

Norm-struggles

Norm-struggles:
Sexualities in Contentions

Edited by

Lena Martinsson and Eva Reimers

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

LENA MARTINSSON AND EVA REIMERS

This is a book about norms and normativity, in general, and about the heterosexual norm, in particular. Although the common point of departure for the different chapters is to explore the effects of norms on sexuality and gender, taken together the book evinces the importance of being open to how these norms enforce, repeat and connect to other norms such as class, nationality and race, but also how norms are constantly challenged and subverted (Butler 2004). The book reveals the open end of what happens when norms are acted out and articulated together (cf. Braidotti 2002).

We have chosen to explore how norms work, change and are challenged in the schools, working life, popular culture, and public discourses. This choice is based on an interest in the implication of norms in everyday life, but also on a view of public discourses, the schools and working life as significant places for norm construction and normative struggles. Student, employee, employer and citizen are all positions that demand, give rise to expectations about, and enable identity. People are, figuratively speaking, entangled in webs of norms that allow them to make sense of themselves and others. Public discourses, school organizations, education and working life can be seen as effects and parts of normative struggles and repetitions.

Some norms are given hegemonic positions and construct conditions or, using the terminology of Judith Butler (1993), a *hegemonic order* for how to desire, interpret, feel, look, behave, and organize. They are norms that make some life paths, some bodies and some ways of organizing societies, schools and work possible, recognizable, and designate them as normal. At the same time, other bodies and ways of living are made impossible. The notion of the abnormal serves as a precondition for the conception of what is perceived as normal. This is why, for every norm, there are acts, feelings, desires, persons and institutions that are considered outside the norm. For this reason, deconstructing norms is a highly

political project. It is also, as we will discuss later, an important task for pedagogy.

Norm?

One ambition of this book is to develop a more detailed understanding of how norms work in social life. There are, of course, some differences in how the contributing authors define and make use of the concept. In this introduction, we wish to highlight and draw on the chapters in order to distinguish and discuss some important traits of norms and normativity.

The concept of norm has been used in several theoretical works during the past decades. Some of the most important are Judith Butler's work on sexuality and her way of analysing sexuality, gender, and desire as repetitions of norms (1990, 1993, 2004). Already in its colloquial usage, the concept of norm expresses an idea about cultural forces that regulate and control human notions and behaviour. In contrast to the concept of "discourse", the fact that it is used colloquially renders norms a concept that effectively illuminates how knowledge, images, and representations are related to power and the ongoing construction of superiority and subordination (Foucault 1972). Thus, using the concept of norm builds a bridge between the academic and the non-academic context. The concept is already in use, which makes it politically and pedagogically useful.

A norm is always constructed together with several and changeable companions, i.e. the abnormals, everything that does not fit into the norm. Actions, ideas, artefacts, bodies, categories, groups, or people are continuously distinguished as being different from the norm. This pertains also to feelings that are experienced by individuals, feelings that are repressed, feelings that are perceived as frightening or non-intelligible. This may concern desires, but also whole bodies, or different ways of life. Notions and feelings of abnormality make norms visible and tangible.

Thus, scrutinizing norms is, among other things, a way of studying how discrimination and exclusions are made possible, how positions outside the norm and outside what is intelligible are constructed. If there were no heterosexual norm that repeatedly made heterosexuality into the natural and intelligible sexuality, there would be no homophobia or discrimination against bisexuals. And if there were no norm that attached power and superiority to place and skin, there would be no racism. If there were no norm concerning monogamous heterosexual couple relations, other sorts of lives, heterosexual as well as homosexual, would be regarded more possible and likely.

We do not advocate or believe in the possibility of a society without norms. The continuous construction of norms makes the world intelligible and is therefore essential. We need norms for thinking, acting and maintaining social interaction, but this does not mean that norms are self-evident or stable. They are continuously subjected to change. Furthermore, there is no given set of norms. New norms are constantly being articulated and made possible. These transformations can be very positive; they can, and often do, open up new ways of thinking about lives and societies. They can make new identities possible (Braidotti 2002). The norm of gender equality, which is addressed in the chapters by Ericson, Martinsson, Renold and Epstein, Nordberg, Saar and Hellman, is one example of this paradoxical or schizophrenic process. On the one hand, the norm of gender equality has subverted a great many patriarchal norms and hierarchies, thereby opening the door for other lives. On the other hand, it has continued to reproduce a multitude of heteronormative forces. This shows how norms can simultaneously work in several different directions. They do not have linear effects. The production and transformation of norms are not predictable. That is one reason why several chapters in this book focus on changes and transformations.

