

## Conceptualising tolerance: paradoxes of tolerance and intolerance in contemporary Britain

Ade Kearns and Jon Bannister<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract:* This article uses the examples of young people and ethnic minorities to show how the political rhetoric of British tolerance sits alongside a growing public discourse of intolerance and calls for greater conformity. A conceptual model of tolerance is set out, elucidating how tolerance can have different types of objects, assessments and responses, the latter ranging from static disapproval to dynamic cognitive adjustment. We argue that public policy should consider these foundations of tolerance and appreciate the context-dependent nature of tolerance rather than setting out to tightly define the boundaries of intolerance; the latter strategy runs the risk of stimulating a downward spiral whereby people's thresholds of tolerance are continually lowered.

*Keywords:* young people, tolerance, ethnic minorities, public policy

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Urban Studies, University of Glasgow

**Introduction: British tolerance as virtue and a value**

Britain has a reputation for tolerance (see Paxman, 1999) which has been proclaimed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century at least. In the first half of the twentieth century, tolerance was regarded as one of several British virtues experienced by foreign travellers, compared to the alternative characteristics of other nationalities. International socialites such as Odette Keun (1934) described the “adorable things” she liked about the English as including “courtesy, kindness, obligingness and tolerance”. Similarly, in the post-war period, the creation of the myth about the virtues of the British that had both helped us achieve victory in the two world wars, and also justified our ascendancy, included proclamations about British tolerance, in contrast to the less attractive virtues of both our erstwhile enemies and allies (Calder, 1991).

More recently, UK leaders have transformed tolerance from a *traditional virtue* into a *political value* as part of their attempts to boost the national mood and shore up British identity in the face of inter-ethnic tensions, working-class disaffection, and claims about social fragmentation. Tony Blair, in December 2006, argued that tolerance was “what makes Britain, Britain”, that Britain’s “hallmark” was its “common culture of tolerance” (BBC News, 2006). Following Blair, his successor Gordon Brown, in the early stages of his “crusade” about Britishness<sup>2</sup> in March 2007, said that: «When people are asked what they admire about Britain, they usually say it is our values: British tolerance; the British belief in liberty» (Lawson, 2007).

A leading political journalist, Matthew Parris, assessed that Tony Blair had helped develop “a genuinely new era for Britain – an altered culture, a permanent change in our national mood” (Parris, 2006). He said that: «without a shadow of a doubt, Mr Blair will leave a happier country than he found. Something tolerant, something amiable, something humorous, some lightness of spirit in his own nature, has marked his premiership and left its mark on British life». Most of his piece focused on gay rights: legislating for civil partnerships, scrapping of clause 28, equalising the age of consent etc., but he also argued that Blair had led “a general reduction in

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<sup>2</sup> Until the economic crisis of late 2008, Brown had given more speeches about British identity than any other topic.

the level of censoriousness in public life” as well as “a relentless campaign of oratory and example on religious tolerance”.

This politicization of tolerance might easily suffer from the weakness of delusion, or the commission of deception. As Paetzold (2008) argues: «The most well-intentioned theory of tolerance can turn over and degenerate into the defense of crude intolerance» (p. 942). Thus, we should be wary that politicians might “talk-the-talk” about tolerance whilst pursuing an agenda of intolerance. This duality is evident if we look at the public discourse promoted, and the public policies pursued, in relation to two groups identified as problematic in Britain today, namely young people and settled migrants.

### **Intolerable non-conformities**

Over the last decade or so in the UK, both politicians and the media have focused on perceived threats to British society and way-of-life posed by two social groups in particular: young people, and ethnic minorities. Non-conformist behaviours are said to be growing and to be increasingly threatening to social welfare. There has been a considerable “othering” of these two groups, premised on the assumption that the larger majority group share a set of values not subscribed to by the two respective minorities. The consequence is demands for allegiance to the majority to be demonstrated through an adaptation to conformist behaviours. As we proceed to discuss attitudes and policy towards young people and ethnic minorities, we see how the ideal or value of tolerance co-exists with an increasing “chorus of intolerance” (Hattersley, 2005).

