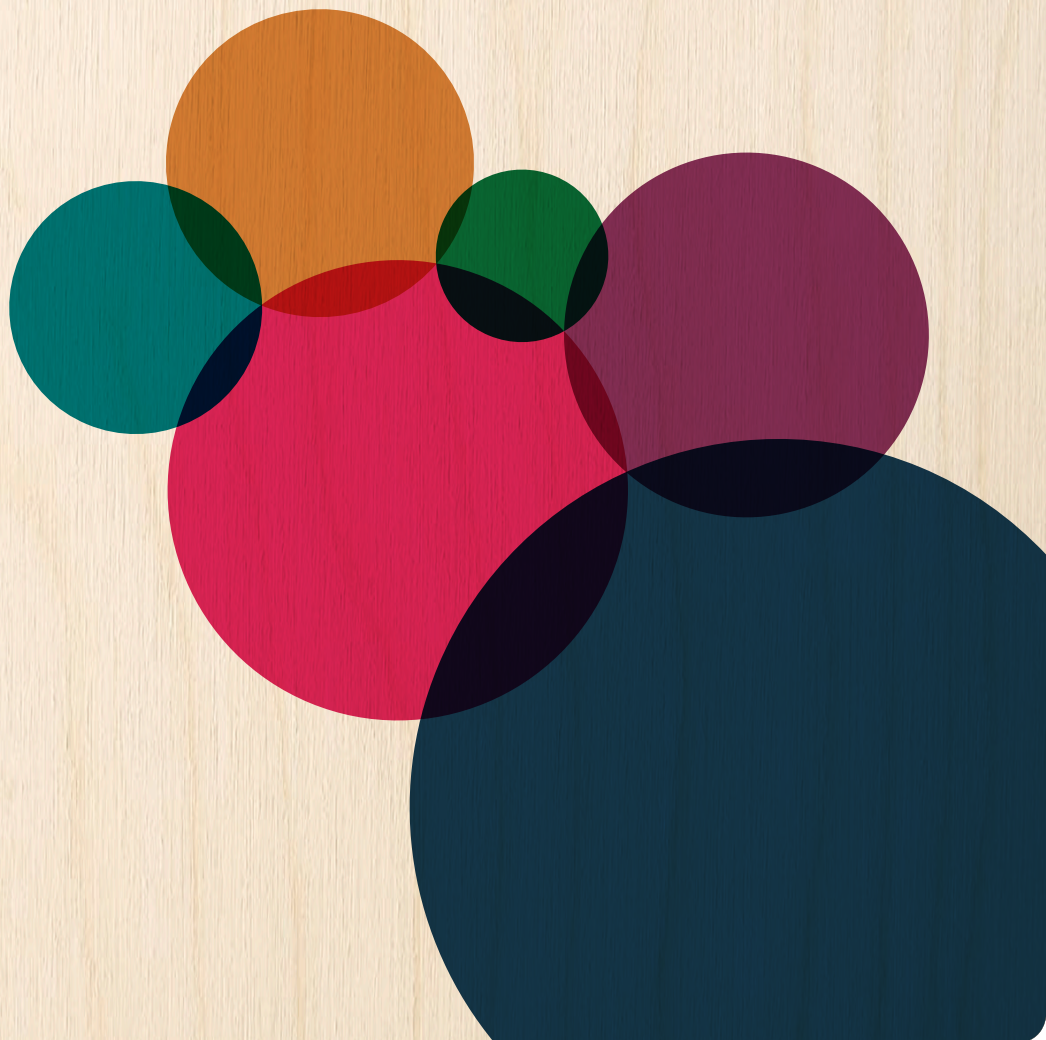


NORMS AT WORK:

CHALLENGING HOMOPHOBIA AND HETERONORMATIVITY

Lena Martinsson, Eva Reimers, Jolanta Reingardė, Anna Sofia Lundgren



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Norms at Work: Challenging Homophobia and Heteronormativity

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PREFACE

This book is one of two books produced by a collaborative project involving both researchers and activists. The book *Open Up Your Workplace* presents tools that can be used by those who want to work against discrimination in the workplace. *Norms at Work* is a research report that provides deeper knowledge about the heterosexual norm, and is a supplement to *Open Up Your Workplace*.

We believe that it is important to recognise that there is no definite boundary between research and activism. Research about discriminatory norms is a form of activism, just as activism against discrimination produces new knowledge.

The authors of this book have been active in two different research projects. Jolanta Reingardė worked in the project *Open and Safe at Work. It*, which was funded by the European Union. Lena Martinsson, Eva Reimers, and Anna Sofia Lundgren worked in the project *The Self-Evident Heterosexuality: School as a Place for Constructions of Gender and Sexuality*, which was funded by the Swedish Research Council and the Equal project *Beneath the Surface*.

These projects were both part of the 2005–2007 TRACE partnership, which was created and funded under the EU Equal program, a program aimed at combating discrimination in the workplace. The project involves four countries: France, Lithuania, Slovenia, and Sweden. Their common interest is to abolish discrimination and the inequality of homosexual and bisexual people in the area of employment, and to enable lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people to work under the same circumstances as their heterosexual colleagues.

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INTRODUCTION

Lena Martinsson, Eva Reimers, Jolanta Reingardė

This book is a joint project by five researchers from Lithuania and Sweden. The aim of our collaboration was to study the processes of normalisation related to sexual orientation, in different contexts and with different focuses of interest. Rather than simply comparing the two nations with each other, we wished to explore the ways in which similar norms are repeated in different contexts, and the effects of such reiteration. Our specific aim was to learn more about some of the conditions that substantiated a norm that we understood as highly problematic, due to its discriminatory effects. We focused our studies on the heterosexual norm, a norm that states that heterosexuality is an expression of nature and therefore the most desirable way of expressing sexuality.

We addressed questions such as: How is the heterosexual norm—as the desired and “natural” state—reiterated in today’s society? How is it challenged? What sort of effect does this norm have on people’s lives, on organisations, on school and working life? How is the heterosexual norm articulated together with representations of citizenship and the nation? And could we, in our research group, suggest any new methods for subverting this norm?

Our studies were conducted in different countries, in different social spaces (universities, schools, and working life in general), and using different methods (interviews, participant observation, surveys, and textual analysis), resulting in a diverse set of materials.

SOMEWHERE ELSE OR RIGHT HERE?

One chapter in this book, written by Eva Reimers, explains how discrimination and homophobia are often presented as being situated somewhere else, at “some other place”. Homophobic (and therefore problematic) individuals are spoken of as people at other workplaces, at other schools. They are presented as people of other so-called “cultures”, or other nations. Thus, discrimination based on sexual orientation is made into a phenomenon performed by someone else—not “me”, not “us”, and definitely not “here”. The example in this chapter

is taken from a Swedish teacher training college. Both students and teachers in the program agreed that discrimination towards homosexuals and bisexuals was a serious problem. In that sense, they could not be considered homophobic. What Reimers underlines in this article is that by viewing problematic, exclusionary norms as non-typical, and as properties of the “other”, the participants in the discussion avoid reflecting on how they, themselves, might engage in discriminatory practices. When homophobia is discussed, it is made into someone else’s problem—*they* need to change, not *us*. No one seems to want to be part of discrimination, to be seen as homophobic.

A similar phenomenon became apparent at a conference in Kaunas, Lithuania, in the autumn of 2006. The conference was titled “Homophobia and Discrimination of Homosexuals: Challenges of Social Inclusion in an Enlarged Europe” and was directed at both politicians and researchers. One of the invited speakers, a Lithuanian politician, asserted that homophobic people were mainly found in rural areas, where the Catholic Church had a much stronger hold on people’s minds than in the urban parts of the country. The big problem was to reach *them*, to inform *them*, and to change *their* attitudes and *their* tendency to vote for homophobic politicians. Once again, problematic and discriminatory practices and notions were presented as traits of others, making it possible to avoid the question of whether and how problematic norms were taken for granted and reinforced in the actual conference—of whether they were not just to be found *there* but also present and operative right *here*.

We believe that these two examples point to one important condition for reiteration of the heterosexual norm. When homophobia is made into a marginal phenomenon, the heteronormative assumptions that constitute a precondition for homophobia are obscured. Two chapters in this book—one written by Jolanta Reingardė of Lithuania and the other by Anna Sofia Lundgren of Sweden—focus on the situation for individual homosexual and bisexual people. Both chapters are based on interviews with people suffering from discrimination at the workplace in Sweden and Lithuania. They present stories about silence, fear, and the coping strategies that are employed in everyday life. The norm that puts forward the heterosexual relationship as the only valid and recognisable form of intimate relation is constantly present in these

interviewees' stories. It is *here*, and it has immediate and tangible effects. It is this normative context that makes homosexuality or bisexuality questionable, different, and strange.

We found a number of apparent similarities in the ways that the interviewees represented the workplace situation in the two countries; for example, the coping strategies employed were very similar. There are several possible explanations for these similarities. Firstly, since the experience of being different and excluded is universal, the ways of making sense of and recounting the story of exclusion and marginalisation, and the strategies for coping with the situation, are also similar in a sense. Another reason could be that the increasing globalisation of the LGBT¹ movement has resulted in a hegemonic or dominant way to interpret non-heterosexual experiences.

This globalisation might, however, be a double-edged sword. On one hand, it strengthens those who define themselves as LGBT; it offers an alternative and critical possibility to heterosexual life, and an opportunity to take part in LGBT experiences and strategies, and thereby also the possibility of telling alternative stories (see Adam et al 1999). In this way, the great story of the successful heterosexual nuclear family is challenged by the production of an alternative critical story that speaks of the cost of the heterosexual story. In our material, we have come upon several stories about good and desirable homosexual or bisexual lives; homosexuality as a deviance and a problem is no longer the only possible position.

On the other hand, the globalisation of the LGBT movement has made homosexuality more visible, not only as a feasible way of life, but also as a threat to the heterosexual norm. Where homosexuality was previously seen as unthinkable, it is now impossible to deny the existence of LGBT people. In Lithuania, for example, the question of the rights of LGBT people is currently on the agenda, and has sparked a fight to maintain a heterosexual Lithuania. As the Lithuanian research in this book clearly shows, the situation of LGBT people has, in that sense, been harder. The individual cost of coming out can be very high; it might lead to harass-

1. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transsexual/Transgender.

ment and even to unemployment. The solution to the problem is not as easy as saying that if everyone comes out from "the closet", the situation will change. In order for LGBT people to be safe, the heterosexual norm must be deconstructed and subverted.

DIFFERENCES?

In our common research we have often been asked: isn't there a huge difference between Sweden and Lithuania? Isn't the situation in Lithuania awful, and the situation in Sweden pretty good? Those who have asked these questions have noted that Sweden is famous for its open-mindedness and its work for gender equality, while Lithuania is often described as one of the most homophobic countries in Europe. So, yes, there are obvious differences. The conditions for LGBT people in our respective countries are not the same.

The Lithuanian researchers in this book focus on problems specific to Lithuania, where homophobia is often articulated as part of the notion of what it is to be Lithuanian. One result of this situation is that the LGBT movement in Lithuania is strongly questioned and opposed; it is met with resistance and is therefore very small. We have also seen that, unlike in Sweden, it is not only possible but also favourable for a politician to express homophobic attitudes in the Lithuanian parliament. However, as the Swedish researchers in this book demonstrate, despite a public discourse in which homophobia is seen as a deviance, it is important to critically examine how Sweden, too, is permeated by a heterosexual norm; heteronormativity is not something that only exists in other nations, among other people.

As a consequence of our results, we would even go as far as suggesting that thinking of heteronormativity as something that only exists in the margins of Sweden, and open-mindedness as something typical of Sweden, is actually very problematic. These notions obscure the ways in which homophobia is made possible in everyday Swedish life, in universities, schools, the workplace, and the home. Another chapter in this book, written by Lena Martinsson, describes how heterosexuality is made into a norm in rather paradoxical and unexpected contexts. Martinsson's studies of gender equality strategies and projects show how

these efforts to foster gender equality are based on and reiterate the heterosexual norm. When pupils in Swedish elementary schools are taught to behave in an equal way, they are simultaneously expected—and therefore instructed—to live in heterosexual relationships. Other ways of living are made invisible. These reiterations of an idea about what is normal also serve as the most fundamental condition for homophobia, and certainly also as a condition for exclusion and stigmatisation in everyday life of those who do not adapt to the norm.

NORMS?

We have already used the concept of a *norm* several times, but what do we actually mean? How is the notion of a specific normativity related to a discussion about homophobia? We use *norm* as a concept that shows how representations and language, ways to understand and make sense of things, events, and situations, are connected to power. The concept tells us something about how norms are productive, and how they have effects on collectives and individuals. They govern us in the sense that they tell us what to do, and what to feel and think. A norm tells us how to behave, how to act; it makes our lives intelligible. Norms are social, and they are reiterated and produced in innumerable different places. They are not the creation of a single individual, nor even of a single state. Inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1978), we are more inclined to see the state or the law as effects of norms, rather than as sources of norms. Laws and regulations are materialisations of norms that make these norms seem more stable than they actually are. Another significant aspect of norms, as we use the concept, is that no one can control a norm. It is repeated in everyday life, in organisations, the state, trade unions, churches, schools, and many other places. Everybody takes part in creating and maintaining the power of specific norms, by repeating them, and by being subjected to them.

In stating this, it is also important to recognise that norms are changeable. They are not stable. Furthermore, several contradictory norms are often articulated simultaneously. It is therefore never totally predictable how a norm will work. For example, there are many norms, both in Sweden and Lithuania, that tell people not to discriminate, that discrimination is bad. On the other hand, both in Lithuania and in Sweden, people are

constantly repeating norms that make the heterosexual norm into the superior and good norm, a reiteration that fortifies other ways of living as deviant and problematic. Simultaneous reiterations of both an anti-discriminatory and a heterosexual norm can be seen as struggles between different norms, or as norms in conflict. This conflict offers possibilities to choose a political standpoint, to take part in one norm in a way that challenges the other. These struggles take place everywhere, which means that it is also possible to challenge or—as some of us also name it in this book—to *subvert* norms at different places and in different contexts (Butler 1990). This subversion of norms, the process that makes them unstable, is not just something that happens exclusively in official and public contexts. It happens and must be pursued in private life too, in how people dress and behave. Norms can be challenged at work places, by NGOs, and by the way in which citizens place their ballots in political elections.