Several norms

Another important point we wish to make is that a perspective on norms, rather than specific categories or categorizations, allows us to make contradictions visible, as well as societal and individual changes and complexities. The authors share a profound interest in complexities and unexpected occurrences. Theoretically this means, as Steven Seidman elegantly shows in his chapter, that we question the idea of a compulsory structural order. We wish to highlight the importance of looking at the inconsistencies, instead of solely focusing on the repetitions of norms. This is illustrated, for example, by Arne Nilsson who relates a situation in which homosexual men were given a higher position than heterosexual men on board cruise ships in the 1950s. This connects to our common interest in the contingency of the social. One way of understanding inconsistencies theoretically is to embrace the idea that there is not one single order, one single structure with one single source. Instead there are several, changing and often contradictory norms, or structural forces or discourses at play simultaneously. These different norms make, for example, gender performances into highly unpredictable endeavours. To exemplify: In many countries today, the norm of gender equality has been strong, manifested in jurisdiction, in education and so forth. This, however,

does not eradicate other contradictory norms, such as patriarchal norms or norms that separate women from men. This points to the simultaneous existence of (at least) two opposite norms for how to behave as women and men. Or, to put it differently, the positions woman and man are produced in two very different ways. One way emphasizes sameness and the other emphasizes difference. These contradictory norms render gender and gender performances an insecure matter. It becomes obvious that it is possible to do femininity or masculinity in different ways.

Other norms construct categories of class, age and race. All these different norms make performances uncertain and unpredictable. It is not possible to know how an individual will articulate different norms. Every repetition of a norm, or every articulation of a norm, takes place in relation to other norms and discourses. And every repetition and articulation of a norm, and those that it is related to, changes the norm slightly (Butler 2004, Laclau & Mouffe 1985). One example of this, which points to the importance of conducting analysis from different perspectives, is brought forward by Janice Ristock. She scrutinizes how the heteronorm, or using her term “heteronormalcy”, works among service providers for women who have been subjected to domestic violence. She reveals how the power and control model the service providers use to make sense of the abuse is based on heterosexual and ethnic norms. One consequence of this is that violence in non-white and/or same-sex couples is made unintelligible.

Norms are not stable and they change through articulations. One could say that we are confronted with chaos, with an endless number of possibilities. This contingency and fluidity of norms may strike some people as threatening. This is partly true, because the precarious nature of norms shows us the uncertainty of society and culture. However, as Jaques Derrida has claimed, the instability and fragility of norms is also a possibility, a chance to change and destabilize what seems taken for granted (Derrida 1996: 84). Every performance, and every reiteration and articulation (of norms), therefore, entails a responsibility and is of political importance.

Norms are produced everywhere, over and over again. No single authority in politics, business or religion can, on her or his own, decide to introduce a new norm. An authority can legitimize and stabilize a norm through jurisdiction, rules and policies, but cannot introduce one on its own. Norms are social and need to be shared in order to gain power. The norm in itself has no subjectivity. It is when it is articulated, enacted, and materialized that it becomes forceful. And it must have been enacted or repeated over and over again to become a norm.

The consequences of the simultaneous existence of a multitude of discourses, categories and norms are addressed in several chapters. Janice Ristock critiques the view point that abusive relationships involve one person who is exclusively the abuser and one who is solely the victim. Such a perspective makes it difficult to account for women who fight back, or for relationships in which the roles shift. She therefore calls for a more complex understanding of domestic violence.

Common to the way in which all the chapters deal with norms is a critique of rigid understandings – and thereby by reproduction – of categories. Even if the authors share a common interest in discussing heteronormativity, we all wish to problematize our own view point by focusing on discussions of the relation of the heterosexual norm to other norms. As Steven Seidman underlines, it is important to discuss how other norms or structures are made invisible when one, for example, only focuses on compulsory heterosexuality. As Seidman points out, focusing on the heterosexual norm is part of reconstructing the dichotomy between hetero- and homosexuality. But other norms, such as the norm that establishes monogamy, may be more important, and they construct other categories as well as exclusions. Taken together, the chapters can be read as an attempt to develop new views on how to handle the many different norms that condition and make meaning, identity and society possible.