#### *The Problem of Young People: a misrepresentation and intolerance of youth*

Today, as for most of the post-war period in Britain, youth culture is seen as non-conformist, problematic, and a significant threat to the cohesion of society, generating widespread insecurity. Thus, whilst since the mid 1990s the level of crime as measured by the British Crime Survey (BCS) has fallen substantially and is now at its lowest-ever level since the first survey results in 1981, around two in three British people believe that crime nationally has increased in the last two years (Kershaw *et al.*, 2008).

The BCS also measures public perceptions of anti-social behaviour. The indicators that comprise the BCS measure of anti-social behaviour have remained relatively stable since the turn of the millennium, though around one in five people hold a high level of perceived anti-social behaviour in the area in which they live (Flatley *et al.*, 2008). The perpetrators of these behaviours, criminal and anti-social, are disproportionately and *incorrectly* identified by the British public as being *young people*.

Recognising that young people are blamed for up to 50 per cent of all crime – an overestimation by a factor of four – the children’s charity Barnardo’s (2008a) commissioned a survey of adults and discovered that over half of those interviewed thought young people were increasingly a danger to others and “beginning to behave like animals”. Around one-third agreed with the statement “it feels like the streets are infested”, closely mirroring a finding of the BCS in which around one-third of the respondents identified “teenagers hanging around on the streets” as a problem in their area (Flatley *et al.*, 2008).

Moral panics around issues of crime and disorder and the intolerance of youth are, of course, nothing new. In *Hooligan: A History of Respectable Fears*, Pearson (1983) reminds us that successive generations of press and politicians have advanced a myth that the “British way of life” is under threat by an unruly minority, namely young people, and this despite empirical evidence to the contrary. Not only do young people commit less crime than is attributed to them, it is questionable as to whether some of the negative behaviours of youth are really that threatening. For example, when pressed, half of those adults that identify “teenagers hanging around on the streets” as a problem in their area also recognise that they are “just being a general nuisance” or “not doing anything in particular” and the majority recognise that this activity holds limited detrimental impact on their well-being (Wood, 2004). Nevertheless, the moral panic holds sway. Almost half of the adults surveyed by Barnardo’s (2008a) felt that something had to be done to protect adults from the behaviours of young people.

#### *Intolerance and the demand for respect*

At the core of New Labour’s law and order agenda rests a simple message: «Anti-social behaviour...will not be ignored or tolerated any longer» (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. vii); there is to be a «no tolerance approach to anti-social behaviour» (Home Office, 2004, p. 10); «Disrespect

and yobbish behaviour will not be tolerated anymore» (Blair, 2005); and, that there is a need to «bring back a proper sense of respect» (Home Office, 2003, p. 6). This approach was encapsulated in the Respect Action Plan (Respect Task Force, 2006), which drew together multiple interventions aimed at eradicating anti-social behaviour.

Drawing on Young (2007), the Respect Action Plan serves to “other” the perceived perpetrators of disrespect, to create a “them” and “us”. It regards those identified as anti-social as being apart from the majority of the population, it accuses them of not possessing the “clear value system” shared by us. They lack the characteristics that would make them like us or possess negative attributes that set them apart from us. The Respect Action Plan aims to remedy this situation by enforcing a culture of respect. Respect is loosely defined as “an expression of something that people intuitively understand”, comprising “values that almost everyone in this country shares”, and requiring every citizen to behave in a “respectful way”. In other words, the Respect Action Plan affords primacy to the values of some over others; it is about enforcing a minority to adopt the code of conduct of the majority, to demonstrate their respectability.

At this stage it is worth reflecting on the precise meaning of the term anti-social behaviour. The Crime and Disorder (England and Wales) Act 1998 and the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003 define an individual or group as engaged in anti-social behaviour if they “pursue a course of conduct that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress to at least one person not of the same household as them”. This is very much a catchall definition, as it implies that any behaviour that violates an individual’s well-being and falls outwith prevailing standards of behaviour (or outwith the law) can be classified as anti-social. Certainly, such a broad definition serves a key political function in that conveys a populist message; we are all required to combat anti-social behaviour, as we all experience it.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders, or ASBOs for short, (created under the Crime and Disorder (England and Wales) Act 1998 are a key tool in the endeavour to enforce respect. They are civil orders that “place tailor-made prohibitions on named individuals from entering certain areas and/or carrying out specified acts” (Flint and Nixon, 2006, p. 943). Crucially, the focus is on the perceived impact of behaviours rather than specific qualities of the behaviour itself, “enabling ASBOs to be used to regulate any behaviour depending on the context and the tolerance levels of the

community” (ibid.). It is a clear intention that ASBOs be deployed in wide-ranging situations, but whilst Government guidance stressed that they should not be used for «run of the mill disputes between neighbours, petty intolerance or minor one-off disorderly acts, nor should orders be used to penalise those who are merely different» (Home Office, 1999, p. 7), Flint and Nixon (2006) contend that there is emerging evidence to suggest that this is indeed the use to which they are being put. Moreover, that whilst young people were not initially perceived as a target group, they have in practice become the dominant target population for ASBOs.

