<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *International Journal of Educational Research*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Lundin, M. (2016)

Homo- and bisexual teachers' ways of relating to the heteronorm.

International Journal of Educational Research, 75: 67-75

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.11.005>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-48329>

Homo- and bisexual teachers' ways of relating to the heteronorm

Abstract

Although legislation has made achievements to strengthen the rights of homosexual people in many European countries, the school setting seems to be a place it can be hard to be open as a homosexual person. This article presents articulations of what it is to be homo- or bisexual as a teacher, based on a discourse analysis. The empirical material suggests two different discursive approaches; suggesting different realities of these teachers, described as vigilance and resource. It is interpreted that it is not enough only to rely on laws and a positive mindset of the general public. An explicit support from colleagues is suggested to be crucial to facilitate this group's prerequisites to participate equally compared to norm conforming colleagues.

Key words: homosexual teachers, heteronormativity, teachers' work.

1. Introduction

This article sets out to examine the voices of a small group of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) teachers' voices as they share their experiences of being an LGB person in a school setting (preschool included). Although, these subject positions are nowadays quite frequently seen in society, few of us have had a teacher that is openly homo- or bisexual. In research it is possible to find recent research on teachers' experiences. Those examples, however, often tend to address problems and troubles although that is not the purpose. With this article, these subject positions, albeit seldom seen in school, are brought to the fore in order to show how these teachers articulate their situation. In some contrast to previous research on the matter, the project presented here specifically but not exclusively embraces voices experiencing being a LGB person as a resource.

Research question: How can LGB teachers' relate to being or coming out in school be understood?

1.1 Being a LGB person in society and in school

In many European countries the rights of LGB people have been strengthened. In Sweden for example, the anti-discrimination act (SFS 2008:567) specifically address discrimination towards LGB people although the law also provides legal support for other groups. Sweden is usually considered an open and liberal society when it comes to legal rights and attitudes towards LGB people. In the European Value Survey (European Value Survey, 2008) on the public attitudes towards homosexuality, 54.9% answered

that they *always* justify homosexuality (Q68H), implying that a majority had chosen the maximum value on a ten-level scale. The same value for the participating countries in total was 12.7%. However, the situation for LGB people in school seems to be more complex compared to the more liberal and accepting attitudes of society in general. There, the visibility of LGB people seems to be lacking, and heteronormative attitudes seem to prevail. International research on this matter (Buston & Hart, 2001; Epstein, 1994; Herek, 2004) has revealed schools to be rather heteronormative and heterosexist, generally assuming that everyone within its settings is heterosexual. A study conducted by Kjarnan and Kristinsdóttir (2015) similarly indicated that institutionalized heterosexism prevails in the structure and culture of the schools in Iceland. The teachers play an important part in this respect as they guide the activities. However, the teachers are also a part of these norms, and therefore it is important to understand the teacher's perspective. An LGB teacher is likely not only to experience, but also notice the prevailing sexuality norms. In *Speaking the unspeakable*, Allan, Atkinson, Brace, DePalma and Hemingway (2008) explain the benefits with having open homo- and bisexual teachers to show the diversity in society, means by which students are offered opportunities to identify with homosexual people, they argue. The research presented in this article addresses LGB teachers' situation by focusing on a few homo- and bisexual teachers' voices as they describe their experiences of being an LGB person in a school setting.

1.2 The heteronorm

The norm concept is a key concept to the study, and the crucial norm for LGB people is the heteronorm. In this article, the notion that everybody is heterosexual and wishes to live in heterosexual partnership is defined as heteronorm. Warner (1993, p. xxi) defined the concept heteronorm and according to him ...

... so much privilege lies in heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Het[ero] culture thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the invisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist.

The concept of heteronormativity can be illustrated using two dichotomies (Ambjörnsson, 2006). The first one is the dichotomy of men and women companioned by all the expectations and things taken for granted that can be associated with men and women, respectively. The dichotomy of men and women also include the idea of their complementarity. For example that women's qualities are opposite and complementary to men's. The sometimes-anticipated complementarity can be seen as support of the idea of a dichotomy because it might seem natural that the two categories would purposefully add to each other's shortcomings. The second dichotomy deals with the separation of hetero- and homosexuality. The first dichotomy is a prerequisite in order for the second dichotomy to exist. These dichotomies are palpable in Euro-American

society of today, but they are also undergoing a process of self-corrosion, according to Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990). The crisis of dichotomies opens up for a new epistemology, she argues, where the continuum of subject position becomes possible. In the latter section called; *Victimized or with agency*, a hint of that new epistemology is given.

Heterosexual values and views are often taken for granted. The heterosexual values are hegemonic, and privilege of heterosexuals is assumed to be the norm. The hegemony is embodied in different ways. For example the hegemony can not only be seen as invectives indicating an inferior subject position, but also in how LGBT people are marginalized (King, 2009), anticipated only to exist in groups of others (Reimers, 2008) and sometimes hid as subject position (Rosenberg, 2002) or related to discursive elements involving troubles and issues (Martinsson, 2008), just to mention a few examples. For a deeper survey on these processes, please confer Lundin (2011).