Norm and agency/subjectivity/ individuality

It is by drawing on norms that identity, but also subjectivity and individuality are made and experienced (Butler 1990, 2004). This does not imply that identities, subjectivities or individuals are predictable. This is salient in the chapter by Leena-Maija Rossi. By using the analytical concept of “queering the look”, she demonstrates how the heterosexual norm leads the viewer to read a character in a television commercial as a sexy woman. This reading remains stable until the character begins to shave her/his face, which indicates a totally different—but not given—gender identity.

We oppose every attempt to claim knowledge about how persons identified as women, middle-age persons, boys, workers, or homosexuals actually will act in a forthcoming situation. Instead, we wish to emphasize the importance of understanding identities, subjectivities and individualities as contingent categories in becoming. An identity position such as “homosexual” is made possible by a heterosexual norm, which serves as its prerequisite. It is possible, however, to enact and perceive the subjectivity and individuality as a “homosexual” in a multitude of ways

and together with other norms. As a position conditioned by the heteronorm, homosexual fortifies the heterosexual norm by acting as its constituting other, at the same time as the position homosexual destabilizes the hegemony of heterosexuality by indicating the possibility of non-heterosexuality.

As stated in the former section, several norms make the enactment of subjectivity into a very unpredictable matter. Different sets of norms are intersecting with each other. Whenever one is positioned at the junctures of norms, it is obvious that there exist several possible subjectivities. This can be seen as a condition for political agency, for transgression (Butler 1995). The position in between dominant subject positions is also a position of overlap (Braidotti 2002: 94). The idea that several contradictory norms make political subjectivity possible is discussed by, for example, Reimers, Martinsson, Nordberg, Saar and Hellman. Other authors in this book, such as Eriksson and Seidman, focus instead on the importance of changed social conditions for understanding political activism. The authors all share the ideas of normative changes and the possibility for political change. A reflexive observation is that we, by presenting this notion in text, actually stabilize a poststructuralist norm with an ideal of fluidity, changes in connections, interruptions, and flexibility.

Individuality is often understood as something beneath the surface, as a personal inner core, which precedes pre-existing norms. Based on the perspective of norms outlined above, however, individuality can be better understood as an unpredictable articulation of different norms than as a stable inner identity. This means that we recognize that individuals can and do act and perceive themselves in a multitude of different ways.

Materiality

In order to analyse and understand how norms work, it is crucial to acknowledge that they not only exist and are acted out in thoughts, notions, minds, and speeches, but that they are also made possible through reiterations of and connections between artefacts, technologies, bodies, organizations, and institutions. A norm is an assemblage or multiplicity. The authors of this book use and in different ways draw on the theories of Deleuze and Guittari (1987), Judith Butler (1993), Rosi Braidotti (2000), Donna Harraway (1991), Bruno Latour (2004), and Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (1985). These theorists have contributed to different, but related, ways of understanding materiality and its immediate cultural force. They share the notion that no norm can be separated from materiality and technology. Judith Butler, who has theorized the body as

an ongoing effect, puts forward the importance of talking about materialization instead of construction (1993). She sees materialization as a process, stating: “the process of materialization that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface that we call matter” (Butler 1993:9). This, Butler writes, is not tantamount to an idea of the existence of a subject in the discourse that constructs the body. Instead it is a question of normative reiterations. It is through enacting these norms that that which we call body is made meaningful. This is the performative aspect of the body. It is performed as if it were natural and is therefore part of an ongoing process, making naturalness. The norms that construct the body are not possible to understand without the body, and the body is not possible to make sense of outside of these norms.

Another, but possible complementary way of thinking about materiality is found in the work of Bruno Latour. Latour claims that technology and artefacts as well as social and cultural elements are the glue that makes societies sustainable. Based on the work of Latour, it is possible to maintain that no norm can survive without materiality such as artefacts and technology (1987). Materiality is not the origin of norms, nor is it a simple effect of norms. One illustrative example of these theoretical lines of argument by Butler and Latour is clothing. Clothes are part of the ongoing materialization of gender, class, nationality and so forth. Clothes separate genders and make different categories such as man and woman obvious and natural. As Bruno Latour stresses, materiality is both performative and a condition for sustainability. Clothes perform differences. They perform boys and girls, as well as women and men. Clothes themselves, however, are also effects and part of an ongoing materialization. It is important to be aware of the opposite as well. It is not only sustainability that is made possible through materiality. Materiality, in this case clothes, can also be a way of transgressing these categories.