The anti-social behaviour legislation has faced significant criticism, particularly over the implications for due process and the rights of children and young people (Howard League, 2004). Whilst not disputing that the behaviours of some children and young people are problematic and warrant significant intervention, NACRO (2003, p. 1) suggest that this approach (for example, in relation to the dispersal of groups of children congregating in public spaces) risks «criminalising behaviour that at most could be said to be undesirable, that in many circumstances might actually be entirely innocent. In using the full weight of the criminal justice system against people who have committed no criminal offence, the government risks stigmatising them and risks damaging community relations».

#### *The Problem of British Society: Selfish and Lacking Empathy?*

There is an evident misrepresentation and intolerance of youth, manifest in a Respect Agenda that demands that a minority (youth) adopts the code of conduct of the majority (adults) and introduces new policy instruments which “clamp down” on and criminalise a wider range of youth behaviours, even though much youthful behaviour may merely be an expression of different lifestyle preferences associated with this stage in the lifecycle. However, this is not to deny that some young people express damaging behaviours. But where should we locate the origins of these intolerable behaviours? Is it possible that the lack of respect exhibited by some young people is a reflection of the lack of respect shown to them? Bunting (2008) suggests: «Anti-social teenagers are simply playing out their own version of the aggression and indifference that has been meted out to them».

Recently, UNICEF (2007) undertook an overview of child well-being in rich countries. They assessed the extent to which children felt loved, cherished, special and supported within the family and community, and

whether the family and community were being supported in this task by public policy and resources. They determined that the United Kingdom performed *worse* in this endeavour than 20 other industrialised countries. Commenting on the report's findings, the Children's Commissioner for England, Professor Sir Al Aynsley-Green (2008), said: «We are turning out a generation of young people who are unhappy, unhealthy, engaging in risky behaviour, who have poor relationships with their family and their peers, who have low expectations and don't feel safe».

Similarly, contributors to the *The Good Childhood Inquiry* (Children's Society, 2008) suggest that children's lives are more difficult than in the past and that more young people feel anxious and troubled. The report locates the responsibility for these changes in excessive individualism, family break-up and inequality in British society. Thus, we might legitimately ask whether the selfish attitudes of adults, combined with their lack of empathy towards the life chances of young people, has been fuelling disrespect and rising intolerance? Certainly, it is the case that those young people who develop offending profiles come from the most deprived communities and families, have the poorest educational experiences and are most likely to suffer from poor health (Barnardo's, 2008b).

#### *The Problem of Integration: Ethnic Minority Settlement and Behaviours*

For some time, Britain has told a positive story about its tolerance of migration and of minorities. For the late twentieth century, it has been reported that attitudes to social contact with minorities became markedly more tolerant in Britain during the 1980s and 1990s, though there was less change in general opposition to immigration (Ford 2006; 2008). Furthermore, post-9/11, global and European social attitudes surveys indicate that British respondents are more tolerant than people in many other European countries on questions about living near minorities and minority behaviours (reported in Finney & Simpson, 2009).

But there are reasons to be cautious and avoid complacency about these headline findings. The questions asked in such surveys are often of a hypothetical nature (e.g. would you mind if a member of your family married an ethnic minority spouse; or, would you wish to live in an area where nobody is of a different race), and of course people give socially desirable answers which do not necessarily match their own real behaviours. As Ford himself points out, prejudice remains strong among

some sections of British society and especially those with lower levels of education, and here it is changing slowly. People are also selective in their views, opposing immigration from the Indian sub-continent much more than from Western Europe or Australasia, for example. There is probably a mixture of racial prejudice and intolerance based on cultural differences (Modood, 2005) involved here.