Pharr (1997, 2000) stresses that heterosexism and its manifestations need to be studied within the context of institutions, as within the school setting, for example. The term heterosexism then refers to a more radical connotation than heteronormativity that can be seen as a prerequisite for heterosexism to exist. The heteronorm does, however, not only have impact on LGB people. One important example of the general impact of this norm are for example the various kind of insults, originating in the hierarchic power positions of for example homo- and heterosexuality seen in invectives such as dyke or faggot, that can be said to not only LGBT people but to anyone. Similarly, Ambjörnsson (2006) stresses that the heteronorm refers to society's values and expectations in different aspects, indicating not only sexuality, but also an expected construction of gender.

1.3 The heteronorm and the teachers

In this article it is taken for granted that teachers are raw models for students. It is also taken for granted that the adults in school, both by their diversity and by their work to counteract traditional gender patterns, contribute to fulfilling the mission expressed as diversity. However, it can be questioned if the school is yet the arena for this mission or if school is slightly behind. Eribon (2004) describes how a homosexual teacher constantly fears being insulted by the students and he suggests that the teaching profession could be one of the more difficult sectors of the workforce.

In educational settings certain behaviors and interests are assumed, whereas others are perceived as odd. King (2004) illustrates this as he describes school as a setting where sexuality does not seem to exist – students are regarded as sexually inexperienced, and teachers as sexually inactive. His conclusion refers to sexuality that comply with the hetero norm. Sexuality that does not comply with the norm, such as a homosexual teacher coming out, is at risk of standing out. Slesaransky-Poe and García (2009) suggest that this (already made) sexualization of pedagogy is accomplished through heteronormative behavior. It seems important to challenge heteronormativity within

the school environment and deepen our understanding of the heteronormative ideology.

A teacher perspective is seldom seen in this research area. King (2004) provides one exception. He describes how homosexual teachers consider and make special considerations that heterosexual teachers do not have to make: "As a closeted, gay primary teacher, I constantly monitored my behaviors around children. I was anxious about how other teachers, parents, and principals would interpret my interactions and relationships with my students" (p. 123). This means producing a dissociated personality, to use Eribon's words (Eribon, 2004). A relevant question is to ask what professional impact the considerations exemplified by King (2004) might have. To break the norm by coming out might imply to be perceived as expressing something very personal and maybe inappropriate. This is one of homo- and bisexual teachers' dilemmas: A heterosexual teacher can talk about a partner without being accounted for talking about sexuality, whereas the homo- or bisexual teacher is at risk of being understood as talking inappropriately about sexuality (cf. Slesaransky-Poe & García, 2009). Eribon (2004, p. 105) exemplifies with the possible comment from a heterosexual person, said in a situation when a homosexual person has revealed the sexuality what is incessantly talked about by the heterosexual: "Why do gay people always have to be so open about it?".

In "When Queer and Teacher Meet", Evans (1999) addresses the complexities of separating public from private as these notions are dependent on norms as well as context. Similarly, Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) points out the crisis of parings such as public/private, as well as in/out of the closet. Similarly Eribon (2004) points out the ever-changing borders of what could be considered public and private. Evans (1999) points at an example relating to the dichotomy public/private, where distance is created between a heterosexual teacher and her colleague although the intention was the opposite Evans example illustrates that what is private for somebody in one setting could be private to another. The impact of being might be crucial in areas where homosexuality is less accepted, and where homosexual teachers might feel that they have to compensate in order to avoid delicate situations, for example, by expressing distance instead of closeness.

Another example where a teacher's perspective is presented and applied, is given by Hardie (2012). She points out the dilemmas and issues that have to be handled as a risk management by the homosexual teacher and she says "School contexts provide challenges that needed to be weighed in terms of personal risk" (Hardie, 2012, p. 275). A possibility of being insulted or harrassed is one example of a perceived risk to the homosexual teacher. However, the risk can also be of a more intricate as the secret is known by everyone although the homosexual person does not know. Eribon (2004) points out that the risk is then that the homosexual person can experience "sarcastic

and cruel remarks that he is unable to perceive as such and to which he is unable to reply" (p. 53).

Fifield and Swain (2002) present a homosexual male perspective. They show the intersection between identity and school subject as they illuminate homosexual perspectives. According to them, homosexual teachers can experience awkward moments and to address homosexuality as content can imply to address one's own private agenda to the classroom, they explain. They also explain how the use of words, such as phagocytosis or homozygote in biology class, can provide a feeling of unease because of the connotations of the words. Similarly to Hardie these are things to be handled although risk management does not pervade their narratives. Macgillivray (2008), too, shares a teacher's story and he relates the students' perspectives to the teacher's openness with being gay. Macgillivray actually uses his own voice as an introduction and he analyses his students' experiences using the open teacher as a starting-point for the text. The project presented in this article is focused on the LGB teachers' experiences only.