HETERONORMATIVITY

The concept of heteronormativity is relatively new (Butler 1990). It focuses on heterosexuality as a normative notion that repeatedly asserts heterosexual life as the right life to live. However, it also comprises several other normative notions. For example, it designates rules and regulations for how to behave as a woman and as a man. Seeing these as normative constructions rather than objective descriptions or facts helps us recognise that gender performances are effects of a process where we repeatedly separate two categories from each other, and individuals are forced to be part of only one of these categories. You have to choose to be either a man or a woman; transgressions will be punished. We are therefore all continually producing ideas to the effect that some parts of bodies, such as the vagina or penis, are connected to specific characteristics, such as being emotional or logical, or passive or active. The norm prescribes women and men to act, think, and perceive themselves as the opposite of the other sex. A man is what a woman is not, and vice versa. Furthermore, the definition of each sex entails that individuals who are named “woman” should desire a “man” and individuals who are named “man” should desire a “woman”. These gender categories, together with their prescriptions of how to behave and what to desire, are a normative construction, a heteronormative construction. The norm governs, as Judith Butler express it, *intelligibility* (Butler 2004: 42). Two genders are created,

in a binary relation to each other. Those who transgress these categories run the risk of becoming strange or even unintelligible in the eyes of others. Judith Butler defines the concept of a norm in the following way: “A norm is a form of social power that makes subjectivity, it makes it possible to act, it makes you act in an intelligible way” (2004:48). This means that people who do not act in accordance with the norm are not intelligible; they will appear as queer, excluded, different, and strange.

Our focus on norms means that when we, in this book, talk about *sexuality* we are referring to sexualising norms, that is, representations, notions, and modes of behaviour that make us feel and understand, act and organise our lives, genders, and societies in specific ways. Furthermore, when we talk about *sexual orientations* we are referring to problematic divisions and dominant notions, often perceived as “truths”, about what is normal or abnormal to desire. We regard *sexual orientation* as a social construction that must be changed, because it has troublesome and discriminatory effects. In order to counteract oppressive and discriminatory effects of dominant notions about *sexuality* and *sexual orientations*, it is important to discuss the question about sexual orientation in two steps. Firstly, it is urgently necessary to recognise that not everyone can or want to adhere to the heterosexual norm, follows the problematic heterosexual, and that many people are therefore suppressed and limited by this dominant norm. It is therefore important to make it possible to live a non-heterosexual life without risking exclusion from, for example, family and working life, or other forms of punishment and harassment. Secondly, in order to achieve this it is necessary to be made aware that the divisions between heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual individuals are normative products that must be questioned and subverted. We need to challenge the idea of a “normal” and “natural” heterosexual category.

PRIVATE—PUBLIC

The research on which this book is based was to some extent (and in the Lithuanian cases completely) funded by the European Union. The aim of our respective projects was to study discrimination based on sexual orientation, in working life and in schools. However, early in the research process we found that the situation in public workplaces was perhaps not the most important issue to discuss. When individuals

feel that they cannot be open about their sexual orientation to their immediate blood family, not being able to be open at work becomes less imperative. When you constantly hide important aspects of your life and identity from those who are closest to you, it becomes strange to discuss, or in some cases even reflect on, openness and discrimination at work. The interviews in the Lithuanian study also showed that it was in no way possible to limit issues of openness and discrimination to working life; they were just as relevant outside work. This made us aware of the importance of not separating the work, semi-public, and private spheres from each other. Even if it is possible to assert that the heterosexual norm is reiterated in the workplace, this norm is just as noticeable and effective at home, in private life, and, for example, when someone is playing football with their friends. In fact, it is possible to view the notion of “home” and “family”—with a father and a mother—as an effect and a reiteration of the heterosexual norm. In a similar way, it is also possible to understand the game of football as part of the construction of masculinity as opposite to femininity. This is why, in most contexts, playing football is still seen as atypical for females.

Norms are constructed and repeated in the workplace and within organisations. Political institutions, such as parliament, are no exception; they are also contexts in which the heterosexual norm is reiterated in different ways. Nobody can escape this being part of how norms are made and subverted; we all take part in this process by the way we dress, talk, shop, and behave. It is due to this construction and repetition in different contexts that the norm seems so stable and appears as an expression of something natural and self-evident. This is why we believe it is vital to discuss these norms in different normative contexts, and to deconstruct the barrier that has been set up between private and public lives.

In earlier research, work has been done to study how heteronormativity is reproduced and challenged in politics, media, popular culture, art, and so on. Research on working life has, however, been rather limited.² Even more limited is research on so-called private life. We

2. Straight people don't tell, do they? Negotiating the boundaries of sexuality and gender at work (Lehtonen & Mustola 2004) is, however, one good exception which focuses on the workplace situation of LGBT people in Finland.

want to emphasise the importance of looking more closely at how these norms construct homes, friendships, and materiality, and how norms are reiterated—but also challenged—in the homes, among family members, between friends, but also in spare time activities such as sports or in NGOs. We also emphasise that this deconstruction of the division between the public and private spheres has been discussed by gender researchers and feminists for a long time. The work towards gender equality, and the struggle against heteronormativity and homophobia, cannot be limited to one sphere in society. Norms are repeated everywhere and to restrict the question of what is political to the public arena is in itself an expression of a normative and thereby powerful situation.

Hopefully, the European Union can also make the private arena into an important field to discuss. As feminists all around the world have emphasised for decades, the so-called private sphere is a highly political space.

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EXPERIENCING HETERONORMATIVITY

SILENCED SEXUALITIES³: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE, AS NARRATED BY LESBIANS AND GAY MEN IN LITHUANIA

Jolanta Reingardė 4

INTRODUCTION

Lithuanian social and political discourse on equal opportunities in working life has only recently begun to encompass sexuality and the experiences of homosexual people in the workplace. Discrimination at work has previously mostly been discussed in terms of gender or age, while a more elaborate approach towards discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation has been absent. There is also very little national research which questions heteronormativity, attempts to reveal the experiences of silence and coming out by gays and lesbians in working life, or explores the ways in which these experiences affect individuals' identities and relationships with others within organisations. One of the reasons for this is that sexual minorities at work have gone unnoticed. As Martin (1992) puts it, just as men work with men and come to believe that they work in a gender-neutral world rather than in one dominated by men, heterosexuals also, by working with other heterosexuals, come to believe that they work in a sexually-neutral world, rather than in one dominated by heterosexuals. Because sexual minorities are socially invisible, sexual orientation is perceived to be irrelevant, as if gay people have a sexual orientation, but straight people do not.

3. This concept is borrowed from the work of Epstein, O'Flynn, and Telford (2003)—*Silenced Sexualities in Schools and Universities*. UK: Trentham Books.

4. I would like to sincerely thank my very good colleague and friend, Arnas Zdanevičius, for his conceptual insights and valuable feedback on this article. I am also grateful to all researchers at the Social Research Center at Vytautas Magnus University, who carried out the research project “Open and Safe at Work”, and to the students of the Sociology Department for their research assistance and interest in the project.

The terms *sexual minorities* and *minority sexual identity* are used in order to emphasise the context, particularly the power relationship in working environments in which lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender (LGBT) people find themselves subordinated, marginalised, stigmatised, and excluded. However, it should not be forgotten that generalised concepts such as “minorities”, “subcultures”, “marginal groups”, and even “queers” are very much associated with the categorisation of individuals, and thus are subject to manipulation in the public sphere, just as in the case of “deviants” and related concepts such as “deviance”, which are now deprecated by critical sociology as being theoretically mistaken (Sumner 1996, Zdanevičius 2001). In Lithuanian public discourse, the term “sexual minorities” is used in order to underline the normative aspects of homosexuality (that is, its inferiority to heterosexuality). However, this concept also has a sociological meaning in the academic literature; a minority as a group, which tends to be more vulnerable to social exclusion, as in the cases of ethnic, religious, and other minorities.

The Eurobarometer of 2006 on *Discrimination in the European Union* show that 58% of Lithuanians feel that being homosexual is currently a disadvantage in Lithuanian society, 42% feel that discrimination based on sexual orientation is widespread in Lithuanian society (the EU25 average is 50%), and 30% feel that it is even more widespread now than it was five years ago. These figures present only a very general picture, which can be usefully supplemented by the qualitative data of the study described in this chapter.

This study is based on 38 in-depth interviews with LGBT people in Lithuania. The interviews were carried out within the framework of the project “Open and Safe at Work”, which is supported by the European Union and the Lithuanian government (EQUAL Initiative). The following analysis uses the experiences of the interviewees (particularly gay men and lesbians, who dominated the sample) in order to explore the ways in which they construct their sexual identity at work, their experiences of discrimination, and their survival strategies in heteronormative working contexts. It also attempts to reveal how non-heterosexual identities are reflected in individuals' choices to *come out* (i.e. to openly reveal their lesbian or gay identities) or to *stay in the closet* (i.e. to hide their sexual identities). The major complication of carrying out

research into sexual minorities in organisations is related to the question of how to gather data in an atmosphere of silence.

We strove to include the experiences of those who were openly gay and those who remained in the closet, as well as the experiences of homosexuals of different gender, age (21–55), and geographical location (Vilnius, Kaunas, Druskininkai, and Šiauliai). Most informants were selected by applying the “snowball method”, while others made contact with the researchers after reading information about the study on the Internet. The final sample comprised twenty-five gay men, ten lesbian women, two bisexual men, and one transgender woman. Eight gay men and four lesbians worked in career-oriented, so-called “masculine” professions (ICT experts, engineers, security guards, high-level managers), nineteen men and six women worked in social services (health care, education, beauty services), and the transgender woman had been unemployed for the past year. Seven of the interviewees were totally open about their sexuality at work, ten were open to “selected” individuals, and the remaining twenty-one kept their sexual identity completely hidden in the workplace.

CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES

The silencing of minority sexual identities is a major factor in the lives of LGBT people. Much of the discussion around sexual expression and identity has focused on the debate over essentialism versus constructionism. Broadly speaking, whereas essentialism seeks to establish “natural” or “biological” explanations for sexual practices, relationships, and identities, constructionism claims that these are socio-historical products, not universally applicable, and deserve explanation in their own right. Also, while essentialism treats the self-attribution of a sexual identity as unproblematic—as simply the conscious recognition of a true, underlying “orientation”—constructionism focuses attention on identity as a complex developmental outcome, the consequence of an interactive process of social labelling and self-identification (Epstein 1996, 151). In the early 1980s, theoretical and empirical research adopted a constructionist approach to sexuality; it was recognised that essentialist theories have at best limited relevance for the understanding of sexual identity. For example, Seidman (1997) and Butler (1990) argue that the

essentialist view does not adequately deal with the power-knowledge regime of compulsive heterosexuality, nor does it explain how *compulsive heterosexuality* is created in organisations.

The significant development in this area was Foucault’s radical challenge to our understanding of sexuality (1999[1976]), and his notion that homosexuality should be viewed as a category of knowledge rather than a discovered or discrete identity. It was this view that led onto poststructuralist approaches, conceptualising individual sexual identity as multiple, fragmented, and fluid, constructed and reconstructed within organisations through different discursive processes. Foucault (1999[1976]) also suggested that a silenced sexual identity is an agent of power in its own right. The predominant (hegemonic) heterosexual discourse precludes open discussion of the experiences of sexual minorities at work, implying that knowledge of this taboo is present in the discourse even if it is not talked about. Things that remain unsaid are equally important, and can therefore illustrate the articulation of power.

Another important aspect is the fact that the dominant discourse of heterosexuality puts the dominated discourse of homosexuality under pressure to be silenced, suppressed, and eliminated, as well as crediting it with a certain limited legitimacy and protection. The minority is tolerated and accepted rather than put on an equal footing. The critical approach to organisational discourse asserts that it is the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity, which determines and constitutes the subject’s sexual identity, in which normative heterosexuality is promoted, sustained, and made to appear totally natural in a variety of formal and informal contexts. One of the manifestations of heteronormativity is the division between subjectivity or self-identity (private notions of the self—who am I?) and the individual’s public position or social identity (how am I perceived by others?), especially when this is maintained through silence.

In the analysis presented here, I argue that heteronormative discourse acts as a mechanism of power and control and limits the ability of LGBT people to discuss and construct their own identities at work. On the other hand, agency is not extinguished entirely; this discourse can be used to build power, which can then work against heteronormativity in an act of resistance.

THE COST OF SILENCE

During the research process, a number of themes recurred and became prominent. One of these was the theme of silenced sexualities at work. Many interviewees were still “in the closet”, and were “out” only to a few selected individuals at work. The interview material showed that leading a double life can have a tremendously negative impact on an individual, not only in terms of self-esteem, but, more importantly, in terms of human suffering:

“[...] this is a constant lie, an eternal one... Sometimes even I get confused in my nonsense stories: where I was, what I was or wasn't doing. I'm a very lively person by nature, but when I get to work I immediately become rather like a dead person. I can't discuss anything, I can't tell my stories to anybody, and I feel as if I'm somehow vanishing from the inside. *This heteronormativity destroys me from the inside, you understand? I have to destroy myself from the inside in order to please them. How can you live like that?* [emphasis mine] And our lives are too short, do you understand?” (Rima, lesbian, 36)

“*The worst bit is this self-discrimination*, when you think about all those norms that you don't accept, and then start to apply them to yourself, and start to live according to them without being aware of them. *This is awful, and all those things [norms]... that means that even though you don't agree with them, you follow them anyway because you want to safeguard the people that are close to you: your parents, your children, and so on* [emphasis mine]. On the other hand, not being able to take a clear position [to come out] makes you feel abnormal. You can't admit it, but somehow you still start to agree that we are evil somehow, that this is abnormal, and so on. You don't want it, and you don't say ‘I'm like that... it doesn't mean that I hate men or that I harass all women’ [...]. When you don't question anything, don't tell [the truth] in their eyes, then what happens is that these norms stay [inviolable].” (Migle, lesbian, 33)

“In general, it's very hard to conceal your [sexual] orientation, especially when you reconcile it with yourself and accept it as a concurrent part of your identity. *I feel, perhaps, like the dissidents during the Soviet era who used to live a double life—a public one, more*

or less complying with the requirements of the regime, and a private one, the underground one that is ruled by your own conviction [emphasis mine]. You're constantly aware that when the truth about your real identity comes out, you can always be repressed. Often, you can't even participate in public life, or be active in certain social movements. I left one organisation just because I heard jokes about homosexual people. I realized that I can't strive for the same aims, or have something in common with those people, because they don't accept people like me.” (Dalia, lesbian, 40)

The cost of silence can only be understood within the general context of oppressive heteronormativity. It has an enormous effect on the personal lives of homosexuals and creates a premise for self-destructive feelings and behaviour.

EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

We found that indirect discrimination at work was the most prevalent current experience among the research participants. Direct discrimination in working life—including refusal of employment, obstruction of promotion, and obstacles in professional development—was mostly mentioned in terms of experiences from the past. Indirect discrimination was reflected in a variety of forms and contexts: pejorative jokes and outrageous comments; worsening in relationships after coming out; the lack of a safe context in which to talk about sexuality; the necessity for gays and lesbians to control their appearance, dress, gestures, the content and flow of informal communication.

The major reason for individuals to avoid disclosing their sexual orientation at work was the belief that they would be discriminated against. Factors influencing the decision to remain silent included the language used by colleagues at work, and the fear of being excluded.

“You know, this openness... if only you could come out of the closet that easily: open the doors and get out. First, it won't happen, this coming out. I would guarantee that at least sixty or seventy percent of my co-workers accept me. And yet I'm not sure. And that's why I don't want to come out. (Edigijus, gay, 24)

Silence and ignorance, as a reactive strategy to coming out, were also perceived as discriminatory. Ausra described how she had taken her girlfriend to her company's Christmas party and spent the whole night telling people about their partnership. However, the resulting lack of interest in her private life made her feel disappointed and excluded.

“... in my current job, I tried to come out, I tried to be more open, but nobody understood me. Our organisation holds a big celebration every year at Christmas. The invitation that everybody received said that you are invited with your “other half” [partner]. So I thought that we [my girlfriend and I] could go. Of course, I was nervous, my hands were trembling, and if I remember right I had four glasses of champagne to give me the courage to introduce my girlfriend to everybody. I introduced her as my partner. [...] It was very scary and I was watching their reactions. And they reacted differently: some of them had big eyes, some of them had curious looks, and some made me feel happy and relaxed. We were sitting and chatting: Oh, this is your partner, how nice!—Some people thought I was joking. We really had a nice time together. [...] That evening, I was really happy, and I thought that now I would be happier, I'd live in joy and peace. But after a while I realised that nobody really understood me. Everybody thought that this was not my girlfriend, just a friend. I think they couldn't understand that somebody would dare to do that—to bring their [same-sex] partner to the party.” (Ausra, lesbian, 27)

With this reactive silence, Ausra's colleagues, whether consciously or not, used silence or “misunderstanding” as a tool of hostility. In their study on the absent presence of sexual minorities at work, James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2003) state that work colleagues create social reality for gay people in the workplace, through the absence of what might be said, and what is left unsaid. The absent presence could also be said to be constitutive of social identity, and the way in which gay people are seen by their workmates (Hardy et al. 2000). By ignoring alternative sexualities, the organisation makes it more difficult for sexual minorities to construct an “out” social identity. In this case, silence can be seen as a manifestation of the refusal by the majority to acknowledge these alternative sexualities.

Although we are concentrating more on discursive practices in terms of talk and social action, we do not suggest that context is irrelevant; in fact, it surfaced as a very important factor. Many studies have shown the significant relationships between the situational constraints embedded in organisations and occupations, on the one hand, and the coming out decisions (and related discriminatory practices) made by individual employees, on the other (Lehtonen and Mustola 2004, Lehtonen 2002, Heikkinen 2002, Sears and Williams 1997). One of our interviewees, Gruodis, described how a lack of commitment to work was one of the consequences of his silence:

“If this job was going to last for ever, or if I knew that I'd be working there for the rest of my life, maybe it would be different. I don't know how it would be. But I know that I'm leaving soon, and I always live with the idea that I'm going to quit this job. This feeling of how temporary it all is, I think, made me avoid committing myself to being too open, and to having friends.” (Gruodis, gay, 36)

We also found that in smaller organisations, where there is more interpersonal contact, it is harder for employees to recognise their minority identities or to protect themselves in the case of discrimination. The large international companies, as Aušra's story shows, might be perceived to be more LGBT-friendly:

“[...] sometimes I think, if someone [from work] didn't like my sexual orientation, and if someone tried to fire me from the company, there are easy ways to act against that. I could write letters to the foreign partners of the company, and I don't think they would tolerate such discrimination [...] In a Lithuanian company, things would be different. The previous companies I worked with were small. Everybody knew about everybody. Everything was decided around the coffee table and suchlike. [In small companies], I think, there would be no chance to make claims or complaints. There is nobody to protect you.” (Aušra, lesbian, 27)

James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2003), in their research among members of the police and the fire service in the UK, have also noticed

that close personal relationships mean that the costs of coming out are higher, because of potential negative reactions. In bigger organisations, with less interpersonal interaction, it is easier to be in the closet, and the risks associated with coming out are reduced. Our research shows that commitment and loyalty to the organisation, as well as work attitudes, may also contribute to the decision over coming out. Gender makeup also matters; the more “feminine” environments were perceived as being more friendly towards gay men than were the career-oriented “male” organisations.

“The colleagues who know about me accept [my sexual orientation] quite well. My boss, who is a woman, has no problem with it, and accepts it as normal. She even knows my boyfriend. I don’t think hairdressers should have problems with that. Everybody understands that a hairdresser is somehow allowed to do that [to be gay]. [...] There are many gay people working in the beauty industry. In other companies, with all kinds of managers, it’s more difficult. I think the managers are sitting [in the closet] with their mouths shut, living double lives.” (Raigardas, gay, 26)

For lesbians, this marked difference between male- and female-dominated areas of work was not apparent. On the other hand, lesbians felt more vulnerable and exposed to acts of discrimination, not only on the grounds of sexual orientation but also on the grounds of gender. Dalia’s story indicates her resemblance to other women, despite the differences in their sexual identities:

“Lesbians in our society are in even more closed communities. In general, women are more vulnerable, they can’t feel safe, and they have to hold on to the jobs that they have. They want to live and to love. Apparently they simply understand that being public [about your sexuality] is something like being a kamikaze. Our society will not change its attitudes, and there’s no point in sacrificing your life. There’s also another thing – lesbians are also women, and women value their personal life and privacy more.” (Dalia, lesbian, 40)

Gender relations emerged as one of the most significant, if not the most significant, structuring factor for the working conditions of homosexuals. Most of the interviewees who were open at work (in one way or another) had carefully assessed the prevailing organisational climate before disclosing their sexual orientation. Thus, in future studies of sexualities at work, it is extremely important not just to focus on the actors, but also to describe the working environment.

COPING STRATEGIES

The issue of coping strategies in heteronormative work environments has been well elaborated by many researchers. It was also explored in the empirical material of our research project. Griffin (in Croteau 1996) distinguished four main ways in which lesbians and gay men manage their identity in the workplace: covering up, passing, being implicitly out, and affirming one’s identity.

COVERING UP: SUPPRESSION OF SEXUAL IDENTITY AT WORK

Prevalent among the interviewees was the tendency to suppress the discussion of coming out at work, and to state that they did not want to flaunt their sexuality at work. As one of our informants said, “your sexuality is a private issue, thus of no interest to other people at work”. In the view of the interviewees, being open about sexual identity often meant demonstrating something that is not publicly accepted. Making a division between one’s public and private life, and covering up one’s homosexual identity, emerged as a dominant survival strategy.

“There is no doubt that the most important thing is that *you are first of all a human being, who is doing some work, and that you are competent in your field and can be trusted* [emphasis mine]. I think competence positively affects anyone’s professional career, regardless of sexual orientation. I work in the field of information technology. My work is related to statistical analysis, creation of various tools, multi-dimensional layers, and so on. And somewhere at the end of the list is the small fact that I’m gay, that I like guys.” (Andrius, gay, 23)

“Something that I like at work is that we don’t talk about our families, children, husbands, or wives. This is a good atmosphere. In my view, you don’t need to talk about that at work. *It’s good for me, because I’m very different from the others. I think it’s most difficult for those who are really visible, I mean, gays who are obviously gay* [emphasis mine]. As much as I discussed that with them, they told me that they don’t need to come out, everybody knows about it anyway. Heterosexuals don’t talk about themselves, why should homosexuals talk about this at work? Many of them [homosexuals] adjust to their workplace and they look like everybody else. You don’t make a fuss about what you are, and you live your life peacefully.” (Lina, lesbian, 30)

Mykolas, a young businessman and the owner of a small company, stayed in the closet for many years. He felt that talking about his sexual orientation would be something like a claim for idiosyncrasy that breaks common rules.

“[...] if you want to be idiosyncratic, to be an exception that breaks the rules, then you start to complain that you’re being discriminated against. Simply put, maybe sometimes you yourself break those rules. I don’t get any remarks because I never give any grounds for it. I don’t act, I don’t need to act [like that], with manners, words, eye-winking. I wouldn’t tolerate it myself, if, say, I had those gays [with those effeminate manners] working for me. [...] In my opinion, [homophobia] is very often provoked by these people themselves. Very often, these people are just bad-mannered, they’re trying to be very visible, like, “I don’t care and everybody should get out of my way”; this sort of public [sexuality] is not acceptable to me.” (Mykolas, gay, 35)

We also found that in certain occupations, mostly male-dominated and career-oriented professions, *covering up* acted as an identity management strategy that was followed both at work and outside of work. The story of Mykolas shows that he has developed one identity, a professional identity, at work (where there is no space for sexuality), and another one in his “off-duty life”, where his homosexual identity is again kept secret. When asked about his sexual identity at work, Mykolas was quite strict:

“I: I’m basically interested in how you feel at work as a gay person.

M: I wouldn’t want to talk about such a topic. The more you’re connected to people, the more you are afraid of it. When you’re employed by someone, you don’t take responsibility for them. But when you’re an employer you care about your clients, the common image, about everything. When the clients have to sign contracts, would they want to give work to a faggot? Why should I create the unpleasant situation for them of doing business with somebody who is not like everybody else? I separate my personal life from my work. This [being gay] is my private life and it should not be confused with my work. I am “normal” in public life. I am neither fighting with myself nor with society in general.” (Mykolas, gay, 35)

This commitment to both professional and private identities, and their contradictory manifestations, was apparent in several of the narratives reported in this study. Moreover, male-dominated and career-oriented work places were also observed to be highly heteronormative, with the professional identity acting to suppress the homosexual identity. In the extreme cases, heteronormativity was manifested through internalised homophobia directed towards “feminine” gay men, certain mannerisms, overt demonstrations of homosexuality, and so on.

Another interesting finding was that the covering up was not always under the control of the individual. The naming of someone as lesbian or gay, described by Butler (1997) as “the divine power of naming”, did not necessarily happen with the subject’s knowledge. Several informants felt that their colleagues knew about their sexual orientation, or felt that they had been “outed”, despite never having made any effort to come out, or even having carefully tried to protect themselves from disclosure.

“[...] I was working at McDonald’s in 1996, and somehow they found out about me, and it started this “[whispering]” ... [...] Once, a girl came up to me and asked me if I wanted to have a cup of coffee with her after work. OK, I said, let’s go. We went for coffee and she started [interrogating me]—how, when, who with, how many times? And I said, please tell me why you’re

asking me all this. She wanted to know about it out of her feminine curiosity. And I said “yes, I’m a lesbian.” And our friendship ended after that. We talked, and I found out that everybody knew about me. [...] And I started to feel that communication in our team was happening but I didn’t exist for them any more. We were at a party, but it went on like I wasn’t there. And you feel this silent, passive... alienation.” (Rima, lesbian, 36)

The issue of silenced sexualities at work is central, in a number of ways, to the experiences and identities of sexual minorities. Silencing can be interpreted as a means of self-protection as well as suffering. Therefore, it could be argued that social interactions at work, and denied subjectivity, are dependent on organisational contexts and situational factors.

The silenced sexualities also reveal deeper incoherencies in our cultural discourses. These can be disentangled with reference to the distinctions between private/public and private/secret, respectively, which are superimposed upon the hierarchy between homosexuality and heterosexuality. According to Goffman (1963), sexual activities and fantasies tend to unfold in the private domain, while sexual identities and orientations are part and parcel of our public persona, and are routinely deciphered from appearances, accessories, and interactions. Here, sexual inequality means that it is only LGBT people who are blamed for flaunting their sexuality when their sexual orientations surface in public places.

PASSING: INVENTING HETEROSEXUAL LIFESTYLES

The passing strategy can be characterised by the way that sexual minorities maintain silence through deliberate action on their part to act as heterosexuals, sometimes even inventing opposite-sex partners. Passing can take the form of not giving details about one’s private life, referring to friends in a gender-neutral way, or inventing a heterosexual lifestyle.