Further reservations about the dominant narrative are prompted by the fact that, having (rightly or wrongly) been proud of its “tolerant” history, Britain appears in the early twenty-first century to have lost its way and its confidence on tolerance following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 and ethnic disturbances in northern English towns in 2001. The thrust of the public debate engendered by political leaders and officials over the past 5 or more years has been that ethnic minorities in Britain have been separating themselves from the majority population and shown a reluctance to integrate into British culture and society, and that we should not tolerate this any longer. In one of the most ironic interventions, Tony Blair (Prime Minister at the time) declared that «we must be ready to defend this attitude [of tolerance]», to «stand up and fight for tolerance», and advised migrants: «So conform to it; or don’t come here» (BBC News, 2006).

The British approach to diversity has been questioned by its own “moral” leaders (including respectively the head of the Commission for Racial Equality [CRE] at the time, and the Bishop of Rochester); the dominant philosophy of race relations has been labelled as an “anything goes” multiculturalism (Phillips, 2005) and as the novel philosophy of “multiculturalism” (Bishop Nazir-Ali, quoted in Wynne-Jones, 2008a). Tolerance itself was also been put in the dock when Phillips said: «we have allowed tolerance of diversity to harden into the effective isolation of communities» (ibid): it seems that too much tolerance can be a bad thing. A leading Islamic academic, Mona Siddiqui added momentum by arguing that our liberalism had gone too far in «allowing people to do what they want and say what they want» (quoted in Bowditch, 2007); the view was attributed to her that «the tolerant culture in the UK is allowing extremist ideas to flourish» (Allardyce, 2007).

Two phenomena have been criticised and associated with one another: residential separation and the perpetuation of minority behaviours. The reports into the urban disturbances in 2001 highlighted problems of “self-segregation” and the “parallel lives” of minority communities (Cantle,

2001; Denham, 2001; Ouseley, 2001). Phillips (2005), as head of the CRE, further promoted this concern when he declared that Britain as a nation was “sleepwalking to segregation”. The consequences of this self-segregation were several, according to subsequent contributions to the debate. It allowed the continuance of minority cultural practices and beliefs implied to be incompatible either with British values or with the duty to integrate. A series of Government ministers expressed concerns about behaviour such as young marriages (Blair), the wearing of the veil (Blair and Straw), and a reluctance to speak the English language (Blunkett). These practices in turn were claimed to cause conflict with the majority group in society (Phillips, 2005), to undermine the core culture (Migration Watch UK) and to pose a threat to the majority White identity (as described in Phillips, 2006). Together they had also resulted in “no-go areas” for the rest of society, and meant that minorities had a minimal need to integrate or form relationships with the majority (Nazir-Ali, 2008).

This discourse is manifestly one-sided. Both residential segregation and lack of belonging have several causes, lying with the majority society as well as the minority (Modood, 2005). The duty to “fit in” is however said to lie squarely with the minority, who are instructed to adapt their behaviours in the interests of integration, whilst in fact it is the majority White population who «are most isolated...less tolerant, more suspicious and less willing to engage...with communities other than their own» (Finney & Simpson, 2009, p.111). In sum, the public discourse says that diverse British society has suffered because the majority (“we”) have been too tolerant, and the minority (“they”) have been too reluctant to integrate, despite evidence to the contrary. Parts of the media act to sustain this discourse: the Sunday Telegraph for example reported from its own poll that: «A majority of Britons believe that Muslims need to do more to integrate into society» (Wynne-Jones, 2008b). One commentator has remarked that this amounts to a “chorus of intolerance” whereby «Muslims are accepted into Britain – but only if they cease to behave like Muslims» (Hattersley, 2005).

The two examples discussed here show that there are clearly paradoxes between proclamations about British tolerance and public policy concerns that we have been too tolerant of certain groups, and that we need to clarify (and expand) the range of behaviours that we define as intolerable so that we can eradicate or curtail them. It would be helpful therefore to set out

what we might mean by “tolerance” since ambiguity of understanding may permit variation in interpretation, both of the tolerance we have and the tolerance we might create.