Bodies, technologies, organizations, wage systems, clothes, medicine and so forth are all different forms of materiality that in connection with each other and together with different ideas and imaginations are components of norms. These assemblages make the social possible. The performances made possible by the assemblages can stabilize or challenge dominant conceptions, but also be highly contradictory, as Lena Martinsson shows in her chapter about machines. The machines in an industry are not only part of an industrial organization. They are also repeating other norms and are therefore not totally faithful. They can challenge the idea of industrial structure in the factory of which they themselves are a constitutive part, and become very troublesome for managers. Because of its performative and productive aspects, materiality

is important to discuss when analysing politics, resistance and insecurity. The examples presented by Martinsson also demonstrate connections between materiality and divisions of labour. The division of labour is an ongoing materialization of different norms as well as a performative act, a making—that never can be totally predictable—of these norms. These processes are discussed further in the chapters by Mathias Ericsson and Arne Nilsson. They both scrutinize how norms concerning gender and sexuality are part of organizing the work at a fire station, in Ericsson's chapter, and on a cruise ship, in Nilsson's chapter. In these examples, norms are part of a working organization but they are also repeatedly transgressed.

We believe it is important to emphasize that, like any articulation of norms, materializations and materiality entail a threatening outside, something that is excluded or abject. When something is materialized, or when an artefact, an organization or a body acts or articulates norms through its movements, something else is excluded. The materiality makes some articulations and some connections possible, whereas other bodies, technologies, organizations, or visions are excluded. This is exemplified by Melissa Autumn White. She writes about the nation and the immigrant sex worker's body. White suggests that the nation can be seen as an assemblage of bodies, citizens, flags, feelings, institutions and borders that are connected in different and changeable ways. Immigrant women, on the other hand, can be understood as victims who can be "helped" and tolerated by the nation, and hereby be included as a tolerable other. If they, on the other hand, are understood as active female sex workers, they are perceived as a threat to the nation and to the idea of what a woman should be. They are thereby also a threat to the production of heteronormativity. These women are made into objects, and as such cannot become citizens. White asks what the nation-state as a geopolitical territory of inclusion would be without an 'other' non-citizen body to interdict, stop, arrest, detain, deport, or grant temporary access to or "protect". The body of the citizen as well as the body of the non-citizen comes into being through exclusion. In this sense, as White states, the migrant sex-working body is not, in any way, external to the nation. It is, in fact, *internal* to its re-organization and security.

Norms, pedagogy and education

It is no coincidence that four chapters (Epstein & Renold, Lundgren, Nordberg, Reimers) in the book explore norms that concern gender and sexuality in relation to education. As stated above, education is a highly

political issue. One explicit aim of public education is to foster coming democratic subjects and citizens. The content and enactment of this “citizenship education” is not, however, self-evident. If a vital democracy is to develop, it is important to encourage citizens to be critical of the status quo. What we term a critical norm perspective is an alternative to a citizenship education that aims at integrating pupils into society without questioning the society’s norms and hierarchies. In line with Gert Biesta (2006), we underline the importance of pedagogues challenging what has been taken for granted. In doing this, they themselves cannot be sure of the outcome. Rather than fostering pupils to accept and adhere to what is perceived as common values, teachers need to ask the students and pupils difficult (and provocative) questions in order to challenge dominant norms. The objective is to demonstrate that societies can be organized in alternative ways. This is an important as well as risky democratic pedagogy. With a pedagogy such as this, unpredictable articulations of norms are likely to arise.

It is important to recognize that challenging norms, as well as reiterating them, is not something that only adults and teachers do. Like teachers and adults, children, pupils and students are not only reiterating norms, but also challenging them. A pedagogy that is critical of norms helps both students and teachers make these transgressions and challenges visible and meaningful. This perspective is of special significance in the chapter “Deconstructing the normal ‘boy’” by Marie Nordberg, Thomas Saar and Anette Hellman. Based on observations of boys in different grades, they demonstrate how heterosexuality and heteronorms are repeated in everyday conversations and other interactions in the public schools and preschools. They show how these norms regulate and restrict lessons and activities. But they also present an alternative story existing in parallel with the dominant, in which children regularly reject and contest the heteronorms, and transgress and transform the gender positions offered to them. With what can be called “a queer look” (cf. Rossi in this book) at the practices in preschools and schools, it becomes evident that schools are not only gender stabilizing, but also offer ample examples of situations in which boundaries are tested, subverted, and transgressed. The heteronorm has been so predominant among researchers (Thorne 1993, Davies 2003), however, that subjects who deviate from the norm, or who do not fit in with notions of the hegemonic boy or girl, very often go unrecognized. This demonstrates that rather than reflecting how those who are identified as boys and girls, men and women, act and perform their identity, the heteronorm prescribes how to make sense of how they ought to perform, and how to make sense of their identity.

Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson (1998) have stated that while teachers are expected to be heterosexual, schools are expected to be non-sexual places. Eva Reimers demonstrates how this, in the context of teacher education, leads to a situation in which heterosexuality is made into and conceived as a sexuality without “sex”, i.e. heterosexuality is desexualized. As demonstrated by Anna Sofia Lundgren, the “outside” of this notion is that “sex” becomes the main signifier of other sexualities. This is one reason why many LGBTQ teachers, as Lundgren shows, are reluctant to be open at their workplaces. A teacher who has come out to his/her colleagues and students risks being perceived as a threat, not only to the students, but above all to the consensus that schools are non-sexual places.

Another feature of the heteronorm in educational settings is that LGBTQ people are repeatedly either presented as somewhere else, or as deviant and problems. Even when the talk about LGBTQ issues is made within a framework of tolerance, it is made from a point of reference where everyone present is presumed to adhere to a (non-sexual) heterosexual identity. Both LGBTQ persons and homophobic persons are constructed as if they were somewhere else, and as if they were some other sort of people. At least in the case of Sweden, this facilitates a move that makes tolerance of LGBTQ persons into a national trait. Homophobes are not only considered to be intolerant, they are also constructed as un-Swedish. This shows how norms about sexuality and gender intersect with norms about nationality.

Norms of tolerance and discrimination

Another theme in this book concerns tolerance and discrimination as two different attitudes and positions towards subjects and performances that in some way or another are perceived as deviant and not within the boundaries of normality. Although we agree that a tolerant attitude and society are more beneficial than intolerance for those who fall outside the norm, we simultaneously maintain that tolerance and discrimination both sustain heteronormativity. They construct and position subjects as normal or deviant, as natural or problematic, as “us” or “the other”. This becomes important when we move on to recognize the connections between the heteronorm, sexuality, citizenship, and nationality.

The book presents examples of norm reiterations from different countries. The aim is not to compare different countries with each other. We find such comparisons rather problematic, because they risk reconstructing stereotypical ideas about different nations. It is, however,

important for us to assert that norms concerning sexuality and gender are contextual and contingent, and that they are, as White states, part of the making of nation. They are not just the effects of cultures or national contexts. One example of the contingency of norms is the dominant norms concerning homosexuality in Sweden and Lithuania. As demonstrated by Reimers, in Sweden homotolerance is perceived as part of so-called Swedish values. In Lithuania, on the other hand, as recounted by Arturas Tereskinas, homophobia is considered a national trait. Tereskinas demonstrates that discrimination against and marginalization of LGBTQ persons becomes possible by reference to preservation of the national identity. This does not only illustrate different values concerning sexualities, but also how sexuality is made into norms that construct the nation.

In constructions of national traits and values, and of those who are to be considered part of the nation, or as “intruders” or “threats”, sexuality plays an essential role that has not always been recognized. Even if some nations, for example Sweden and Canada, like to present themselves as tolerant in relation to gender, sexuality, religion and ethnicity, this tolerance is based on a very similar notion of an ethnocentric and hegemonic heterosexual norm as that found in for example Lithuania, where homophobia and discrimination are presented as national traits. In both cases, the “normal” sexual citizen is understood as heterosexual: a tolerant heterosexual in tolerant nations and a homophobic heterosexual in homophobic nations. Nations that emphasize tolerance tend to present nations, nationalities and religions that are seen as intolerant as threats. Nations that emphasize homophobia, on the other hand, tend to present nations (or initiatives from the EU) that are perceived as open for “deviance” as threats to their sense of citizenship and nationality. In both “tolerant” and “discriminatory” nations, deviations from the reproductive heterosexual family norm are used as symbols for endeavours to create coherent national identities in contrast to others. These two different ways of sexualizing the nation have radically different effects in terms of marginalization and discrimination of LGBTQ persons, but in both cases LGBTQ persons often find it necessary to employ different strategies in order to “pass” and not disturb the hegemonic heteronorm. There are clear limits also to tolerance.