“Can you imagine, we meet on Mondays, everybody is telling their stories: I raised children, I brought my children to McDonald’s with my wife, etc. But what can I do? What can I tell them? But this happens, you understand? Everybody talks like nobody

cares about your personality. But it only seems that way. [...] they’re waiting for my story—and what can I tell them about myself? [...] and in this situation I feel very uncomfortable. I can’t tell them that I was with my girlfriend. Then you have to become like an actress. But this is too hard, [...] and it sucks. It means that from the beginning you have to become some dead person. [...] I imagine that I will change my profession and imagine myself working in a big company, and I’m already worried about the people there.” (Rima, lesbian, 36)

“The lack of openness causes discomfort. You can’t even tell jokes about your lifestyle. Even if you are in a company [at work] you can’t look around. You have to pretend that you’re looking at girls. You constantly have to pretend about your family. It’s a rule that you have to pretend at work. When you meet up with your mates from college, you have to manipulate things somehow, because we’re not interested in telling the truth. Not in Lithuania. Sometimes, it seems that even if I leave for a foreign country, the same insecurity will stay with me. [...] Sometimes you get so accustomed to it, and you get used to thinking, talking, and being silent in that way. [It seems that] nobody should discuss this with you. You should avoid that. It becomes a habit, when you’re at work or when you meet your friends.” (Egidijus, gay, 24)

As Fairclough (1995) pointed out, power can control and limit alternative discourses. Having gay people around is acceptable, as long as they send no reminders of their minority sexuality. This is illustrated by the familiar public message in Lithuania which could be generally stated as follows: LGBT people have a right to exist as long as they suppress their own identity. Homophobic attitudes in Lithuania, even among some LGBT people, have become a kind of political correctness, especially at work. Given that displays of heterosexual sexuality are constantly evident, repetitive, and naturalised in the work environment, being homophobic and negative towards homosexuality becomes a coping strategy in Lithuania’s highly homophobic work environment, albeit one which eventually leads to self-marginalisation enacted through silence and the suppression of homosexual identity. This contradiction can lead some

to feel that it is the homosexual's sexuality that is of no interest to other people at work, rather than sexuality in general. In these cases, silence can be seen as the denial by the informants of the importance of sexuality at work. Eventually, suppression and silencing of discourse renders them invisible, and makes it harder for them to develop confidence and power through shared identity (Kirsch 2000).

Although no scientific self-report studies have yet been conducted in Lithuania, the pilot surveys that have been carried out in the country (mainly among homosexual males) indicate that the majority of homosexuals cover up their sexual orientation, or use invented heterosexual lifestyles to pass at home and at work. The sexual inequalities experienced by lesbians and gay men at work can also be constructed as ripple effects of a wider legalised heterosexism. Despite European anti-discriminatory legislation, which was incorporated into Lithuanian national law before the country joined the European Union in 2004, the absence of an anti-discriminatory norm with respect to sexual orientation in the Lithuanian Constitution continues to be one of the main dimensions of status inequality.

SELECTED OPENNESS

Among our interviewees, the strategies of being implicitly out or of affirming one's identity generally applied to only carefully selected individuals at work. These coping strategies were usually articulated through the use of explicit language and artifice to indicate sexual orientation and to encourage others to view the interviewee as homosexual.

“When you communicate with people at work, you choose people. You're close or distant to certain people. Those colleagues that are close know about my orientation, and they laugh about it with me. We talk about it and everything is cool. There are ten other people in my company and I can say for sure that half of them know about me. One joke, another joke. After some time, things should be very clear. So I tell jokes about it in order not to offend them. When someone asks me about it, I look into their eyes and try to tell them as much as they can stand.” (Linas, gay, 22)

“I work in several organisations: one of them is very gay-friendly, and that's because there are more homosexuals there. Also, in my view, it's because they accept me as I am. [...] Certainly, you choose who to tell and what to tell them, but in general I work in an environment full of educated people, and that makes it less complicated. In addition, you feel how open people are to you, and then you decide how open you can be to them. When you communicate with others, you make a decision: to tell or not to tell. [...] In reality, not everybody needs to know all the details, and not everybody cares about it. For me, [sexual orientation] is not a very important thing, because this is my private life and, I think, not everybody should know about this.” (Tomas, gay, 22)

James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2005, 452) describe coming out at work as a performative act: “Being gay or lesbian is not a truth that is discovered, it is a performance, which is enacted”. Because of the constant assumption of heterosexuality, coming out is something which has to be done in everyday life situations.

There are a number of reasons why people decide to come out. Humphrey (1999, 138) suggests three main ones. Firstly, there is the issue of honesty and integrity at the personal level; secondly, there are significant benefits in building open relationships at the professional level; and finally, some people think that it is important to educate various audiences about the existence of lesbians and gay men, and to empower lesbian and gay people in the process.

Those who were completely or partially open at work considered coming out to be significant at the personal as well as the professional level. The third, political, aspect mentioned by Humphrey was not overtly articulated by our interviewees. However, it is very important to contextualise the actual freedom of individual choice, and to appreciate it from the perspective of LGBT people. For instance, our only unemployed informant, a 47-year-old transgender woman Medėja of Russian descent, had recently started to come out in public by giving interviews to different TV channels and newspapers with the clear purpose of becoming more visible and using her sexual identity in order to attract employers and to find a job. While Medėja had completed higher education, she was now

looking for a job as a beautician, and wished to use the media in order to become famous because she considered it to be the only way to persuade employers to hire her: “I have no choice but “to sell myself”, and I hope that some employers will understand that I will be able to attract more clients”. She also added, “Use my real name, do not be afraid to use it in public. I want everybody to know about my situation.” This case demonstrates that coming out might be more of a survival strategy than an optional luxury.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we examined the construction of minority sexual identities within organisations through the discourse on silent and silenced sexualities. The conceptual distinction between self-identity and social identity is an important one. The silence that enables this division is evident in a number of ways. Foucault (1999[1976]) has identified silence as a discursive practice which contributes to the identity construction of sexual minorities within organisations, as well as a feature of power relationships between the homosexual minority and the heterosexual majority (Butler 1997). The “absent presence” (Ward and Winstanley 2003) of homosexuals at work emphasises the importance of all aspects of discourse in exploring sexual identity; the absence of discussion on minority sexual identity is as meaningful as the presence of discussion on majority identity. Facing the everyday reality, in which the majority of homosexuals are in the closet, we believe that understanding of the discourse can potentially be increased by focusing on the silence that exists in and around it.

The process of coming out at work is predicated on cultural discourses, and organisational contexts and practices: from self-affirmation of sexual identity to the situational constraints embedded in organisations, occupations, and informal contexts. It is continual and unpredictable. Jill Humphrey (1999 p. 137) discusses the archetypes of the deprived and diseased homosexual; these archetypes form part of a collective heritage, and even when they do not surface so dramatically, they are lurking in the shadows of subconsciousness. Thus, all homosexuals are under a cloud of vulnerability—even those who have been out and proud in the workplace. The perpetual angst, in turn, generates a form of constant self-surveillance of sexuality and personal dignity.

In line with other research findings (Kuhar 2006, Lehtonen 2004, Lehtonen and Mustola 2002) that focus on discrimination against LGBT people in the workplace, it seems that, in Lithuania, heteronormativity at work affects the personal lives of gay people tremendously, and obscures their chances to live their own lives. We found the most prevalent coping strategy to be the making of a division between private (self) and public (social) identities, and the suppression of the former in order to comply with heteronormative order in a variety of formal and informal contexts. As the closet remains a social structure of oppression, coming out as a rational survival strategy for Lithuanian sexual minorities might be questioned. In the words of Seidman (2004), living *beyond the closet* may still lie in the future for many LGBT people in Lithuania.

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TEACHERS ON TEACHING AND SEXUALITY

Anna Sofia Lundgren

“If you look deep into the problem, there is no problem!”, he said laughingly. “People generally make too big a deal out of it. I’m gay, and I’m a teacher—so what? I’ve never understood what the big fuss is over that! It’s a free world, isn’t it? Why don’t people just come out? Why don’t people just live?”

I had been interviewing⁵ teachers in Sweden in order to discover perspectives on heteronormativity in schools; or, to be more precise, in the teaching profession. I was curious to find out more about how norms of heterosexuality worked in the staff room and in the interactions between teachers and pupils. I also wanted to be able to say something about what happens when *images of (homo)sexuality* are articulated together with *notions of what it means to be a good teacher*: what effects do these notions have on individual teachers; and do they influence pedagogy, and if so, how?

I will begin this chapter by discussing the interviewed teachers’ narratives about what they considered to be characteristic of “a good teacher”—and, implicitly, aspects they felt had nothing to do with teaching at all. I will then move on to describe strategies used by some of the teachers that identified as gay or lesbian but did not want this to be common knowledge in the schools where they worked. Heterosexual norms constitute the conditions for identities, and so in the last section I will describe how the gay and lesbian teachers talked about their profession, and how heteronormativity made them express their identity as teachers in particular ways.

5. 15 interviews were carried out, either face-to-face or via e-mail.

NARRATIVES ABOUT TEACHERS AND SEXUALITY

There was strong consensus among the interviewees (regardless of sexual identity) regarding the factors that characterise a good teacher. They described the teacher as:

- a role model
- a “deputy” parent, who plays a parent’s role in bringing up the child, and who takes responsibility
- a representative of the state
- a leader
- an educator; a possessor (and mediator) of knowledge
- a professional
- someone who loves children

Some of these items seem pretty obvious; for example, a teacher must be in some kind of leading or guiding position. Many felt that a representative of the state should be “representative” in the sense of being “objective” and “neutral” (which is of course paradoxical, since the state is very much political). This focus on neutrality and objectivity was also related to the distinction between the private and the public; while the public sphere was also connected to some kind of neutrality, the private sphere was considered more “political” (or “particular”).

The emphasis on professionalism should be understood in a similar way, as an assurance of teachers’ objectivity and neutrality, and an assurance of their not being too private. It might also be viewed as an effect of the frequently-mentioned feminisation of the profession; a way to say that “this is a profession, not something that some people (i.e. women) have in their genes”. Professional status is obviously also something that members of every profession must call attention to if they wish to argue for a decent salary.

When talking about their professionalism, the interviewed teachers often mentioned the specific capacity that they felt teachers had in working with diversity. They described a certain professional ability to “handle”, as it were, this diversity in the classroom. Diversity usually included ethnic diversity, but gender equality and questions regarding religious beliefs and social class were also discussed. Questions of sexual

diversity were seldom mentioned (at least not by the heterosexual teachers), but were always included when I asked about it.

There were also things that the teachers said that teaching absolutely *did not* comprise. Because teachers often deal with children, sexuality was considered one of these things, even though many researchers have pointed out that a great deal of everyday school life is actually structured by sexuality (e.g. Epstein & Johnson 1998). Only two teachers out of 15 felt that sexuality could—and often did—play an important part in educational practice. They depicted sexuality as being inherent in a constantly present heterosexual gender-play, and thus inevitably a part of the relationship between teachers and pupils. These teachers both taught pupils of about 13 to 16 years, which might explain why it was easier for them to talk about sexuality in relation to their pedagogical work than for teachers that took care of smaller children, as children are often considered innocent and asexual (Epstein & Johnson 1998 p. 130). It is interesting to note, however, that sexuality mentioned in this way, as an inherent part of the gender system, was in many respects separated—as extremes on a continuum—from the sexuality that is about sex and sexual attraction; there was a knife-sharp distinction made between the understanding of sexuality as an organising principle of the general interaction in the classroom, and sexuality as sexual attraction between individuals. The fact that only two teachers admitted to the existence of sexuality in the classroom can thus be explained by the fact that, for the others, the very word “sexuality” mainly implied the latter aspects of the word.

It’s easy to see how these notions of the teaching profession and the “good” teacher might sometimes be violated by some of the notions that exist about homosexuality and homosexuals. The notion of “the homosexual *as sexual*” was present in two of the interviews. By emphasising the reprehensibility of this connotation, these teachers drew on the notion of the teacher as a deputy parent, a person that should take responsibility:

The question is whether they’re really suited to work as teachers. They have other interests, don’t they, and... Well, maybe some of them are interested in young boys [laughing], but that’s when we’ll put a stop to it [now serious]!

I don’t think there are any problems, people can live the way they like, but what I mean is [laughing] ... The point is that ... If they come on to the pupils, if they don’t leave the lads in peace, then... [shakes his head]

These interviewees—two males of about 40—not only assumed that we were talking about gay men (as opposed to lesbians), they also chose to mention the possibility of a gay man’s being interested in very young boys. In these short quotes they manage both to make lesbians invisible, and to sexualize gay men in a way that comes very close to paedophilia. At the same time, the two men make *themselves* very visible: “that’s when we’ll put a stop to it” and “if they don’t leave the lads in peace, then ...”. With these phrases, they confirm themselves in their positions as good teachers, and, it might be added, as good heterosexual men.

The sexualisation of homosexual people (especially gay men) also threatens the notion of the neutral and objective teacher, since sex is usually regarded as a very private thing. Ironically, not all talk about sexual orientation was considered too private, as illustrated by Eva, one of the lesbian informants (cf. Lehtonen & Mustola 2004):

They’re always talking about children and grandchildren and husbands and so on and so forth... All the time! I’d say that my colleagues out themselves several times a day. I’m openly lesbian and I talk about my partner from time to time, and that’s OK. Because there’s a lot of talk in the gay... community that you should be out, and that’s true for the whole society, isn’t it? You should be out, and that’s good. And I just want to say ‘sure—I can talk, but can you be silent?’ That’s the question. Do they even know they’re talking?

HETERONORMATIVE INTELLIGIBILITY

Cultural norms affect not only what it is possible to do, but also what it is possible to be and to become. To be regarded as an intelligible subject, one must performatively act in some kind of accordance with the norms that are available. This idea that norms are what constitute the intelligibility of the subject might sound rather impersonal, but

as Judith Butler has argued (2005), we come into contact with these norms in our everyday life by proximate and living exchanges. The question of *who we are* is answered in every word we speak and in every move we make; but as the ways in which we can speak or move are restricted, so too are the possibilities for becoming.