### **Understanding tolerance<sup>3</sup>**

From its sixteenth and seventeenth century roots as a principle to resolve and avoid religious conflict in Europe, tolerance is now described as «a liberal virtue» (Knowles 2001, p. 100), as a «core concept and value in the formation of modernity and modern societies» (Karstedt, 2007), and as an «underpinning of democracy» (Sullivan and Transue, 1999). But despite its centrality to our conception of modern, liberal, western societies, there is a need to clarify our view of tolerance, for it can be seen as positive or negative, as moral or practical, as well as in many other ways.

Karstedt (2007) characterises tolerance as something which «can only be defined in a negative way» and as involving passivity, the absence of action and of strong emotions. Yet two shorthand definitions illustrate that there is more to it than that:

«Toleration...requires one not to interfere in conduct which one believes to be morally wrong» (Knowles, 2001:102); and:

«The working definition of “tolerance” which is widely used is: “The deliberate choice not to interfere with conduct or beliefs with which one disapproves”» (Hancock and Matthews, 2001:99).

It is immediately apparent from these definitions that both the object of tolerance (e.g. conduct or beliefs) and the response to it (e.g. moral distaste or disapproval) can vary. It is also worth noting that passivity can be easily misinterpreted, perhaps particularly in the British case. Anthropologists such as Kate Fox argue that the English display of restraint, cautiousness and contact-avoidance is due to our assumption that other people share our “obsessive need for privacy”. Fox refers to this as «negative politeness» (Fox, 2005), concerned with our own and other people’s need not to be intruded upon, rather than being positive politeness concerned with other people’s need for inclusion and social approval. It is easy, therefore, to see how this negative politeness can be mis-read as exemplary British

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<sup>3</sup> For an extended discussion, including the foundations of tolerance in engagement, respect and civility see: Bannister J. and Kearns A. (2009).

tolerance. Tolerance, however, involves more than passivity, namely judgements and choices. To explicate this further, let us consider the key components of tolerance, which we take to comprise: the objects of tolerance; the assessment of those objects; and the responses.

#### *The Object(s) of Tolerance*

The object of tolerance, the thing to be tolerated, can be an action (or “conduct”<sup>4</sup>), a lifestyle or behaviours (or a “set of conducts”), or a set of beliefs (or a “culture”) – see Table 1. Residing behind these immediate objects of tolerance, though, may lie a dislike of the group to which an individual belongs (the perpetrators) – thus making tolerance personal – or alternatively a concern about the consequences or impacts of the action. Thus, we may feel that we are tolerating the perpetrators, their behaviours, and/or the consequences of those behaviours. Our view of the perpetrator may further depend upon whether we deem them to be “deserving” or “undeserving” of our consideration.

**Tab. 1: The Objects of Tolerance**

<i>Object of tolerance</i>	<i>Examples of things people may feel they tolerate</i>
Conduct	Spitting in public; passive smoking; playing loud music.
Lifestyle	Large families living long-term on benefits; travellers
Culture / beliefs	Islamic practices
Social group	Single parents; students; travellers / gypsies
Impacts	Untidy gardens; streets with reduced visual amenity; noise disturbance

#### *Tolerant Assessments: Judging Unfavoured Conduct*

Many years ago, Cavan (1961) identified public attitudes to negatively judged conduct<sup>5</sup> as ranging from tolerance with approval, through tolerance without approval, to disapproval and condemnation, depending upon their degree of threat to the smooth running of social organisation. Others, for example Mendus (1989), declared that permitting something to happen, without the presence of disapproval, is not tolerance so much as liberty.

<sup>4</sup> In what follows we refer to the tolerance of “conduct” as a convenient shorthand for all objects of tolerance.

<sup>5</sup> In her case, juvenile delinquency.

However, Newey (1999) identified the fact that the disapproval at the heart of tolerance can be on moral or non-moral grounds. So, in facing any unwanted or unfavoured situation, we first make an assessment of the object of tolerance, based upon our own interests and/or those of wider society; this defines those things that we feel we are tolerating. Of course, in making these assessments we are influenced by the media and by the prevailing public discourse about conducts and social groups.

As shown in Table 2, our assessments depend upon the damage we think the tolerated conduct will do. Thus, we may *dislike* something because it offends our tastes and preferences. We may *object* to something because it infringes our privacy or quiet enjoyment of private or public space. We may be *offended* by something because it contravenes our moral code. We may oppose something that threatens our interests or wellbeing, or those close to us. We may *disapprove* of something because we consider it to be harmful to the individual concerned. Finally, we may *condemn* something because we believe it to be a threat to social organisation or accepted social norms. Of course, the last of these may also represent a response.