Ferfolja shows how lesbian teachers handle situations when being harassed in Australian schools (Ferfolja, 2008). In her article, she gives voice to teachers that volunteered to share the stories of being silenced or marginalized. In an earlier article, Ferfolja (2007) exemplifies how lesbian teachers being self-silences, referred to what she described as a privacy discourse when arguing for their right to privacy. The teachers' accounts in the article from 2007, she also exemplifies how the teachers related to a discursive position by referring heterosexual relations to pass without coming out. The research presented here, contrarily to Ferfolja's articles, is based on the teachers' initiatives to share LGB teachers' (men and women) experiences rather than the researcher's initiative to understand lesbian teachers, as in her examples.

The research presented in this article contributes to the same kind of knowledge that Mayo (2008) presents as Mayo focuses on the teachers' voices and not the students'. However, in comparison to Mayo another difference is pertinent. Mayo's project is carried out in a gay hostile environment of northeast Florida where the legislative support for LGB people is weak, whereas this project is carried out in Sweden where the setting can be regarded as supportive, especially with respect to legislation. This is especially made explicit as Mayo describes gay teachers' efforts to support gay students. Similarly, Richard (2012) addresses homosexual teachers' support to LGB students and although it can be discussed whether this support is solely the LGB teachers' responsibility (Hardie, 2012; Mayo 2008), her results indicate the impact and importance of support, openness and inclusion in schools.

Swedish research with focus on homo- or bisexuality in preschools or schools is seldom found, especially when it comes to educational research with teachers' first-hand perspectives. There are examples, however, if the search is widened to student, school,

or system perspectives. Connell (2005) provides one example, focusing on how masculinity is constructed in school and how masculinity norms provide a hierarchy for boys. Similarly, Nordberg (2006) shows how words such as gay and sissy function as markers, indicating what is regarded unacceptable and deviating from the masculinity norm. Connell's and Nordberg's research refer to men deviating from masculinity norms and their examples are likely to differ from women's experiences of deviating from femininity norms. This project refers to the perspectives of homo- and bisexual subject positions regardless of gender.

1.4 Victimized or with agency

The intent of the project described here is to embrace not only the voices describing harassment, likewise Ferfolja (2008) but to strive for different voices and also to make the participants into subjects. To make the teachers into subjects is in accordance with Macgillivray (2008) who provides a narrative of the self-steered and successful teacher rather than an image of a powerless and harassed subject. Traditionally, the concept of agency has been used to describe that dichotomy referring to the dichotomy of oppression and freedom. Butler (1997, p. 7-8) relate to agency in another way, describing agency as an act with consequences, referring especially to how we "do things with language, produce effects with language...", which opens up for the possibility to look at the self-steered homosexual teacher in terms of the produced consequences of for example speech acts. Gowlett (2014) uses Butler's concept of agency as she analyses a student's situation in school. In her use of the concept agency (Gowlett, 2014, p. 406) she points out: "Agency is not, therefore, seen through a prism of escape but more an alternation and recrafting of the rules that enables a viable form of social existence. Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) uses a biblical narrative as an allegory to explain how an oppressed subject position can, despite the oppression and subordination, use of the situation to provide a privilege. Her example is in-line with the concept of agency suggested by Butler (1997).

In this article, the LGBT teachers are subjects that share stories on their own initiative, suggesting an agency, rather than victimised teachers that are asked to participate in research. Before turning to the method, there are two other differences with respect to the preciously mentioned articles (Ferfolja, 2008; Macgillivray, 2008; Mayo, 2008). First, all of them relate to a high school setting whereas this project embraces teachers at all levels. Second, those articles all originate in an Anglo-Saxon environment whereas this project is based on Swedish data.

2. Methods

Taking into account that the hetero norm has an impact on Swedish teachers, it is reasonable to find that it is hard to get in touch with people who can provide material for the analysis. As the aim is to *understand* how teachers can articulate their work situation, the representativeness is less important. Instead, the articulations need to constitute examples of valid experiences of this specific group of teachers. An experience should in this case be validated in terms of first hand accounts and a willingness to share experiences in a safe environment.

2.1 Data collection

The data collection was made collaboration with a LGBT network, implying that the group of informants initiated the work. This group is part of a network associated to the Swedish teachers' union called Lärarförbundet. The network is called Lärarförbundets HBT¹-nätverk (The teacher union's LGBT network) and it consists of around 46 members² from various school levels, from preschool to university level. Its members come from different parts of Sweden, from north to south, east and west, although a great deal of its participants comes from the Stockholm area. The network is open to in-service and pre-service teachers of all ages³, who define themselves as LGBT⁴. In an average network meeting, a third to half of the members are likely to participate.