It would be easy to think that norms of heterosexuality only affect bisexuals and homosexuals; that those identities which in a certain cultural context are regarded as “other” are the only ones that are actually influenced, and subordinated, by the norms in question. However, this is clearly not the case. Norms of heterosexuality comprise and influence most people, and most people are in one way or another a product of them. In this case, being a product of heterosexual norms meant that teachers who defined themselves as heterosexual were made into the norm. It is important to reflect on this privileged position, and to be reflexively aware that it is not a given; rather, it is the result of a long historical development that has resulted in a view of heterosexuality (as we understand it today) as “normal” sexuality. It is also important to note that this privileged position, one which has been raised to the status of normality, makes its possessor blind to the very norms that create the position in the first place. As we have seen, those who are in this privileged position are also blinded to the sexually disclosing practices that openly and performatively constitute them as heterosexual people, because these practices are not seen as sexually connotative. This also means that even when talking about, and working pedagogically to achieve, equality regarding sexual identity, we constantly risk reproducing the very norms that we set out to deconstruct. I use the inclusive pronoun “we” here in order to hint at the fact that this applies to most teachers, regardless of sexual identity—there are always things (words, the way you use categorisations, and so on) that in one way or another will performatively reinforce understandings, differences, and hierarchies.

To be, as a straight person, a product of heterosexual norms, is also about having to relate to the ways in which you are straight, *the ways* in which you performatively constitute this identity in your everyday life. One of the interviewed teachers expressed herself in the following way, her story demonstrating among other things the existence of categories of sexual identity:

I’m straight and I know, it sounds strange to say that as it shouldn’t be important, but I don’t live with anyone, I have no boyfriend, I have no children, I’m not especially attractive conventionally speaking [laughs]. I have male-coded interests where I like sports and so on... And I often think about people thinking I’m a lesbian, and I feel rather unfeminine in all this... The fact is that [a male colleague] sometimes hints at the possibility of me being... well, “not straight”.

This woman’s feelings and self-descriptions show how “being straight” (defined as a sexual practice, a desire) is in itself no guarantor for the automatic granting of a privileged position as a heterosexual woman. On the contrary, she demonstrates how heterosexuality is not only about how you define yourself sexually, but also about how you live, how you dress, how you act, how you look, and what you do. Having no obvious signs of heterosexuality (like a husband, or children), she feels less feminine, a feeling that shows the strong connection between sexual identity on the one hand, and gender identity on the other. The concept that is most often used to describe the relationships and hierarchies between sex, gender, and sexuality is the “heterosexual matrix”. This concept is used by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, and is defined as “that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are neutralized” (1990 p. 151n6). In the quotation above it is obvious how heterosexuality is dependent on a number of different features that have no immediate connection to sexual desire. The woman’s description of her colleague’s comments are but one example of how heteronormativity can manifest in a school context (as, of course, in almost any other context), and how failing to perform an ideal femininity can call the otherwise taken-for-granted heterosexuality into question (Valentine 1996).

Among the 15 interviewed teachers, there were eight that defined themselves as bisexual or homosexual; six of them were not out in school. These six told me about their strategies for passing, for keeping their sexuality a secret; strategies that meant constant self negotiation and surveillance.

One woman described school as an arena of a rather closed character with clear hierarchies both between teachers and teachers, and between teachers and pupils. This made it a perfect ground for gossip:

People do like to talk, so you have to be on your guard. I actually do lie a bit sometimes. I mention guys' names and so on, say that I've done something with a man even though I haven't, to fuel their heterosexual fantasies! Once I actually took a gay friend to a school event. I never said anything about our relationship because people just assume that they know, and that was the whole point, wasn't it!

Another woman used the same strategy, but she also mentioned how she tried to avoid conversations about private matters in the staff room.

I try to keep a smile on my face, I laugh a lot, and when they talk about vacations and children and stuff it's OK, but when they do the gossip kind of talk about partners and potential partners I think I tend to laugh it away so that I don't actually have to answer, I'm like: 'yeah right, maybe' or saying stuff like: 'I'm way too picky for this town', and I think they're okay with that, hm, because they never really put any... any pressure on me or anything. [...] I reckon maybe that's how it always works regardless of who it is that you're not dating, I mean, if I was straight but hadn't found Mr Right, wouldn't they be a bit careful not to hurt my feelings? I mean, *being alone* is maybe the main issue, but still, I really don't want to take the coming out shit with them...

Other strategies that were mentioned were:

- sticking to a “professional” role: “I’m your teacher, not your friend”;
- avoiding discussion of homosexuality;
- trying to avoid being asked personal questions;
- not being seen with people that were obviously homosexual;
- not being seen in gay clubs;
- not dressing, cutting your hair, or doing anything else in a way that could be interpreted as “not straight”.

These strategies—more used by some informants than by others—obviously affected the way these teachers carried out their jobs.

EFFECTS ON TEACHING AND TEACHER IDENTITY

Having to guard everything about your private life affects your methods of teaching. The importance of creating a safe classroom, and the pedagogy of learning rather than teaching, is often mentioned in Swedish pedagogical literature. One way of achieving this is to anchor the knowledge in something that the pupils will understand, to make it more familiar and intelligible. Not being able to do this (because of the unwillingness to create a climate that would make private questions possible) was described as a problem by many, not only because they had to come up with other ways of explaining things, or because they felt their relationships with the pupils suffered, but also as a question of *morality*.

This morality had everything to do with the notion of the teacher as a *role model*. This issue was described by teachers who were out, as well as those still in the closet. One man, 52 years old and openly gay, asked me:

How am I to be a good role model to the kids if I'm not out? How would they know that they can come to me if they want to discuss these things? You have a moral responsibility as a teacher to be a good role model, that's what I think anyway.

Others described the same feeling, but had not been able to live up to their principles:

... to be able to be yourself. You should do that as a teacher, you should be strong and a good role model. But I started out on the wrong track, and I haven't been able to put it right.

The teachers that spoke from a heterosexual position also mentioned this function of the role model as a strong argument for non-heterosexual teachers to come out *to the pupils*. When we talked about arguments for coming out *to colleagues*, these teachers instead spoke from within a discourse on equal rights.

... it's good that teachers think about not making a huge thing out of it either. Sexual orientation isn't something you talk about at all—so why should they?

You shouldn't force anyone to be open. The school is a workplace, not a place for showing off your private life. Here, they should have the same rights as everyone else.

It seems obvious here that the discourse on equal rights is pronounced from within, itself producing heteronormativity, installing the image of an uncomplicated and problem-free division between private and public spheres. It is also another manifestation of blindness to the issues mentioned above by 43-year-old Eva. In addition, these teachers had no hesitation in using the words “we” and “them”, thus including themselves and me (although most of them knew nothing about my sexual identity) in the heterosexual norm.

The gay and lesbian interviewees who did not want their colleagues and pupils to know about their sexuality described themselves and their teaching styles in words such as “impersonal”, “strict”, and “professional”. Apart from the difficulty of constantly being on guard (avoiding being seen in the company of obvious homosexuals, not taking a stand on homosexuality-related questions, avoiding private questions, and so on), their “invisibility” affected their pedagogical work and the ways in which their professional identity could be performed. Thus, this disappearance into invisibility also involved a certain (pedagogical) “becoming”: turning into a certain kind of teacher, using a certain kind of pedagogy. The alternative—being more open—was described by these teachers as more honest, easier (no need for the abovementioned strategies), and productive of a better and more responsible teacher's role. The words used to describe different teaching styles were clearly valued, and this obviously put pressure on those teachers who felt they lacked the strength to live up to this ideal, and whose lives were conditioned in a way that made their choices of how to perform as a teacher seem very restricted.

The dilemmas that these teachers described could be viewed as creating a triple feeling of guilt. Firstly, their own, and officially supported, con-

viction was that you should be proud of yourself and be “what you are”. Not having the strength to come out in school made some of the teachers feel they were not standing up for themselves, and they sometimes felt ashamed of this. Secondly, a teacher can function as a very important role model for the pupils. Not taking up this task was described by one teacher as a betrayal: she felt she betrayed her pupils. Thirdly, in describing teachers in general as open-minded (and professional diversity workers!), the closeted informants felt that they did wrong in not trusting their colleagues, as if their feelings of invisibility were self-inflicted, and their predicament was one of their own making.

The images of the ideal teacher as being a *role model*, and of *ideal pedagogy*, call for certain ways of performing the teacher's role. If the relative clarity of the Swedish legislation against harassment due to sexual identity in the work place, and the general ideals of openness (often pronounced by the LGBT movement) are also taken into consideration, it seems that these teachers found themselves in an problematic position. There were simply a lot of strong arguments saying that they *ought* to come out. Some of the teachers came back to this “ought to”. They felt it as a *moral lack* not to openly act as role models.

PERTURBING THE NORM

Of course they wonder, and they have their prejudices from a young age, but I usually just explain how it is. I like guys even though I'm a guy myself. That's how it can be. People are different! And most kids accept this fairly well, I think, even if you sometimes hear things like... things that actually come from the parents, but I never compete with them. They can have their opinions. And I have mine. Because I know that I'm a significant and rather well-liked person here [laughs], I think that it means something that I tell them.

Understanding sexual identity as something inherently given is a notion that permeates most people's views and self-understanding. This is also the notion from which the discourse on equal rights largely emanates, and it is found in the narratives of both the heterosexual and the non-heterosexual teachers.

All people should have the right to exist. You are what you are.

Nobody can be blamed for his or her sexual orientation. It's not a matter of choice. We're living in a democracy! All people are humans and should have human rights.

These views of identity and human rights do not alter the fact that there are strong norms of heterosexuality. Openness is not always accepted, as one teacher mentioned:

I'm very open about who I am and how I live. It's always worked out fine, no one has ever said anything else. [...] But it's evident that I avoid talking about certain things. There are many fine lines and I'm very aware of them. That I can't be the whole me in school, that there are parts that must be invisible there.

It was all about those fine lines. Very few of the interviewed teachers told me about experiences of direct discrimination; such stories more often concerned someone else, someone they knew or had heard of. Nevertheless, most of the teachers mentioned the fine lines which they dared not cross in fear of becoming the Other.

Still, being open is a way to performatively act out alternative subject positions. It is a way to force the norm into realising that it is not what it wants to be: it is not natural; it is not a given. Perturbing the norms of heterosexuality by acting out alternatives can serve as a model not only to gay and lesbian pupils (or pupils with homosexual family members), but to all pupils and teachers, regardless of sexual identity. However, it is also important to recognise how demands for openness can put a lot of pressure on the individual gay and lesbian teachers. If a process of change is to be democratic, the process needs to be carried out by all. It is about changing norms that restrict some, but at the same time privilege others. The offering of alternatives can therefore never be a question of how (or whether) homosexual identities are performed by gay and lesbian teachers in the classroom. It must be a part of everyday pedagogy.⁶

6. For a discussion on disclosure strategies in the classroom, see for example Khayatt (1997 and 1998) and Silin (1999).

All stories about identities are also stories about relations to a set of norms. This became obvious when the teachers talked about themselves—how they identified themselves, how they acted in the classroom, what they felt they could or could not become, and so on. Within the Swedish context of my interviews, it was clear that defining oneself as a homosexual teacher was (most of the time) not considered a problem as such.⁷ The individual's identity as a homosexual was nevertheless surrounded by a set of images that did not always fit the notions of what constituted a good teacher. When "bi/homosexuality" was articulated together with "teacher", people tended to react either with anxiety,⁸ or in a positive way, drawing on notions of the teacher as a (homosexual) role model.

In my material, sexuality was shown to comprise and affect so much more than just questions of sexual orientation, ways of organising one's private life, or feelings of being able or unable to express "yourself". When bisexuality and homosexuality were totally excluded from the teaching profession and the work place, this exclusion changed both the professional teaching identity itself (in terms of how it was acted out and experienced) and the pedagogy carried out by the teaching subject.

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7. At least not in comparison to how the position has often been described in other national contexts (see Evans 2002; Khayatt 1992).

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CHALLENGING HETERONORMATIVITY

ALWAYS SOMEWHERE ELSE—HETERONORMATIVITY IN SWEDISH TEACHER TRAINING

Eva Reimers

In our common project to investigate homophobia and heteronormativity in different contexts, we have often said to each other that pedagogy and education are essential if we truly want to end discrimination based on sexual orientation. In schools, students do not only learn skills and facts, they also learn how to be as a person. This is not just a side effect; one of the main objectives of public schools is to foster citizens according to the norms and values of the specific nation. Schools are therefore explicitly normative institutions. They are places where children and teenagers are supposed to learn and internalise legitimate, accepted, and cherished common social values. In the words of Göran Linde:

You can hardly find any national school system for mass education today that is not based on the same notion of schools as a means of enhancing shared values to keep society together. (Linde 2003 p. 111)

While norms are reiterated, taught, and learned in a myriad of places (everywhere, in fact), schools stand out as a sort of concentrated norm-constructing space. In terms of the heterosexual norm, the school is an example of, to borrow a metaphor from Leena-Maija Rossi (2003), a “hetero factory”, that is, a place where the heterosexual norm is not only made dominant, but also made into the only natural and self-evident way of living. It is one of several places where children are prescribed with a heterosexual “life script”.

Although teachers are not the sole source of knowledge for students in school, they are obviously important. Teachers’ attitudes to and knowledge about gender and sexual identity are therefore essential in combating prejudice and making way for a society in which citizens are

free to develop and to participate in different aspects of society, regardless of gender or sexual identity. My research has therefore focused on teacher training in Sweden. The explicit aim of public education in Sweden is to foster democratic citizens who appreciate diversity and are tolerant of deviation in looks, talents, abilities, gender, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation. Despite this notion of schools as spaces that foster tolerance and diversity, I, in my role as a teacher of teachers, have found that it is very unusual⁹ for student teachers who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to be open about their sexuality or gender identity. Furthermore, my students have also told me that they never encounter openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual teachers at practicum. According to Lipkin (2002), this situation is not unique to Sweden. Despite a plethora of courses in lesbian and gay studies at several universities in America, the topic of LGBT issues in education seems to be remarkably absent. This situation made me ponder how Swedish schools, and, to an even greater extent, the institutions that are supposed to prepare students to become professional teachers, create norms of sexuality and gender in their practices. Since Sweden is often presented as a country that is tolerant and open towards lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender people, I became even more interested in critically investigating whether and how the heterosexual norm is reiterated or contested in teacher training. How are we preparing our student teachers to combat discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation?