Tab. 2: Tolerant Assessments (of Unfavoured Behaviours)

<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Rationale</i>
Dislike	Offends our taste or preferences
Object	Infringes our privacy or quiet enjoyment
Offended	Goes against our moral code
Oppose	Harmful to our interests or well-being
Disapprove	Harmful to the perpetrator (and with social costs)
Condemn	Threat to social norm or organisation

### *Tolerant Responses*

We then make choices about how to respond to the objects of tolerance. Choice is crucial, for it is important to remember that tolerance is not the same thing as indifference, acquiescence, or «situations where there may be no real choice over whether to take action or not» (Hancock and Matthews, 2001, p. 99). Tolerance is “necessarily selective”, “purposeful and intentional”, and «a rational and conscious act even if it is expressed through inaction» (*ibid*, p.100). Other «reasons for non-interference such as indolence or cowardice...are quite distinct from, and sometimes antithetical to, toleration» (Horton and Nicholson, 1992, p. 3).

Thus, having formed a view about the object of tolerance, we then opt for one of several responses, as shown in Table 3. Our response may take the form of what we shall call “pure tolerance”, namely non-intervention about those things we do not agree with, despite our abhorrence of the conduct and its impacts; this we shall call “static tolerance”. Alternatively, we may adopt one of several other dynamic, tolerant responses, which may in reality blend into one another in practice.

We might raise our threshold of tolerance, our ability to cope with the unfavoured conduct, through adapting our own behaviour in order to lessen the impact of the unfavoured conduct upon us, for example through avoidance tactics. Alternatively, we may cope by raising our threshold of tolerance psychologically, coaching ourselves to be less irritated or angered by the conduct. We may choose to willingly co-exist with the unfavoured conduct whilst at the same time attempting to moderate the expectations and behaviours of both the “perpetrator” and ourselves so that we “get along” better; we term this “ameliorative co-existence”. Lastly, we might take the most tolerant course of action, adopting a cognitive response whereby we do not intervene in the unfavoured conduct by virtue of a reduced propensity to disagree with it; this may be due either to a shift in our moral perspective, or to an increased understanding of the causes of, or the perpetrator’s “need” or “right” to engage in, the conduct, i.e. we think about it differently and see it as “less wrong” than previously. This is perhaps more difficult and less common; in Seligman’s view (1999) people become increasingly tolerant more through self-restraint (more often opting not to intervene) than through normative adjustment (judging behaviours as less wrong).

*Intolerant Responses*

The above discussion has concentrated on the range of tolerant responses made by individuals to unfavoured or intolerable conducts. These behaviours can in theory and practice be promoted or supported by public policy and its associated public discourse. In other words, government, our social institutions and the media together help shape the environment in which we make our responses.

Tab 3: Tolerant Responses

<i>Response</i>	<i>Content</i>
<b><i>Static response:</i></b>	
Pure tolerance	Disapproval plus non-intervention
<b><i>Dynamic responses:</i></b>	
Behavioural Response	Raised threshold of tolerance through behavioural adaptation, i.e. avoidance
Psychological Response	Raised threshold of tolerance through improved coping mechanisms
Ameliorative Co-existence	Toleration plus mutual modification of behaviours and expectations.
Cognitive response	Reduction in disapproval through changed moral code or via understanding

But whilst our institutions of governance can in principle support tolerance on the part of citizens, they can equally display and promote intolerance. As Table 4 shows, public policies may often contain one or more of a range of intolerant responses to unfavoured conduct, ranging from strategies of prevention, through management of the conduct and its effects, to more severe responses to imprison or remove the perpetrators.

All but one of the responses in table 4 (the exception being “treatment”), make little or no attempt to either understand or re-shape the motivation or desire of individuals to engage in unfavoured conducts; they merely try to remove the behaviour in one way or another. Key instruments of public policy in making this range of responses include the educational and health sectors, policing and residential management services within communities, and the justice system. Equally important, though, is the content and tone

of public debate instituted or promoted by government and its agencies for this influences the type of response made by individuals as outlined previously in Table 3.

