Sexual Norms: the Self-Policing of Sexuality

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ABSTRACT
With a growing movement towards the commodification of sexuality, following the recognition of the economic potential of the pink pound, gay villages are becoming an increasingly common feature within major British cities. Debatably, providing a retreat from the constraints of everyday heteronormativity, these enclaves are sometimes viewed as areas of liberation, providing a ‘safe haven’ for ‘sexual deviants’ where sexual self-disciplining can be relaxed. However, with internal marginalisation remaining a fundamental issue in queer communities, proffered by arguments of movements towards exclusive homonormativity (Bell and Binnie, 2004), the self-policing of sexual behaviour is arguably a process at work, even within queer spaces. With particular reference to users of the Pink Triangle in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, this paper aims to explore the way in which the relationship between queer subjects and their immediate environment can open up the discussion of ‘self-policing’ in relation to both heteronormative and homonormative sexual norms. Synthesising primary qualitative data, generated through semi-structured interviews and participant observation, with existing debates in contemporary queer literature the influence of ‘self-policing’ on the practices of the users of this purposely designed gay space is considered. The real spatial implications of sexual norms are explored. It is argued that social norms have direct, if subtle and complex, impacts on the behaviour of sexual non-conformers which vary between subjects and the nature of the places they occupy.