ABOUT THE CONTEXT

The official Swedish position on gender and sexual orientation is quite clear. It is illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sexual identity against employees, students in higher education, and pupils in compulsory education. In addition, there are laws against the incitement of hatred based on sexual orientation. Same-sex couples can enter legally-recognised domestic partnerships, and are eligible to adopt children; and, violence against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people is recognised as so-called hate crime, and is therefore subject to specific measures.

9. At least, where I teach.

One of the Swedish ombudsmen, *HomO*, has been designated particular responsibility for safe-guarding rights based on sexual orientation. Lesbians, and even more so gay men, often appear in the media, as writers, artists, and singers, but also as politicians and journalists. All these factors in combination might indicate that Sweden is a haven for LGBT people; that it is a country in which homophobia, not homosexuality, is seen as a problematic deviance, and where it is therefore unproblematic to identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

This official norm of tolerance, freedom, and openness also pertains to the area of education. The national curriculum for public education begins by stating a set of supposedly common values, the *Fundamental values and tasks of the school*, which are intended to work as a foundation for all teaching and all other activities in Swedish schools. The overall goal for Swedish schools is to foster the students to encompass these values. The foremost value is *democracy*, which is specified as:

- Inviolability of human life
- Individual freedom and integrity
- Equal value of all people
- Equality between women and men
- Solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Läroplan för det obligatoriska skolväsendet, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet, Lpo 94, p. 3)

All these formulations could be seen as so-called “floating signifiers” (Laclau & Mouffe 1985), that is, concepts that overflow with meaning because they are given different meanings in different contexts. In Swedish schools and teacher training, these values are often employed in order to address issues of racism, bullying, gender equality, and sexual orientation.

When different actors point to these values in order to argue the need to raise awareness concerning sexual orientation, they refer to passages such as: *Xenophobia and intolerance must be met with knowledge, open discussion and active measures... appreciate the values that are to be found in cultural diversity* (Lpo 94 p.3), to passages that stress the right of each individual to develop according to his or her unique individuality, or to

passages that emphasise that no pupil should be subject to discrimination, harassment, or bullying. This means that when LGBT perspectives are motivated by one or several of these values, the focus is not on the heterosexual norm, but on deviations from the norm, and problems that can be expected to arise due to these deviations. This makes it into a discourse of tolerance, based on the notion of a normal and unproblematic majority who are encouraged to tolerate the divergent “other”. This way of framing sexual orientation maintains the power of heterosexuality as dominant and privileged. It affirms and strengthens the heterosexual norm. However, there is another passage in this list of fundamental values and tasks which should also be seen as instructive for Swedish schools. It is a text about gender equality and gender roles. It says:

The school has a responsibility to counteract traditional gender roles and should therefore provide pupils with the opportunity of developing their own abilities and interests irrespective of their sexual identity. (Lpo94 p.4)

This passage asks teachers to subvert stereotypical notions about gender; and because gender identity intersects with notions of sexual orientation, it also makes it important to question why and how so-called traditional gender roles prescribe that men should desire women and women should desire men.

From the above it might appear self-evident that being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender should not be a problem for either students or teachers in Swedish schools. However, as already mentioned, teacher training and schools seem in most cases to be exclusively heterosexual spaces. This can be understood in line with Adrienne Rich’s (1993) expression “compulsory heterosexuality”. While Rich employed the concept to specifically demonstrate how lesbianism had been made invisible in just about all of society, including academia and feminism, the notion of compulsory heterosexuality serves as a good metaphor for how heterosexuality is enforced in compulsory education. It highlights heterosexuality as a political institution rather than a natural or universal one, and points to how society enforces one specific way of expressing intimate relationships at the expense of others.

Schools are not exceptions from our statement in the introduction that society is permeated by the heterosexual norm. Even discourses of tolerance, like that of the *Fundamental values and tasks of the school*, are articulated within a heteronormative frame. This heteronormativity is so taken for granted, and so ubiquitous, that it is rendered almost invisible. It is a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees. Heteronormativity is everywhere; it is taken for granted and regarded as self-evident. This does not, however, mean that it is impossible to be made aware of its existence and effects. In the following, it is my aim to show how the heterosexual norm is present, but also how it can be challenged and subverted, in teacher training at a Swedish college.

There is little research about how teacher training programs address issues of sexual orientation. However, the studies that have been made show that the hegemony of the heterosexual norm in teacher training is not an exclusive Swedish phenomenon. For example, Rita M. Kissen (2002) maintains that little has been done in US teacher education to advance knowledge and attitudes about LGBT issues among future teachers (p. 2). This statement was confirmed in a study by Gary Sherwin and Todd Jennings (2006), who surveyed 77 teacher training programs across seven states and found that 40% did not address sexual orientation as a diversity topic. The conclusion Sherwin and Jennings drew was that secondary teacher programs are very likely to passively sustain homophobic and heterosexist school cultures through the omission of topics relating to sexual orientation. They also found that where the issue was addressed, the topic focused on risk, and on homosexuality as a deviance and a problem. I believe it is most likely that there is a similar tendency in most parts of Europe, of either ignoring the subject altogether or, if it is addressed, focusing on risk.

I will now go on to describe how the heterosexual norm is taken for granted, and reiterated, but also contested, in concrete situations in teacher training at a Swedish college. My observations were made in a course titled “Intersectionality and cultural diversity” and at a theme day during practicum arranged by the Equal project *Beneath the Surface* (Swedish: UnderYtan). I see my observations and analysis as “cases” that exemplify how norms are reiterated and subverted. Since the examples are so few, it is not possible to generalise the findings to all 26 teacher

training programs in Sweden. However, my results may be illustrative for other teacher training programs as well. All teacher training in Sweden is based on the same governmental statutes, and all programs aim to prepare their students to work in schools that base their work on the aforementioned *Fundamental values and tasks of the school*. Similar notions of the role of the teacher and her/his assignment are very likely to be repeated at all 26 teacher training programs.

NOT HERE, NOT ME—THE “PROBLEM” IS SOMEWHERE ELSE

My observations revealed two important tendencies. Firstly; the students situated both LGBT people and opposition to such people somewhere else, outside of the room in question. Secondly, they repeatedly put forward immigrants as the major obstacle to the affirmation of non-heterosexual sexualities.

In Sweden, as mentioned above, it is “politically correct” to assert the need to grant lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people the same rights and opportunities as are granted to those who identify as heterosexual. When I presented my study at the university in order to get permission to do field studies, everyone I spoke to agreed that this was a necessary and urgent topic to address. Simultaneously, they maintained that these were difficult questions that can create problems. This reiteration of both the urgency of the matter and the risk of causing problems and offence was repeated at my observations in a course titled “Intersectionality and cultural diversity”, and at observations at a theme day during practicum entitled “Obstacles, possibilities, and needs for integrating LGBT perspectives in schools and teacher training”.

SECURING SCHOOL AS A HETEROSEXUAL SPACE

When students in seminars discussed strategies for teaching pupils in compulsory schooling to be tolerant and open towards LGBT people, the discussion was based on two assumptions. One was that schools were obliged to foster tolerance and openness towards LGBT people, that is, that such tolerance was a good thing. The second assumption

was that everyone in the seminar was heterosexual; people who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender were not expected to be present. LGBT people were spoken about as if they were self-evidently somewhere else.

Furthermore, some of the strategies the students suggested indicated that they regarded schools as heterosexual spaces. For example, there was a general agreement in the seminar that one of the best ways to make pupils more tolerant and open about different forms of sexual and gender identity was to make contact with The Gay and Lesbian League and invite their school outreach officer to give a presentation on what it is like to be LGBT. Several students maintained that in this way the pupils would see and understand that lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people are ordinary people, that they are “just like everybody else”. This strategy and line of argument reiterated and enforced the heterosexual norm in several different ways. Firstly, the strategy was founded on the assumption that school is a heterosexual space; in order for pupils to gain experience of LGBT issues, it was necessary to bring LGBT people into the school. It thus became a strategy that rendered lesbian, gay, and bisexual students and teachers invisible; the statement that LGBT people were “just like everybody else” apparently did not make them ordinary enough to be found among pupils and teachers. Secondly, this approach constructed LGBT people as “out of the ordinary”, as if sexual orientation made individuals into a different type of person, compared to heterosexuals. In this way, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people were made invisible not only in everyday school life, but in society in general. Thirdly, the strategy was based on the concept of a shared identity common to all lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people; one or two visitors from The Gay and Lesbian League were supposed to be able to represent all LGBT people. Fourthly, the idea of letting the pupils see that “they” are “just like everybody else” implies a preferred form of sexuality, one in conformity with heterosexuality and other norms that are perceived as signs of normality. This line of argument tries to play down the fact that LGBT people actually question and contest notions of normality. Finally, the strategy of inviting LGBT people as “experts” on sexual deviance conceals the fluidity and openness of norms concerning gender and sexual identity. It is not only those identifying as LGBT that are affected by the heterosexual norm;

regardless of how we identify ourselves or are identified by others, in terms of gender and sexual orientation, we are all regulated and affected by the heterosexual norm as a norm that tells us when we are getting close to transgressing the borders of what is considered “normal”. No woman is ever totally successful in her performance of “heterosexual woman”, and no man is ever totally successful in his performance of “heterosexual man” (Butler 1990/1999, 1993). Transgression of these borders is therefore not an experience restricted to those of us who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The way in which we are questioned and regulated by the heterosexual norm is a common experience for everybody.

The concept of tolerance is an alluring one; however, people are made complacent by acquiring a self-image of being tolerant towards groups of people who are somehow deplorable or questionable. Tolerating others never brings about any actual changes, and this is why, as Arthur Lipkin has stated; *well-meant exhortations for tolerance will never be sufficient to prepare teachers for their encounter with lgbt topics, students and families.* (Lipkin 2002 p. 17). Tolerance is a way of stabilising the difference between what is understood as a normal and unproblematic majority and a deviant minority. It is a way of stating “I accept that you are strange” without questioning the position from which this statement is made. Although LGBT people are accepted, they remain safely “other”, and the dominant position is never questioned or challenged. This position had a reverse side. The construction of teachers in Swedish schools as self-evidently tolerant, respectful and open, in favour of equal rights regardless of sexuality, was made in opposition to the intolerant other, those that were considered narrow-minded, obsolete and homophobic. These individuals or social groups were considered problems in the struggle for equal rights and possibilities for everybody.

If the students in the course had been more aware of the heterosexual norm in the form of “compulsory heterosexuality”—as a norm that is enforced and constructed, rather than self-evident and natural—this strategy of inviting The Gay and Lesbian League into the school would probably not have been their prime and sole measure for teaching pupils more about LGBT issues. Instead of focusing on people and

identities as deviances, they would have suggested measures based on the ways in which people and activities are made into deviances; that is, on how the heterosexual norm is repeatedly enforced and made “natural”, and on how it limits and regulates everybody in a way that makes us all less free.

In proposing to invite representatives from The Gay and Lesbian League, the students spoke from a position where tolerance was taken for granted. The seminars took place within a frame that constructed the future teacher as a carrier and upholder of the *fundamental values and tasks of the school*, and therefore also as somebody who approved of gender equity and tolerance towards LGBT people. In one seminar, the students were made aware that tolerance was not an unequivocally positive position. They were told to conduct an exercise in which each member of a pair took turns to state out loud that they tolerated the other person’s appearance or choices.¹⁰ In the discussion following the exercise, the students expressed surprise over how they had all perceived the experience of being tolerated as a humiliating affront, as a means of being degraded. They also said that in tolerating arbitrarily chosen aspects of the other, they realised that to tolerate is to exercise power. While this exercise sparked a discussion about *tolerance* as a problematic notion and practice, it still did not make the students question the way in which they had previously constructed heterosexuality as the norm and LGBT people as deviant. The concept of *tolerance* was replaced by the concept of *respect*, but without questioning why certain practices were considered more normal or deviant than others. It was still a matter of “us”, meaning the heterosexual majority, respecting “them”, meaning the LGBT minority.

This “us and them” position also had another, different manifestation. The construction of teachers in Swedish schools as self-evidently tolerant, respectful, open, and in favour of equal rights regardless of sexuality, was made in opposition to the intolerant other, those that were consid-

10. The exercise was taken from a book published by the Swedish Gay & Lesbian League (RFSL), Edemo, G & Rindå, J (2004) *Någonstans går gränsen* [“The Line Must be Drawn Somewhere”].

ered narrow-minded, obsolete, and homophobic. These individuals or social groups were considered to be obstacles to the struggle for equal rights and opportunities for everyone.

THE INTOLERANT OTHER

Kevin K. Kumashiro (2001) has argued for the necessity of an intersectional perspective in making sense of oppression and identity. In *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality* (ibid.) Kumashiro brings together examples of how notions of race makes trouble with notions about sexual orientation and vice versa. LGBT-persons who are Latino, black, Asian and American Indian in different ways question, and make apparent, the dominant notion of LGBT-persons as white, middle class and Christian. Norms and notions about sexual orientation intersect and interact with notions about race, ethnicity and culture.

This intersection of different norms was noticeable in the ways in which the students tended to situate “the problem” somewhere else by making homophobia into a matter of culture. A frequent strategy, both in the seminars and at the theme day, was to point out immigrants as a hindrance to open discussion of LGBT issues. The following observations were made at a theme day during the students’ practicum. The day started with an introduction in which the theme was presented as part of the *Fundamental values and tasks of the school*. Next, there was a lecture about the notion of sexual identity, aimed at making the students aware of how lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people tend to be marginalised and discriminated against. Following this, the students divided into groups in order to discuss “Obstacles and problems in addressing LGBT issues in school and teacher training”. Everybody in the group I attended agreed that sexual orientation issues were always difficult, and that they became even more so when culture was also involved.