Tab. 4. Intolerant Responses

<i>Response</i>	<i>Content</i>
	<b>Prevention:</b>
Treatment	Educational and developmental programmes aimed at individuals or groups.
Deterrence	Making the conduct illegal. Public shaming of the perpetrators.
Leveraging Conformity	Demand conformity to majority preferences as signifier of belonging to the community or society. Conformity as price for societal benefits. Constructing the behaviour as “illegitimate”.
	<b>Management:</b>
Situational Control	Reduction in opportunities and resources for the behaviour, plus curtailment of potential benefits derived there-from.
	<b>Eradication &amp; Retribution:</b>
Prohibition & Sanctions	Criminalisation of the conduct with punishments (fines, custody, community service)
Exclusion & Expulsion	Restricting access for perpetrator. Removal of perpetrator(s).

**Tolerance in context**

The nature and extent of tolerance afforded to or by any individual or group is very context-dependent, at both the national and the local spatial scale, although it is also true to say that our own personal characteristics and backgrounds also have a bearing on our responses to different situations .

Nationally, both historic traditions, cultures (such as religious influences) and government dispositions (as indicated above) all predispose some nations to be more or less tolerant than others in respect of particular issues. European countries have been found to vary substantially in their level of acceptance of immigrants and in anti-immigrant opinion (Chaloupkova and Salamounova, 2006; Dard et.al., 2005), with Scandinavian countries more tolerant and some southern European countries less tolerant. In relation to sexuality, analysis has shown, again, that there are wide national variations in attitudes. Catholic countries and East European countries are less tolerant of homosexuality than Scandinavian countries, Spain and Belgium (ESS 2008). National historical trajectories appear, therefore, to influence present-day attitudes, with implications for the scope for tolerance to exist.

At the local scale, and akin to the neighbourhood determinants of health (see Macintyre et al., 2002), tolerant attitudes are influenced by both compositional and contextual factors. Forrest and Dunn (2006) for example, have shown how, in the case of Sydney, Australia, tolerance of “outsider” groups varies according to the social composition and migration history of different districts within the city. Thus, inner city locations which have a history of diversity are often the most tolerant; districts of more recent diversity, as well as homogenous areas of younger and middle-aged people exhibited mild opposition to multiculturalism but not racism; intolerance and racism were evident in very diverse, very poor areas. For us, this work illustrates that the contextual dimension to inter-group tolerance works through the extent of dominant group privilege in an area (“what is at stake?”); the compatibility of the groups concerned (“who are we talking about?”); and in the history of experience in an area (“what are we used to?”).

Our tolerant assessments and our tolerant responses are partly situationally determined, so that, for example, our behaviour in the face of unfavoured conduct is different in city centre locations, in public buildings, on modes of transport and in our home neighbourhoods. Three sets of considerations come into play in any situation, starting with our *knowledge and expectations* of the situation and circumstances we face. Given the context we are in, we address the questions of whether the conduct concerned seems “in” or “out-of-place”, consistent or not with what we would expect might happen, and whether we have any familiarity with the

perpetrator him/herself or his/her social group: the less familiar we are with them, the less tolerant we are inclined to be. Then, we consider the *risks* we face in terms of exposure and impacts. How often are we going to have to face or experience the conduct in question? How often are we in that context, i.e. the same place, with the same co-occupants? Further, what is the nature and extent of the effects upon us of the conduct concerned? The greater the risks to us of the conduct concerned, the more inclined we are to take action of some sort. Finally, the role of other agents of *governance* and control are relevant. Should the tolerated conduct be controlled or regulated by a locally available agency, such as a landlord, the police, or neighbourhood wardens? If so, we may defer to their intervention, or demand it, rather than intervene directly ourselves (in this case we act by proxy to curtail the conduct). If on the other hand we wish, or deem it necessary, to intervene ourselves, we may consider the likelihood of receiving assistance or back-up from our fellow citizens, which we may be better able to judge in some situations than others.