At network meetings, many significant experiences are shared within the group, and on several occasions the question whether these could be shared to a broader audience was brought up. The network was a suitable setting to collect a few different examples of voices (i.e. not only the voice of the harassed) and subsequently seven network members decided to participate. Among the men and women that participated both student teachers and experienced teachers were represented, as well as different professional areas, such as pre school and middle school. The policy of the network is that what is mentioned within the group, stays in the group. For the work to accomplish this article, the same policy was applied with the amendment relating to the seven members decision to share their experiences. The instruction to them was to write a short account of their "experiences of being homo- or bisexual in relation to the pedagogical work" (my translation) and it was explained that the individual contributions were to be put together into an assembled text that was double checked for identity markers.

2.2 Analysis

The reading of the assembled text (4000 words in total) focused on parts that involved account of coming out that related to the research question. Coming out was used as a node in the analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000; Wreder; 2007). As the analysis is not directed towards individual's experiences but to how this group can describe the society where they work. Discourse analysis (Laclau & Mouffe 2001) allows

¹ Homo- and Bisexual, Transpersons (HBT) in Swedish, i.e., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender in English.

² Number of members registered on the web forum of the network (November-2013).

³ Network members approaching pension were not observed when the work was accomplished

⁴ At the time of the data collection no trans person participated.

focusing on accounts concerning one specific field without addressing the voice of the individual. The methodological approach shows similarities to Ferfolja (2007) who identifies discourses and relates to the teachers “discursive positioning” (p. 575). However, the analysis presented in this article can only be seen as a first attempt to accomplish a discourse analysis. With this tentative analysis of discourses I argue that the presented two stances in the results should be regarded as different discursive approaches rather than discourses in their full sense.

Sometimes names occur in the excerpts, and these are all pseudonyms. The presented six excerpts were translated from Swedish to English, trying to keep the authenticity of the original expression and still transferring the meaning to the English language. The excerpts were proof read by an English native speaker.

3. Results

The teachers’ assembled text contains expressions that can be described in terms of two tentatively described discursive approaches. These are called the vigilant approach and the resource approach. The four first presented accounts illustrate a vigilant approach. The two last accounts illustrate the discourse of being a LGB person in school/preschool and pointing to it as a resource. The given examples are related to whether the teacher is open or not with respect to her/his sexual orientation.

3.1 A vigilant approach

The excerpts below are used to illustrate two very different ways of describing how it is to be a homo- or bisexual person in school.

One teacher provides quite clear standpoint, explaining that the sexual orientation is nobody else’s business:

For about 5 years, I was working at a school without talking to anyone there about how I lived and what relations I had with people outside of work time. I said with emphasis to myself, that it [my way of living] was not a concern for work, professionalism, or workplace. What does it matter what life I have outside of school?

This teacher clearly expresses a choice not to come out because it is a private matter. The vigilance is interpreted in the expressed silence, suggesting that the sexual orientation is beyond the everyday topics. Looking at a heterosexual perspective on this does not exclude that comments on one’s own way of living a heterosexual life occasionally could become visible in conversations. Yet, this teacher makes this statement. A consideration to avoid heterosexism is one way to explain this strategy. The expression differs significantly from the next account where the teacher expressed that the lack of openness was a problem because sharing things at work is a social treat.

In this next excerpt, the teacher tells us about the breaks where teachers come together and talk over a coffee or lunch. This teacher is not open with her/his orientation, but expresses a dissatisfaction:

During coffee time and lunch breaks I sit together with the rest of the staff and socialize. I feel that my lack of openness becomes a hindrance for me in conversations and socialization. I also want to be able to talk about what I've done during the weekend and with whom.

The teacher clearly expresses that not being open implies a hindrance at work, and we can guess that the lack of openness among colleagues also implies a lack of openness in the work with the students/children. The vigilance is interpreted as the rationale for safeguarding and not revealing any delicate information in the conversations at coffee break, to avoid coming out. From the excerpt we do not learn much about what the impact of this hindrance is, more than it seems to be a social handicap not being able to share for example weekend experiences.

In both the given examples, it is the teacher's choice not to be open. However, it should be mentioned that the author of the latter excerpt also gave voice to the resource approach, explaining a shift in views. The teacher commented on her/his coming out saying that it was successful and respectfully accepted by her/his colleagues: "Not until this period [after coming out] had I started to understand how not being open had affected me."

The teacher that wrote the account below seems to have chosen not to be very open with the sexual orientation. This choice seems to come with a strategic vigilance to be able to avoid coming out:

I remember how talented I became at maneuvering away from topics that might make me have to come out [speak about my sexual orientation] or lie about myself in the coffee room at work. How perceptive I became regarding how people expressed about people like me. So, at a workplace with 20 employees, I only dared to be open with 2 persons /.../ One expression here, another expression there going in the wrong direction and I got up from the red sofa and sent myself on an errand somewhere.

In the teacher's account, the constant attention paid to delicate topics seems to be crucial in order not to get into any situations that could be revealing and from this attention the vigilance is interpreted. The approach implies articulating avoidance of delicate situations that could occur. Precautions are, for example, expressed as a crucial feature to keep the secret about sexual orientation.