One student, whose parents had arrived in Sweden from Syria, maintained that the issue was more challenging for a teacher with a non-Swedish heritage and cultural background. As a member of a specific cultural or ethnic/religious group she ran the risk of being perceived as a deserter if she addressed the issue of sexual orientation. Her worry

was based on a notion of her own cultural heritage as being in opposition to Swedish norms, where homophobia was perceived as non-Swedish and tolerance as Swedish. However, in stressing this, it was clear that she sided with the so-called Swedish position of it being perfectly fine to be gay. Although I don't want to deny the difficulties she brought forward, I believe it is vital to point out that she herself evidenced that things were more ambiguous than the way she presented them. She identified herself as Syrian at the same time as expressing her approval of both gender equality and LGBT people, thus proving that it is possible to combine these two positions. The same applied to another student of Syrian descent, who supported the opinion of the previous student by recounting how a young Syrian man that she knew of was met with resistance and dissociation from his relatives and the local Syrian community when he came out as a gay man. While this student positioned herself clearly within the Syrian community, she simultaneously condemned the treatment that the man had been subjected to. She thus showed herself as being in solidarity with norms that she presented as foreign to the group that she herself belonged to.

Another second generation immigrant student further fortified this ambiguous position by recounting her surprise and bewilderment when she saw a fellow student stand at a podium and announce to all freshmen student teachers "My name is Mohammed and I am gay". To her, this was a contradiction in terms. Her personal position, however, was to foster both gender equality and openness towards LGBT people.

These accounts illustrate how identity is constructed in relation to dominant discourses. The immigrant students presented themselves as being in conflict with the dominant sexuality norms in their ethnic and cultural communities. They constructed themselves as exceptions that fortify the rule; instead of disrupting the stereotype of homophobic immigrants, they left it uncontested. This is similar to the stories by lesbian and gay people of colour presented in *Troubling Intersections of Race and Sexuality* (Kumashiro 2001). By constructing themselves as being different from the majority of their ethnic group, LGBT people of colour present themselves as being unusual, and even offensive, in the eyes of people with the same ethnic identification. Even though they themselves identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and regard this as a fea-

sible way of life, they maintain that other people of their ethnic identity are homophobic and oppressive. Thus, the visibility of LGBT people of colour fails to disrupt the dominant conception of certain people as being more or less inherently homophobic.

This tendency to construct immigrants as problematic for schools and teachers who wish to address issues of sexuality was also apparent in the seminars in the course I followed. One seminar was based on literature that explicitly addressed, and aimed to subvert, the heterosexual norm. In this seminar, there was a general agreement that it was probably more difficult to be gay or lesbian for people with a non-Swedish background than for those with a Swedish background. This agreement was, however, not unanimous. One student objected, and said that although he agreed it must be quite different to be homosexual as an immigrant than as a native-born Swede, that did not necessarily mean it was more difficult. He was of the opinion that concealed prejudices and contempt might be just as difficult to handle as open resistance. Although in this statement he questioned the dichotomous construction of the so-called immigrant and Swedish cultures, he still maintained that the official Swedish position was a lot more open and tolerant than non-Swedish positions. Another student caught on to the notion of concealed prejudice and stated that he thought it was important to recognise that he and everyone else were part of the heterosexual norm. He said:

It is important not to presume just one sexuality, and to avoid talking and acting so that others are made deviant.

Even if this exchange formed only a small part of the seminar, it evinced that both the practice of placing problems somewhere else and the notion of opposition between immigrants and Swedes in relation to sexuality can be, and are, challenged. Although they were rare, I did encounter students who perceived themselves as part of the heterosexual norm, regardless of their ethnic background.

It was more common for the students to talk about heteronormativity from a position where it was considered as a problem only for people who were identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender and not for those who identified as part of the heterosexual majority, as if the

latter were unaffected by the heterosexual norm—as if their way of performing sexuality was natural, and not dependent on socially constructed norms. This meant that the heteronormativity of the majority remained unchallenged, particularly when both LGBT people and those that were presented as being hostile to them were placed somewhere else, and constructed as other and deviant. LGBT people were considered as deviants who should be treated with empathy and tolerance, while the homophobic non-Swedish deviants were understood as people who were problematic and alien, maybe even threatening, to tolerant Swedish culture and values.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF SEXUALITY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

My observations from this Swedish teacher training program bear evidence that despite the intention to be tolerant and open in attitudes and practices concerning sexuality, teacher training risks enforcing compulsory heterosexuality. This indicates that compulsory schooling is also a place for compulsory heterosexuality. Students and teachers in the program I observed tended to assume heterosexuality among themselves and others at school, leaving little or no room for other sexualities or gender identities. In this way, LGBT people, and others who do not adhere to this norm, become marginalised and are made deviant and in some sense “unnatural”. The dominant majority is left unchallenged, and those who are considered to be in the minority are made less significant. Thus, even in a situation with little or no acceptance of outright homophobia, the effects of the heterosexual norm still limit the ways in which individuals can perform their gender and sexual identities, thus creating discriminatory effects.

My observations also reveal that norms are constructed, or created, in intersection with other norms. Not only do norms of gender intersect with norms of sexuality and sexual orientation, but both types of norm also intersect with norms of nationality. National identity is constructed by nationalisation of other social identities; in the words of Epstein and Johnson, “*It nationalizes—names and rewards as national—some groups; excludes and punishes others as foreign or alien.*” (1998p. 18). In positioning themselves as tolerant and open, the future teachers simul-

taneously position themselves as both heterosexual and Swedish. These two majority positions make it possible for them both to tolerate those are presumed to belong to the LGBT minority and to condemn those who, due to their supposed alien and obsolete identity, are perceived as intolerant. Thus being Swedish and being heterosexual become the most normal and most preferred positions.

Sweden is a country that likes to present itself as modern and tolerant. My study indicates that efforts to foster tolerance towards one marginalised and stigmatised category entail stigmatisation and marginalisation of another category. In this sense, two different minority categories—LGBT people and immigrants—are placed in opposition to each other, as if they were incompatible; as if it was impossible to say “My name is Mohammed and I am gay”, or as if it was unnatural and unexpected for a teacher with Syrian heritage to promote non-traditional ways of performing gender and sexuality, or as if it was impossible or unexpected for a person identifying as Swedish to express homophobia.

The way in which LGBT-issues are discussed and represented in my observation at a Swedish teacher education disclose how the discourse makes marginalisation and homophobia into a matter of culture, and furthermore cultures that are in opposition to the imagined Swedish culture. This discursive move shifts focus from heteronormativity as a discursive and cognitive matrix that saturates all of society, and therefore concerns everybody, to a discourse about a problematic other in need of adaptation in accordance with the dominant majority. Hereby, the heterosexual norm remains concealed, the dominant majority is left unchallenged and LGBT-persons are left invisible both in school and in society at large.

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CHAPTER 4

WHAT IS NOW MADE INTO THE NORM?

Lena Martinsson

One important aim of this book is to challenge and subvert not only norms of sexuality, but also norms of gender, race, class, and nationality. There is much to consider when working against discriminatory norms. What I will highlight in this chapter is the necessity of developing a course of action that makes the work against different inequalities more interrelated—to have an intersectional perspective. How are gender norms related to sexuality norms? Can the struggle against gender inequality be heteronormative, racist, or reiterative of class prejudice?

As already discussed, the concept of “heteronormativity” stands for the idea that heterosexuality is natural, and should be regarded as the most normal way to live. Living as a bisexual or homosexual person carries the risk of being punished and discriminated against. Another way to put it is that if you act in a way that is not expected of you as a gendered person—such as being in love with a woman if you are identified or identify yourself as a woman—you go beyond a normative rule on how to behave and feel. The norm makes you into *the other*, someone who is less normal, and who is subordinated by the norm. Bisexual people may also experience mononormativity,¹¹ the notion that you should only desire one sex, and that you should only be in a relationship with *one* other person. If you break these rules, you could be excluded in many different ways. The bisexual position has, for example, been questioned even by the gay and lesbian movement, with the suggestion that a bisexual person is actually homosexual, but not open about it yet. To be bisexual is, therefore, not a recognised position (Bertilsdotter 2007). Norms and exclusions such as these are created all the time. It is by repeating understandings or fallacies about what is wrong and unnatural that we construct what is understood as normal and natural, or even

11. The concept of mononormativity was probably first formulated by Anna Adeniji in 2001.

as the true way of living. Thus, we persistently produce a great number of different exclusions and hierarchies that make discrimination and stigmatisation possible (Butler 2004:48). This shows why it is important to deconstruct principles like the heterosexual norm. What is of special interest here is that these examples show that norms about sexuality are connected to, or part of, gender categorisations.

Norms prescribe how people should behave. You could say that a norm is like a script; it tells you how to act and organise your life, how to feel, and what to desire. But norms also work on a societal level, and through materiality and institutions. They are materialised and institutionalised in architecture, in laws, in organisations, in pedagogy, and in religion. These phenomena are part of the norms; they reproduce them and make them stable. However, norms can always be challenged and subverted. This subversion or this challenging is necessary if gender roles are to be changed and if discrimination against bisexual, homosexual, and transgender people is to be stopped. We need to ask whether any given norm is necessary. Must it be this way? Can it be changed? It is also important, of course, to build alliances. In order to eliminate discrimination it is necessary to subvert discriminatory norms in several different ways. It is important to remember that the private is political, and, conversely, that the political is private. The ways in which people act, talk, and *be themselves* in everyday life are crucial; norms are legitimised—or challenged—every day.

INTERSECTIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

In all forms of work against discrimination, it is vital to be aware that problematic and discriminatory norms and representations can still manifest themselves in work for equal rights or emancipation. For example, it is not uncommon for arguments for gender equality to reiterate notions about certain normalities. Let me give you one example. In Sweden, it is common to maintain that Swedish women and men are the most open-minded, modern, and equal people not only in Europe but also in the world. To be a Swede is often understood as being equivalent to being gender equal and to being highly developed. This representation has been used by researchers, politicians, and activists. However, in stating that Sweden is exceptionally equal, simul-

taneously a stereotypical image of the *other*—the non-Swede—as less equal, less modern, and in many cases even as patriarchal is constructed. This *other* could, for example, be immigrants, who are represented as people in need of enlightenment. A hierarchical order is reconstructed that makes the Swedes into the norm, the most developed. Prejudices against immigrants are reconstructed (de los Reyes 2004). It is therefore important to reflect upon what sort of normality is being repeated, and whether the strategy against discrimination could be discriminatory in itself. What is now made into a norm?

There is much work for gender equality in the world today, and hopefully there will be even more. This work is of huge importance, and it must continue. The women's movement, along with the efforts made by women and sometimes also by men in the workplace as well as in the home, brings the dominant gender order into question. The work of politicians against discrimination due to gender also has a great impact on challenging gender norms. However, sometimes this work could be made more effective and radical. In this chapter, I will give some paradoxical examples showing how not only heteronormative arguments but also stereotypical understandings of gender are used in the work for gender equality.

IN TRADE AND INDUSTRY

In my studies of industrial life, I have seen how the work for gender equality reproduces a vision of a complementary heterosexual couple. There is a notion that the two sexes are different, but fit each other like two pieces in a puzzle. This way of thinking is very common in management. In one of my research projects, I interviewed a head manager about his work for gender equality. He told me that he wanted a woman in his management group, and that this woman should be responsible for the human resources in the industrial concern he worked on. He thought this work would suit a woman better than a man; women are, he said, “better at those things”, and he also thought that a management group with both men and women in it would be a good one.¹² In his

12. Martinsson 2006

work for gender equality, he referred to the idea of men and women as two separate categories. Women are one way, and men another. You could say that he repeated a sort of normative common sense that would make his work for gender equality look more rational, and good for the business. You could also say that it was a way for him to make the work for gender equality understandable. But does that mean that men are better at other things such as economy, selling, and so on? Could it be a problem for women to be logical? The manager's thoughts are not only stereotypical, they are also heteronormative. In this normative speech, the idea that "she and he together will be best" is repeated. It is also a problem for work towards gender equality. Women are supposed to work at some tasks, and men at others. A man who would like to work in human resources could be questioned, just as a woman who would like to work with economical affairs.

Here is another example. Another manager, working at a building company, told me in an interview that it was a problem for his business that they didn't have any women in the management group. He would like to have women there, he said. But, as he emphasised, if they had a woman in the management group it should be because of her *being a woman*. "We don't want a woman who acts like a man, who is manly or masculine", he told me. I asked what he meant by "womanly" and "masculine". He answered with a metaphor. Men, he told me, had a perspective as if they were in a helicopter. Women, on the other hand, were always left on the ground. He further explained that he meant by this that women were much more down to earth than men, and he felt that this was a good difference. Different perspectives were good for the business. Women should handle the practical things, while men, he said, were better at visionary thinking, and looking to the future. It is not hard to find problems with this discussion; it is made into a natural order that it is men who are going to decide about the future. A woman with vision is not of interest; she is simply too masculine. A man with practical sense will, on the other hand, not be accepted either. The message is: Act as the norms tell you to! *Together* as a heterosexual *couple* you will succeed.

A third example from the industrial sector comes from the production division itself. When I performed a participant observation of an

industry—both among the managers and the workers—I recognised the speech about him and her together several times. In one sector of the industry there was a huge surplus of men. I was told several times that it would be better if more women were there, because women were different from men. Men were very hard, and their jokes were also supposed to be a lot rougher than women's. Women, on the other hand, were seen as more emphatic and more severe than men. *Therefore*, working together would be best; it would, it was said, be a better *balance*. Another division in the industry had a large number of female employees. It was said that there was a lot of gossip there, and that this was a problem. I was told that if there were more men there, it would be better. Men were more straightforward and more frank than women, and more men would make the *balance* much better. In this example, stereotypical ideas about women and men are again reproduced. It is understood as a sort of common sense, but also as something rather radical. However, the idea of women being more sensitive—but also more prone to gossip—has been used against women in modern history. In this phase of history, being logical and individualistic has been much more highly valued. These are qualities that men, and not women, are said to have. This repetition of a problematic categorisation makes women less highly valued than men; men are connected to the most valued characteristics, and women to the least. Men are connected to the norm, and women are made into *the other*. It is important to question these problematic representations. It is also important to interrupt the repetition of these ideas in the "script" for women and men.