The examples from different countries, places and contexts tell us a great deal about how norms are repeated, challenged and stabilized in different ways. The examples, with all their variation, also show the contingency of societal order as well as the nagging and tiresome similarity of the reiterations of norms. The quest to critically investigate,

discuss and deconstruct the constructions and effects of norms is a never-ending project. This book aims to contribute to that project and to invite the reader to critically ask what and who is included or excluded by articulations, performances and materializations of the norms of which he or she adheres. Enjoy!

PART I:
SEXUALITIES IN SCHOOL

CHAPTER TWO

HOMOTOLERANCE OR QUEER PEDAGOGY?

EVA REIMERS

How shall we as pedagogues introduce/bring up LGBT issues in groups/classes when we know that some families will consider the subject taboo?

The question above was formulated by participants, predominantly student teachers, on a study day dedicated to “Theme LGBT”. Several other issues were brought forward, but the above was considered to be the most urgent to discuss in order to develop some sort of strategy for addressing these issues in the schools, the goal being to prevent prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and bullying. The question is telling in many ways. It positions the pedagogues as agents who have a responsibility to address and introduce issues connected to sexualities. In doing that, it simultaneously positions the pedagogues as self-evidently at ease with people who present themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. It leaves no room for acknowledging the possibility that there might be pedagogues who have mixed feelings about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender persons, and it does not recognize that there might be reluctance or hesitation on the part of pedagogues as regards addressing these issues. On the contrary, the pedagogues are made responsible for doing something about those who are represented as obstacles, or as problems, i.e. families who “consider the subject taboo”. One problem or an obstacle to complete tolerance of and respect for differing sexualities is hereby identified as being outside the school. But to what categories or groups does this refer? Where in Sweden do we find families who object to their children being introduced to “LGBT issues”?

In the present chapter, I will draw on examples from a study of heteronormativity in Swedish teacher education in order to discuss the complex interconnections between differing norms, and how efforts to represent a tolerant attitude towards one minority category can simultaneously result in stereotyping and intolerance in relation to another minority

category.¹ I will end the chapter with a discussion of possibilities of introducing a pedagogy that instead of stressing tolerance, aims to subvert and make trouble with (Butler 1990) different forms of normativities. This concluding discussion is inspired by the concept of *emergentist pedagogy* introduced by Deborah Osberg and Gert Biesta (2008) and by notions pertaining to *queer pedagogy*, in the way this is discussed by, for example, Dennis Sumara and Brent Davies (1999, see also Atkinson, DePalma 2009). The common denominator for these pedagogies is their emphasis on the necessity to create spaces of uncertainty in order for knowledge to develop and the subject to appear.

The tolerant majority and the intolerant minority

The context for the above question was a theme day for student teachers, which was announced as “Obstacles, Opportunities, Demands: Integrating LGBT perspectives into schools and teacher training”. The arrangement of such a theme day as part of teacher training was based on the presumption that it is necessary to integrate LGBT perspectives into the schools and that there existed resistance to this position. Contrary to what took place when these issues were part of the ordinary curriculum, this was not questioned by any of the participants. Quite the reverse, in the group discussion on how to deal with these issues in situations where there are families who consider the subject taboo, everybody seemed to take the premise of the discussion for granted. The discussion was based on agreement on the urgency of bringing questions about sexuality and gender identity into the preschools and schools, and everybody agreed that some families were likely to object. But who were these families?

Already at the beginning of the discussion, it became apparent that the families referred to regarding this issue were immigrant families. One student, who like the majority in this group was studying to become a preschool teacher, stated that the preschool is one of the first sites of official Sweden that immigrants enter into, and that it is therefore important for pedagogues to talk with parents about normative issues—to let them know, as she said: “This is how it is in Sweden”. The student hereby constructed the preschool as a place of “Swedishness”, i.e. as a place where so-called Swedish norms not only were in place and regulated the performance of children and adults, but also as an institution

¹ The chapter is based on research from the project The Self-Evident Heteronormativity. Constructions of Gender and Sexuality in School and Teacher Education, financed by the Swedish Research Council.

representative of official Swedish norms, and as a place where these norms were enforced, taught, and conveyed. By presenting what she regards as “the problem”—and “the solution”—in this way, the student constructs an opposition between what she presents as Swedish norms and the presumed norms of immigrants, i.e. non-Swedes. She constructs openness or tolerance regarding sexuality and sexual identity as a salient feature of so-called Swedish norms, and homophobia and hostility towards LGBT persons as a salient feature of immigrants.