The next excerpt illustrates vigilance from a teacher that has a more open attitude to being a LGB person in school. The excerpt shows what it might be to be outed. The teacher (Frederic) that provided this excerpt expressed that he was not always open, and the situation below seems to provide a specific setting:

A little later on, a woman my age started to work on the same work team as I. She was single. [My colleague] Lena knew her beforehand and she introduced us. Lena wanted to make a “funny” presentation of me and she said:

Well, this is Frederic, my sister. There is no point hitting on him, because after work he goes home to his husband Marcus.

Everybody giggled and I didn’t think much more on that. But some weeks ago a friend introduced me in the same way to a woman that I had never met before. Then, I didn’t laugh, but rather I spoke up for myself. I do not feel like being outed [denoted as different] either by colleagues or by friends.

Based on the last lines of the excerpt, it seems that Frederic was open to Lena, but that he did not appreciate being outed by others, not even by Lena who was his friend. This excerpt also illustrates that coming out is an ongoing process, as new people continuously show up and face Frederic with the choice of coming out or not. Furthermore, Frederic’s account suggests a need for tactfulness from Lena’s side – especially as he so clearly expresses the giggling and the “‘funny’ presentation.” The wish not to be outed is interpreted as Frederic’s wish to manage these things by himself. It is interpreted that Frederic resists being made fun of. As he experiences the situation for the first time it can be interpreted that he was not vigilant enough. At the next occasion however, he is and then he is vigilant enough and takes action to speak for himself.

3.2 A resource approach

The next excerpt gives an account of a different way of articulating how the situation of this group can be like. In this account the teacher tells that she let people in the village know about her new relationship:

I lived and worked in a small village when I met my girlfriend at the time. Then, the question about openness in the workplace became at stake. I directly told my closest colleagues, who are also my friends, and we [my girlfriend and I] did nothing to hide our relationship in the village. Fairly soon, the rumor was spread to both parents and students. One day a pupil asked if the rumors were true and I confirmed. In that way, I have come to understand, I could come out to the students in a pain free and natural way.

In the last part of her account of coming out, she expresses that the approach to let the word spread about her relation was pain free and natural – expressed as a resource to her. To be open from the very beginning seems to be a strategy for her, and served her in order for the word about her orientation to spread around in the village. Considering her way of describing her coming-out as something that is done once, rather than a perpetual renewal as it is mostly regarded, it can actually be interpreted that her approach possibly only had to be applied once – at least if the village setting was small enough to self-generate a continuous coming out process as the word spread mouth to mouth. Her way of describing the situation is in any case very different from Frederic’s, as she totally lets go of control regarding who is allowed to know. This way of referring to the work situation involves adaptation to the setting. The two presented examples

deal with being outed in contrasting ways. In first case as a matter being vigilant to and in the second example as a resource for coming out.

The last excerpt point at the resource of being open and describes it as more or less a prerequisite for teachers' work:

Being a teacher means, [in a certain way,] to reveal your thoughts, experiences and feelings day after day. I do not mean that you should share your private life with your students, but on the other hand, not using yourself as a tool when teaching can be hard, I think. Being a teacher involves meeting others and creating something together in that encounter. I share my experiences, and I get to know others. In the encounter, new knowledge can grow.

In contrast to the expressed avoidance in the example from the coffee room, this teacher explains that teaching is about meeting others, as well as about sharing things with others. This teacher expresses that revealing things would not be something negative, but rather something that promotes learning, which is interpreted as a resource. In the excerpt, it is especially emphasized that you should not be private with students and we can guess that she/he separates what is private from what is personal, implying that the private would be rather intimate. The last two sentences of the excerpt suggest that the teacher has experience being open and it is interpreted that this teacher is convinced this approach is a professional resource.

In the material, it is possible to find accounts illustrating experiencing not being open as a hindrance and not being a complete participant. The material, on the other hand also includes an account of not wanting to come out because the orientation is no one else's business. Both of these ways of viewing the work situation seem to be attached to a need of vigilance in order to avoid coming out or being outed. However, there is also the view describing openness as a resource to reach out to students and facilitate their learning by sharing personal experiences.

4. Discussion

The findings can be summed up by the contrasting discursive approaches, much focused on the nodes of coming out and/or being outed. The two stances that are described as vigilance and a resource approach, shall not be interpreted as ways of talking about LGB teachers' situation. These stances are two different ways LGB teachers can relate to their work, studied within the context of the school institution (cf. Pharr, 1997; 2000).

Although the data used for this article is limited, it is remarkable that it still suggests two qualitatively different discursive approaches. Collaboration with a network, as in this research project, can be seen as being at risk of generating homogenous and biased answers. This line of argument suggests that an extensive data collection could generate even more diverse answers. The voices in this article originate in one network, and it can be assumed that such a source of information does not contribute to a variety of

answers – rather it is reasonable to think that an interest group could provide conformity in expressions, nevertheless, a variety can be perceived. That is, the results presented in this article suggest that LGB teachers at least relate to their work in at least two significantly different ways. Despite the hypothetical bias of answers and the limitation of having a small sample leading to conformity of answers, it is possible to regard the different discursive approaches as a first step to understand the ways in which this group of teachers assert their way of relating to coming out – or not – in school. A larger material would, of course, provide better opportunities to look for other nodes (cf. Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000) and aiming for a more elaborated picture of discourses in discourse analysis sense (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). A larger material including different and stratified samples, for example homo- and bisexual teachers, would allow an analysis where specificities of different groups were elicited. However, considering the theoretical base of the project, Kosofsky Sedgwick's critique of the different reoccurring pairings or binaries, suggests that stratification could imply a contradictory research approach. Nevertheless, the data material used here needs to be seen as a first step to elicit some features brought up by a LGB group that might contrast to a heterosexual conception.