Another interesting and important phenomenon in these examples is that the same idea about the desired relation between him and her together is repeated among the upper class as well as among the workers. The heteronormative ideal of the benefits of having both men and women is reproduced in all classes and also, as the examples show, among women and men. A common and problematic representation that I have met in my investigations is that it is only among the workers or in the working class that heteronormativity is reproduced.¹³ However, my examples indicate that the heteronormative ideal is reproduced and

13. For a similar discussion see Blackman & Walkerdine 2001

made stable in all classes. There is also a rhetoric of women not being as heteronormative as men. This discussion is, again, a reiteration of women being kinder and more sensitive than men. It is a problematic sort of “truth” because it hides how women, and the middle and upper classes, are an important part of the construction and repetition of heteronormative principles and ideals.

It is not only in management and industries that these ideas are repeated; they are also repeated in schools. One “problem” in Swedish schools is what is called “the lack of men”. Many projects have attempted to attract more men to work as teachers. It is said that it is important to have both men and women in schools; that the children need both perspectives.¹⁴ Again, the heterosexual nuclear family is made into a norm, an ideal for how to organise the school. It again establishes the idea of the natural heterosexual couple, and a sort of common sense notion that women are different from men and that this difference is something unavoidable; that you should see yourself as a complement to the other sex.

I have termed these themes and ideas of organisation “*societal marriage*”. The norm of the heterosexual couple is repeated not only in the home but also in management theory and in pedagogy. It is a heteronormative gender principle that reiterates a large number of stereotypes of how to behave at home as well as in the workplace and in political life. It is also a very uncritical way of thinking. If it is correct that women and men are so different (which it is extremely important to question), could not that difference be seen as an effect of troublesome norms, or maybe of an unfair society? Should such effects be celebrated and made into a goal? And why should we go on repeating the heteronormative ideal of being a complement to the other gender?

All these examples also contain the assumption of lack. It is supposed that women lack something that men have, and vice versa. Over and over again, you are told to see the opposite sex as the fulfilment of yourself. He has what I, as a woman, lack. *Together we will be fulfilled.*

14. Nordberg 2005

The next example on this theme comes from the home and from the equal politics of family.

AT HOME

In Sweden, much work has been done over a long period to persuade fathers to take everyday responsibility for their children to the same extent as the mothers. This very interesting and important work was initiated around the 1930s by Alva Myrdal, a famous Swedish Nobel prize winner and feminist thinker.¹⁵ This work has, in a sense, changed the way you are supposed to behave as a man. A modern man is a man that is equal and behaves in an equal way.¹⁶ However, although there have been changes, there are still norms that make it difficult to act as an equal heterosexual couple at home. A recurrent discussion these days is about how to get more fathers to take parental leave.¹⁷ One important reason for such campaigns is that it is an obstacle for women in the labour market to be the presumed caretakers of the children. Another reason that is given is that it is best for the child to have an everyday relationship with both its mother and its father. Sometimes it is even stated that a child needs both a female and a male perspective on the world. It is assumed that men and women have different perspectives on the world, and that these different perspectives are essential for the child’s development. The equal heterosexual couple is made into the model, and also into a vision. Equality is thus considered not only good for women and for men, but also the best model for the child. *In the future we will have equality, when he and she together take care of the child.*¹⁸

I think it is a problem that the most mothers in heterosexual couples take a great deal more parental leave than the fathers. It is important that fathers take parental leave, and to be responsible for and take care of

15. Hirdman 1992:105

16. Nordberg 2005

17. When the Social Democratic Party in Sweden sought a new leader in the spring of 2007, the only candidate for the post, Mona Sahlin, stated that one of her most goals was to get, through quotas, men to take more parental leave. (Swedish Radio 2007 02 07)

18. Martinsson 2001

their children in everyday life. It is of course also important that women take their responsibility as breadwinners. While it is vital for a child to have close contact with its caretaker or caretakers, it is important to find a strategy for this work that does not reiterate stereotypical ideas about gender and sexuality. In the examples given above, there is the risk of reiterating a stereotyped hierarchical idea of women and men as being different and complementary.

Women should act as women and men as men, because that is said to be best for the child. It is taken for granted that there are perspectives that are typical for women and men, perspectives that should therefore be preserved because it is considered best for the child to have both a female and a male role model. These different perspectives on the world should be maintained and used in raising children. This is not only a repetition of the stereotypical way to understand women and men, it is also a reconstructing of the categories of gender. The message is to exceed the gender roles, but to do it in a way that, paradoxically, fails to challenge the gender categories as such, and does not threaten the heterosexual framework. Fathers should take care of their children, but they are supposed to do it as traditional men. With this strategy, the heterosexual couple is yet again made normal and natural, while the homosexual couple is made insufficient, and not good enough. The other problem is that the single parent is made into something strange, unwanted, and stigmatised. The norm says two parents.

It is, of course, important to make it clear that both men and women can be caring parents, teachers, or managers. It is, again, an effect of troublesome norms that makes it so rare to find women in Swedish management groups, or men who take parental leave or work as teachers. In Sweden, men are not expected to work as teachers—at least not with young children—and women are not expected to work as managers. While it is important to overcome or subvert these norms, doing it in this way carries the risk of naturalising gender stereotypes, the heterosexual couple, and the heterosexual desire. It is therefore necessary to disrupt the norms of desire, the notion that men and women are complementary, that they are supposed to fulfil each other.

THE SCHOOL AS A HETERO FACTORY

There is also a common assumption in schools that the teachers are heterosexual. The homosexual or bisexual way of life is often ignored or silenced (Larsson och Rosén 2006). One book about being a woman and a teacher, aimed at student teachers, contains a number of comic strips intended to show the difficult situation of the teacher who finds it impossible to avoid taking her work home with her—home to her husband.



First strip:

It's terrible! Gang members, trouble, truancy, bullying, threats!

You'd better call the police!

No, it's fine, I just needed to let off a little steam.



Second strip:

Shouldn't you come to bed?

But, you know, I'm on flextime ...



Third strip:

... and I really think that Pelle should have got the best marks on that test.

In these three strips, you see three female teachers at home. In two of the strips the women are discussing school, and their work, with their husbands. In the third, the teacher is having an intimate evening with her lover. The strips also show a rather hysterical woman, and two women who can't say no, and who let their professional lives interrupt their private lives, their right to sleep and love.

These strips are just one example of how the “normal” teacher is understood; it is expected of her or him to live in a heterosexual couple. Other ways of life are ignored or made invisible. This could also be one of several explanations for why there are so few teachers who are open about living in a non-heterosexual way, or identifying as transgender—or maybe even that there truly are very few teachers that identify as bisexual, homosexual, or transgender. It may be that it is extremely important to follow the norm of how to act as a gendered person in school. The strips are therefore an example of the reiteration of expectations of how a teacher should be and act. They show how the position of teacher is persistently made into a heterosexual one.

I showed these pictures to a number of teachers and students teachers, and they also became frustrated by the stereotyped image of the female teacher as one who could not act in a professional manner, who could

not separate her work from her spare time, and who was extremely engaged in her work in a non-professional way. They felt that it was not only a stereotype of teachers, but also a stereotype of women; they felt a male teacher would never be represented in that way. I find their objection very interesting. Women are often seen as emotional, unprofessional, and illogical. This is, as I have already mentioned, a problem in the modern world, where qualities such as logic, individualism, and, of course, professionalism are highly valued. These characteristics are also repeatedly connected to men. Women and men are constructed as each other's opposite. So, in the strips that aimed to challenge the role of the female teacher, stereotypical norms about gender, sexuality, and teachers were reproduced.

PEDAGOGY FOR CHANGE?

In Sweden, a new university course has recently been launched; *the pedagogy of gender* (genuspedagogik). This pedagogy aims to subvert gender inequality and gender oppression. It is, however, often heteronormative. It could, for instance, be said that “not everything can be analysed or discussed”, and this makes it possible to talk about gender equality without discussing hierarchical ways of looking at sexuality. It also means that knowledge about heteronormativity is very limited. One of the most-used gender-pedagogical books in Sweden offers tips on how to use problematic television programs.

In television soap operas, and on the commercial channels, there are often representations of rather excessive people and figures. Even if many adults regard soap operas and other children's programmes as unreal, children often feel or experience these programmes as a way into a new world, a world that gives children the possibility to see and understand things that don't exist in their own everyday life, or that do exist but are invisible. Here, everything from racism to homosexuality or veiled violence is illustrated. Instead of condemning children's watching of these programmes, we, in the school, can use it as a basis for important discussions on gender, ethics, equality, and equity. (Svaleryd 2005)

In this text, several phenomena are representing something unintelligible, something strange. Homosexuality is related to phenomena such as racism and violence; it is talked about in terms of people and figures that cross borders, who are presented as “unreal”. The author states that one alternative is that this world is a world the child should be protected from; however she chooses another option. She wants the teacher to discuss these things with the children, and use them to discuss ethics. By this, through this chain of meanings, homosexuality is made into something problematic, unintelligible, and situated in an “unreal” context. It is taken for granted that homosexuality is not present in the children’s everyday lives. The child is made into a non-sexual (and certainly into a non-homosexual) being, and it is assumed that he or she has no parent or sibling who identifies as homosexual. It is also taken for granted that the teachers themselves are heterosexual (Epstein & Johnson 1998, Kissen 2002). Homosexuals seem to be special, and situated at some other place, not in school and not in the world of the children. This is a way to underline homosexuality as *the other*, as something strange, and also as something wrong and problematic.

One important way to work against different forms of discrimination is to interrupt chains like this one. Chains such as these are always constructing meanings. If you connect homosexuality with racism and violence, something happens to the designation of homosexuality that is different from what the result would be if you instead connected it with concepts such as love, openmindedness, self-government, the future, or the family.

Let me now take another example from the same book. This is also a tip for the teacher on how to work with questions about gender equality. The title of the passage is “My self as a father”.

As I mentioned in the first part of the book, the role of the mother is often focused on sex education and in education in coexistence. Today, approximately 14% of fathers use their parental leave. That figure will hardly increase if we do not have early discussion of both parents’ roles for a child’s development with the children and the young ones. Let the boys focus on the

role of the father, but also make visible the boys’ expectations of the mothers (and inversely for the girls). (Svaleryd 2005)

In this text, it is stated that the boy should learn to be a man in a different but still heterosexual way. The idea about *both parents’* roles for the child’s development is repeated here. The boy should be trained to imagine himself in what could be understood as a heterosexual couple. It is said that it is important to work with pupils’ expectations of the opposite gender. However, this text also shows that it is important for the author, and maybe also for the teachers, to work on their expectations of gender and of the pupils. Why is it a given that a child should live in a heterosexual relationship? Or in a relationship at all? And why is it so natural to assume that the pupil will one day have a child? What we see here is not only heteronormativity, but also some sort of norm of togetherness and parenthood. In this strategy for gender equality, everything else is made invisible. Where are the homosexual couples, the singletons, and the families with one parent? No alternative is given. And I must ask whether it shouldn’t have been enough to enable the boys to take responsibility for a *possible child* in the future; it is important to emphasise that this is only a *possibility*.

CONCLUSIONS

In the chapter of this book written by Eva Reimers, she discusses the Swedish curriculum. In this text, it is stated that the teacher shall work towards encourage girls and boys the possibility to live in a non-stereotypical way and to exceed gender roles. This could actually mean, as Reimers argues, that the teachers are obliged to open up the possibility for pupils to live in a non-heterosexual way, and to make this way of life just as natural or normal as any other way of living. This is, of course, not the most common way to interpret the Swedish curriculum, but the interpretation shows the connections of heteronormativity with gender and with the naturalised ideas about how to behave and desire if you are identified as a woman or as a man.

I started this chapter with the question of whether work against heteronormativity has anything in common with work against gender oppression or for gender equality. One answer is that both are concerned with

our expectations and representations of gender. When we work against heteronormativity and homophobia, we are also working against the idea that women and men must behave in a typical female or masculine way. To be in love with the opposite sex could be understood as one possibility, but there are other options too. To work against heteronormativity is therefore also to work for gender equality, or to destabilise the gendered “script”. This work questions the normative ideals of how to behave as a girl or as a boy, and hopefully it also questions the gender categories as such.

In this chapter, several examples have also been given of how heteronormativity is reproduced in the core of modernity, in the centre of what is assumed to be the enlightened Sweden—its work for gender equality. With different strategies for gender equality, the heterosexual eye or desire is reconstructed. In the opposite sex, I should be fulfilled, I should be whole! The heteronormative principle offers nothing other than the heterosexual position to identify with. In a heterosexual context, you are given no possibility to identify with a non-stigmatised homosexual or bisexual position—only with stigmatised ones.

The heteronormative principle constructs organisations on working places. It tells pupils, and those working in industrial life, that they should view the so-called opposite sex as that which will fulfil them, as their complement. As a fulfilled person, or in a fulfilled situation—as the school will be when it looks like a nuclear family—this means, it is said, that the work will be well done. This is a strong process of normalisation that creates hierarchies and makes it much harder for bisexual and homosexual pupils to identify themselves, and to understand themselves in a non-stigmatised way.

When working with different strategies, it is important to be aware of the types of norms that you, yourself, are repeating through your work. It is important to be aware of how norms are connected to each other, how they work in an intersectional way, and how they gain power from each other, how they become strong through being repeated as parts of each other. One question that is important to ask when you are working with these sorts of questions is therefore: *What are we now making into the norm? What is taken for granted? Is*

this sort of common sense something good, or could it be questioned? By asking *what is made into the norm*, you put pressure on the strategy you are working with. It gives you the opportunity to make it better, and thus you are enabled to be part of several struggles against different forms of discriminations.

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