essentialism (Guerrier and Wilson, 2011; Zanoni and Janssens, 2003; Adib and Guerrier, 2003; Acker, 2006). The EqA 2010 is constructive; it both enables and denies, legitimising previously unheard voices but denying the significance of class or intersectional disadvantage.

The aim of this paper, and a key focus of my doctoral thesis, is to critically examine the continued foregrounding of certain equality strands above others within scholarship. The discursive approach of my forthcoming research will investigate the enactment-level experiences of human resource practitioners, who are tasked with navigating the broad scope of the EqA 2010 and the individualistic, complaints-based tribunal model.

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**Autobiographical Note**

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