### **Conclusion: paradoxes of public policy**

In her book, *Policy Paradox*, Deborah Stone looks at how public policies have unexpected or perverse outcomes, often because they «aim to derive rules of behaviour that will automatically lead to the objectively “best” results», masking the fact that policy statements and policy instruments which are given such universal truth status are in fact «political claims themselves» (Stone 2002, p. xii). Public policies for tolerance in the UK seem to operate in this manner, exhibiting many such paradoxes, and working on two different levels. On the one hand, the public institutions of the state have been reformed in line with an agenda of achieving greater tolerance and social justice in public administration, and especially in the treatment of groups who have suffered prejudice (such as gay and lesbian citizens, and the disabled). These reforms constitute the international and public face of “Tolerant Britain”. In relation to ethnic minorities at least, this institutional approach has begun to be criticised for being too tolerant, both in general terms and in specific instances: most recently, a judge criticised a local education authority for being “excessively tolerant” of Muslim school governors who criticised a head teacher for being racist in

not pursuing their Islamic agenda for the school. Education officers were said to be “worried” about a complaint being made to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, should they have defended the head teacher and criticised the governors concerned (Beckford, 2009). On the other hand, policies relating to public conduct in everyday life profess the benefits of asserting our intolerance of unfavoured conducts, again usually focused on particular social groups who become “othered” in this process (such as young people and ethnic minorities as discussed here).

These parallel policy streams are mirrored in a duality of political rhetoric in which politicians declare the virtues, benefits and popularity of “diversity” (in all its forms and dimensions) whilst at the same time calling for conformity on the part of minority groups. The duality is such that tolerance has political value, yet intolerance constitutes the strategy and tactics assigned to achieving the cherished “cohesion”. The Government’s community cohesion agenda asserts «shared values» (Cantle, 2001) and emphasises «what we have in common» and «what binds communities together» as if these things are self-evident and essentially consensual (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007). There is little room for difference in such a policy direction, and the agenda has been described as «communitarian» for its reliance on the dominant moral authority of allegedly consensual majorities (Robinson, 2008).

We have shown that responses to unfavoured conducts can range from the tolerant to the intolerant, with many variations in between (see tables 3 and 4). Yet in the UK, policy which aspires to promote tolerance predominantly uses instruments of intolerance – and within that, tools of management, eradication and sanctions, rather than focusing on prevention. We have also argued that tolerance is very context-dependent, a subtlety lost on policies which search for greater and stricter clarity of definition, especially in determining what it is that we collectively find intolerant. Instead of working towards establishing *principles of tolerance* applicable to different situations, policy has been moving towards setting the *boundaries of intolerance* with a focus on identifying the objects of (in)tolerance (as in table 1 above). This strategy runs a real risk of generating a downward spiral of intolerance whereby the bar is progressively lowered and our thresholds of tolerance set in decline; with such an approach, the attempt to define and eradicate intolerable conducts may never cease.

Our contention would be that in order to sustain a harmonious, diverse society, public policy needs to give greater consideration to the foundations of our tolerant assessments (see table 2) and our tolerant responses, attempting to create the conditions that enable people to adopt the more dynamic, behavioural, psychological and cognitive responses (see table 3). Policies should also aim to create conditions whereby unfavoured, *harmful* conducts are avoided as a result of the mutual respect we have for each other, and the opportunities we open up for everyone to live a purposeful life within society, rather than hoping that intolerable conducts will cease solely as a result of the shame and sanctions directed towards perpetrators.

In respect of the two social groups we have considered here, there are signs that public policy is waking up to the fact that an authoritarian agenda will not in the end deliver tolerance and cohesion. There is evidence of the emergence of a more tolerant approach to youth, one that recognises the origins of the difficulties faced by children and young people in Britain. At the beginning of 2008, the Government announced the launch of The Children's Plan (HM Government, 2008). This initiative aims to make advances in reducing child poverty as well as addressing the educational and health experiences of children. It also aims to reduce youth offending and divert young offenders away from the more punitive aspects of the criminal justice system. A year later, the Government also published guidance on the promotion of "meaningful interaction between people from different backgrounds" (mostly different ethnic and religious backgrounds) to help remove negative stereotypes and prejudice, and to encourage empathy (CLG, 2009).

Whilst these are positive steps, the proof is yet to come, and doubts remain, particularly over whether such approaches will attract sufficient political capital and financial resources to make a real difference; and, over whether politicians from all sides can avoid the populist rhetoric of intolerance that has a far stronger influence on the public realm than the existence of policy documents that espouse the virtues of diversity. Politicians need to talk more about tolerance in order to create a pervasive culture of tolerance, not simply assert that we already have a virtuous culture if only we could remove the threats posed to it by deviants of one sort or another: the irony of that approach seems lost on many people with a public platform and public voice in the debate.

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