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Critical Diversity, Social Cohesion and the Layers of Belonging

Community cohesion requires the recognition of the contributions made by all who constitute that community. Failing to account for the capacities and insights of its membership can lead to exclusion, and diminish the advantages to be extracted by integrating their contributions into what is meant by community. To date, community cohesion has been considered primarily through the partial lens of ethnic and religious diversity. Other individual and social attributes have been constructed as ancillary, and strategies for integrating other contributions have been delayed, limited or subject to divisive debates. These other attributes—e.g., gender, sexuality, and physical and cognitive abilities—are considered commonly as barriers to cohesion yet are as critical to social citizenship as ethnic and religious identity. As an antidote, a critical diversity approach (Herring & Henderson 2012) acknowledges the rich sources of our identity, and the importance of these threads and layers of identity in harnessing the strength of community cohesion. This paper considers how social cohesion spins on the extent to which heteronormative, cisnormative and disablist constructions of belonging can be resolved, and attributes other than ethnic or ethnoreligious identification can be enumerated and accommodated in the creation of community.