The EVS (European Value Survey, 2008) shows that Sweden provides a relatively good environment for LGBT people. This is confirmed by the account of being at ease with coming out to a complete village. On the other hand, another account suggest differently, describing an approach making errands when the topic of discussion goes the wrong direction, which could indicate an anxiety over possible reactions from the environment. This example could tentatively be related to the barely appropriate jokes, recalled by another teacher giving a hint of what such a joke could be like. I suggest that Nordbergs (2006) masculinity markers could be a possible ingredient in such a joke. It seems possible that this group of teachers cannot have a unison approach referring to possibilities with being a LGB person in the school setting. Also, based on the material at hand, it was not possible to get a deeper understanding of whether for example an avoidance of a topic could be related to Butler's concept of agency (Butler, 1997). However, it cannot be out ruled that a strategy to leave a conversation, the room included, could be perceived as a clear statement and a sign of strong agency as it could indeed be an act with consequences (Gowlett, 2014). Whether this was the case in the given example is beyond the scope of this article.

King (2004, p.129) showed how restraining it might be to be closeted. A reasonable interpretation of the expressed vigilance approach in this project is that being closeted is a disadvantage, restraining the teachers' acting space. This interpretation is in line with the teacher who claimed that it was not until after coming out that she *"...started to understand how not being open had effected [her]."* In this particular case, we can guess that not only the teacher herself must benefit from the coming out process (as suggested in the excerpt), but also the students and maybe the community of that village as well. This interpretation is tentative, but yet supported by the possible step towards diversity it must have implied for the community (Allan, Atkinson, Brace,

DePalma & Hemingway, 2008). To be open seems to be a strategy for this teacher in order for the word about the sexual orientation to be spread around. Although the material only showed positive examples of coming out, the empirical material is far too limited for any conclusions in this respect, as we know very little about the agency offered by the closet (cf. Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990). It is likely that the way data was collected had an impact on the discursive patterns that were made possible; messages including restricting factors and impeding the opportunities of the closet.

The excerpts hint at what it might be like to be an open teacher among other teachers but not among students. It seems that there might be a risk being unconsciously outed for a semi-out teacher but the data gives no clues to if any of the teachers has experienced the situation that Eribon (2012) relates. More research is needed to explain the gap between the positive results of the EVS (European Value Survey, 2008) on one hand, and the notion that accounts of being open among students were not prominent, on the other. It is reasonable to think there is a lot more to know about being open in the classroom. Fifield and Swain (2002) gave us some insight when they showed how homosexual teachers might experience awkward moments, and they exemplify by asserting that homosexuality as content can imply a feeling of campaigning in the classroom. The participants of this study did not bring up any such ideas – on the other hand, colleagues seem to be a key in with respect to being open to students. This is for example seen in the pointing out that the diversity endeavor is a common enterprise, rather than a private campaign. Nevertheless, the accounts presented in this article can be interpreted as an indicator of the importance of keeping control as well as fitting with the notion that coming out is a continuous process; that is, after coming out once, you need to do it continuously in order to stay open with your orientation. The continuity of coming out points at the shortcomings of the word-pair “in” or “out” of the closet, as pointed out by Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990).

In one of the presented excerpts, a mindset to share things was interpreted. That account suggests that teaching is about meeting others and about revealing things. It was pointed out that sharing (personal) things is not anything negative, but rather something that promotes learning and that provide a resource. It is most unlikely that this teacher perceives coming out as revealing private information. However, a teacher’s mindset expressing a wish to socialize during lunch breaks might include an inconsistency when avoiding topics dealing with spare time activities and such. This is a self-silencing (Cf. Ferfolja, 2007; 2008) example provided in this data material. The lack of openness is then likely to hinder informed colleagues chatting about, for example, her/his weekend, as suggested in this data material. These findings do, however, not mean that the lack of openness would always hinder – that approach could yet imply possibilities. The findings illustrate that a topic perceived as something to go public about by someone, can be seen as strictly private by someone else. That is, the findings strengthen the notion that the binary of public and private cannot be regarded as a clearly separated pair – as Evans (1999) relates, Eribon (2004) describes in terms of movement and Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990) problematize.

Slesaransky-Poe and García (2009) provide one example that illustrates the (already made) sexualization of pedagogy accomplished through heteronormativity. The teacher arguing that teaching is about sharing things has indeed accomplished something to be able to overcome a feeling of stepping into a sexualized topic by coming out. On the other hand, the material also includes a contrast to the account about sharing. Another teacher provided an example, arguing for not coming out and “revealing” things: “What does it matter what life I have outside school of school?” This is a contrasting standpoint to, for example the account in the excerpt “Being a teacher means...” In a third excerpt, deviation to the hetero norm is expressed as something to avoid by all means, suggesting that the intersection of being a LGB person and being a teacher, suggested by Fifield and Swain (2002), requires some kind of approach, in the heteronormatively sexualized school.

The different voices elicited from the teachers’ accounts can be summarized in six notions. First, it is possible to find accounts illustrating experiencing not being open as a hindrance and being an incomplete participant, suggesting a certain wish to be open. Second, there are voices expressing a wish not to come out because the orientation is no one else’s business. These two ways of relating to openness show two different approaches to being out in the school setting. Third and fourth, two kinds of accounts describe being outed. One account is referring to no control when being outed, the other referring to let go of control in order to accomplish the coming-out process. Fifth and six, the teachers’ accounts exemplify two different approaches to being an LGB person in school, illustrated by the maneuvering away from delicate topics and the approach of sharing thoughts and experiences. Maneuvering is not necessarily only relating to a homo- or bisexual subject position. Also, a heterosexual teacher could risk experiencing heterosexist comments, which could lead to self-silencing or maneuvering away from topics. In any case, the maneuvering is a key feature related to the vigilance approach and it also complies with the gay teachers’ monitoring described by King (2004). Further research is needed to find out what factors in the school setting facilitate the processes of coming out and being open by having a close look at when the maneuvering and self-monitoring become crucial as well as a hindrance or a possibility.

This far it has been possible to point out a few so-called strategies that these LGB teachers use to cope with the different setting where they work. To avoid talking about things concerning life outside school and avoiding particular topics by leaving the room are two examples of how it is possible to cope. Along with these coping strategies comes an expressed perception of a hindrance to socialize. Nevertheless, settings are different in many ways and they can differ in terms of established heteronormativity, manifest in heterosexism. Also, a setting is dependent of all its actors (i.e. also the LGB teachers) and those closeted or silenced also make an impact on the feedback given by the social system of colleagues. In this respect it is interesting to address the teachers’ accounts that do not indicate issues and problems referring to heterosexism or heteronormativity. In the contrasting experiences the collegial support is mentioned. The elicited question of support is in line with Richard’s (2012) suggestion that open

homosexual teachers can support homosexual students. However, it still is still questionable if the support needs to come from the same minority group (cf. Hardie, 2012) or whether equality should be regarded an endeavor for all (cf. Mayo, 2008). The findings presented here suggest the latter.

There is indeed more work to be done for and by LGB people in schools. In the teachers' articulations on coming out, colleagues seem to play an important part, as mentioned above. Only the last excerpt is restricted from accounts of the colleagues' importance. The other excerpts are either quite general (as the first one) or specifically addressing the attitudes and support from colleagues. Speaking about a profession that is directed towards students, it is remarkable that colleagues are such a prominent feature in the accounts and not students. It is concluded that an explicitly and generally articulated support for those who deviate from the norm is likely to facilitate. Such support can be understood as a way to provide a setting so that the LGB teacher – or students – could choose the personality they prefer, also in the school setting (cf. Eribon, 2004). To explicitly talk about the importance of diversity, to explicitly address occurring issues, and to provide explanations of why people choose different approaches, seem to be key factors for creating a school environment that facilitates being bi- or homosexual in school.

5. Conclusions

For many heterosexual people, sexuality is continuously expressed and manifested without any giving it any specific notice. On the other hand, the accounts presented in this article suggest that the bi- and homosexual teachers do need to take action, by being vigilant or take precautions to comply with the norm in a, for them, acceptable way. This notion suggests that there is still work to be done to avoid that school remains a closet while society around changes (Eribon, 2004). The discursive approach of vigilance suggests that much more needs to be done in schools to provide trust and reliance on each other's support. It is not enough to rely on laws (e.g. SFS 2008:567) or a positive mindset of the public in general. The explicit support and trust in colleagues seem to be a crucial part of the resource approach in order to improve the LGB teachers' prerequisites, and the prerequisites for *other* non-compliers with prevailing norms, as well as to provide prerequisites for those how comply with norms but still become harassed with homophobic language. The explicitly articulated support is here suggested to be the key to success.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the *Center for gender research* at Uppsala University, the STINT foundation and the KOLA research group at Linnaeus University that contributed to the accomplishment of this article. Thanks also to the teachers in the network that contributed with their experiences and to reviewers for much helpful comments.

References

- Allan, A.; Atkinson, E.; Brace, E.; DePalma, R. & Hemingway, J. (2008). Speaking the unspeakable in forbidden places: addressing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality in the primary school. *Sex Education*, 8(3), 315-328.
- Ambjörnsson, F. (2006). *Vad är queer* [What is queer] Stockholm: Natur och kultur.
- Buston, K., & Hart, G. (2001). Heterosexism and homophobia in Scottish school sex education. Exploring the nature of the problem. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 95-109.
- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Connell, R. W. (2005). Att undervisa pojkar [To teach boys] In M. Nordberg (red) *Manlighet i fokus*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Epstein, D. (1994). Lesbian and gay equality within a whole school policy. In D. Epstein (Ed.), *Challenging Lesbian and Gay Inequalities in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Eribon, D. (2004). *Insult and the making of the gay self*. Durham and London: Duke University press.
- European Value Survey. (2008). Retrieved 2013-09-27. <http://zacat.gesis.org/>
- Evans, K. (1999) When Queer and Teacher Meet. In W. J. Letts IV & J. T. Sears (eds.) *Queering Elementary Education*. (pp. 237-246) Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ferfolja, T. (2007) Teacher negotiations of sexual subjectivities, *Gender and Education*, 19:5, 569-586, DOI: 10.1080/09540250701535584
- Ferfolja, T. (2008) Discourses that silence: teachers and anti-lesbian harassment , *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 29:1, 107-119
- Fifield, S. & Swain, H. L. (2002). Heteronormativity and Common-sense in science (teacher) education. In R. Kissen (red) *Getting Ready for Benjamin: Preparing Teachers for Sexual Diversity in the Classroom*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gowlett, C. (2014). Queer(y)ing, and recrafting agency: moving away from a model of coercion versus escape, *Discourse: Studies in Cultural Politics of Education*, 35:3, 405-418.
- Hardie, A. (2012). Lesbian teachers and students: issues and dilemmas of being 'out' in primary school. *Sex Education: Sexuality, Society and Learning*, 12:3, 273-282
- Herek, G. M. (2004). Beyond "homophobia": Thinking about sexual prejudice and stigma in the twenty-first century. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 1(1), 6-24.

- King, J. R. (2004). The (im)possibility of gay teachers for young children. *Theory into Practice*, 43(29), 122-127.
- Kjara, J. I. & Kristinsdóttir, G. (2015): Schooling sexualities and gendered bodies. Experiences of LGBT students in Icelandic upper secondary schools, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2015.1019375
- Laclau, E. & Mouffe, C. (2001) *Hegemony and socialist strategy : towards a radical democratic politics* London : Verso.
- Lundin, M. (2011). Building a framework to study the hetero norm in praxis. *International Journal of Educational Research* 50(5-6), 301-306
- Macgillivray, I. K. (2008) My Former Students' Reflections on Having an Openly Gay Teacher in High School. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 5:4, 72-91
- Martinsson, L. (2008). Normeras till frigörelse? In L. Martinsson & E. Reimers (Eds.), *Skola i normer* (pp. 131–164). Malmö: Gleerups.
- Mayo, J. B. Jr (2008). Gay Teachers' Negotiated Interactions with Their Students and (Straight) Colleagues. *The High School Journal*, 92(1), 1-10
- Nordberg, M. (2006). Barns och ungas livsvillkor och identitetsskapande. [Children's and young peoples living conditions and identity making] In Forskarbilaga till *Könsskillnader i målluppfyllnad och utbildningsval*. Skolverket report no 287. Retrieved: 2009-02-16. <http://www.skolverket.se>.
- SFS 2008:567. (2008). *Diskrimineringslag* [Anti discrimination act] Retrieved 2011-06-13. <http://www.riksdagen.se>.
- Slesaransky-Poe, G. & García, A. M. (2009). Boys with gender variant behaviours and interests: from theory to practice. *Sex Education*, 9(2), 201-210.
- Pharr, S (1997). *Homophobia: A weapon of sexism*. Berkeley, California: Chardon Press.
- Pharr, S. (2000). Homophobia: A weapon of sexism. In M. Plott & L. Umanski (Eds.), *Making sense of women's lives: An introduction to women's studies* (pp. 424–438). Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Reimers, E. (2008). Asexuell heteronormativitet? In L. Martinsson & E. Reimers (Eds.), *Skola i normer* (pp. 97–130). Malmö : Gleerups.
- Richard, G. (2012). Politiques pédagogiques identitaires: Réflexions sur le modèle du professeur minoritaire pour les élèves de minorités sexuelles. *Chantiers de l'intervention en sciences humaines*. 3, 56-64.
- Rosenberg, T. (2002). *Queerfeministisk agenda*. Stockholm: Atlas.
- Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a queer planet. Queer politics and social theory* (introduction). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Winther Jørgensen M. & Phillips, L. (2000). *Diskursanalys som teori och metod* [Discourse analysis as theory and method] Lund: Studentlitteratur

Wreder, M. (2007). Ovanliga analyser av vanliga material – Vad diskursteorin kan göra med enkäter [Unusual analysis of usual materials – what discourse theory can do with questionnaires] (pp. 29-51) In M. Börjesson & E. Palmblad (eds.) *Diskursanalys i praktiken* [Discourseanalysis in practice] Stockholm: Liber.