Her statement was followed by others who enforced her position. One student affirmed both the notion about Swedish values and norms as favourable to LGBT persons and the notion that non-Swedes were homophobic, by referring to her own experiences. Although born in Sweden, she presented herself as Syrian and used her ethnic background to evince that teaching, or even speaking about, homosexuality was more challenging for teachers with a non-Swedish heritage and cultural background than for those who had an altogether Swedish background. She claimed that her identity position as part of a Syrian community and cultural context would result in being questioned, even regarded as “a deserter”, if people in that community were to find out that she was talking about homosexuality with her pupils. Her use of the word “deserter” evinces that her worry was not only based on expressions of homophobia that she had experienced in the Syrian community. It also presumed that inclusion and acceptance of homosexuality and expressions of queerness were a significant trait of what she considered to be “Swedish”. In talking with her pupils about homosexuality, she would be seen as somebody who had sided with the enemy. In this way, she reiterates the strong opposition between the notion of Swedish homotolerance (Røthing 2008) and non-Swedish homophobia. It is important to point out, however, that this was not unambiguous, at the same time as this student brought forward a notion of the Syrian community as unequivocally homophobic, she herself sided with the alleged “Swedish” position. Even if she presented herself as Syrian, she did not object to the necessity of creating prerequisites for all pupils (and parents), regardless of sexuality or gender identity, to be comfortable and secure in the schools. Quite the opposite, she used the alleged homophobia of her countrymen as an argument for teaching these matters, not against. The concern she expressed was for LGBT persons, not for maintenance of the cultural values or norms of the Syrian community. In doing this, her statement can be seen as a contradictory enactment. Although she clearly represented herself as Syrian—a position that according to her ought to imply homophobia—she also represented herself as homotolerant, i.e. in favour of a position that approved of

homosexuality. In this situation, she hereby came to contradict the notion that being Syrian is tantamount to being homophobic. There are thus ruptures—she being one—in the notion of a stable Syrian community. This was nothing that she or the others in the group recognized, however. Quite the opposite, by constructing herself as an exception that fortified the rule, her statement contributed to stabilization of the notion of a homophobic immigrant minority in contrast to a homotolerant Swedish majority. This was immediately repeated by another student who, subsequent to presenting herself as Syrian, recounted a story about a man in the Syrian community who was renounced by his family and ostracised by the whole community when he came out as gay. Like the aforementioned student, she positioned herself as simultaneously Syrian and in opposition to what she presented as “the Syrian” position. The story was told as an example of something very terrible that underscored the need to educate immigrants or non-Swedes, both parents and children, about LGBT issues.

The multifaceted face of homotolerance

The discussion above points to a position on LGBT issues that emphasizes tolerance and openness towards lesbian and gays as the position that the school self-evidently should enforce. This position was often repeated when issues regarding homosexuality and gender identity were addressed in the teacher college. Like in the example above, the subject of homosexuality was brought up within the frame of (anti)discrimination and inclusive education, not—as is the most common case in compulsory school (see, e.g., Bäckman 2003, Røthing 2008)—in the frame of sexual education. This framing positions lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons in a minority position, side by side with other minority categories, such as immigrants, disabled, elderly etc., who risk being marginalized or harassed by the majority, and therefore are in need of legal protection. It is a way of addressing sexuality that is based on and contributes to a conception of lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender as stable and fixed identities in opposition to the predominant position as heterosexual with an unambiguous female or male gender.

This way of addressing homosexuality can be seen as both an effect and part of a predominant homotolerance (Røthing 2008). This tolerance has had some very material effects. Swedish jurisdiction during the past thirty years has granted rights to, and protection for, LGBT persons. It is now illegal to discriminate on the grounds of sexual identity against employees, students in higher education, and pupils in compulsory school; there are laws against the incitement of hatred based on sexual orientation;

violence against lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people is recognized as a hate crime; the marriage law is gender neutral; same-sex couples are eligible to adopt children; and lesbian couples have the same rights as heterosexual couples to vitro fertilization. Furthermore, lesbians, and even more so gay men, are becoming increasingly visible in the media, as authors, artists, politicians, journalists and so forth. Parallel to strengthened legal rights and protection, and increased visibility for LGBT persons, surveys also point to a generally increasing positive and tolerant attitude towards LGBT persons (SOU 2007: 17). All this together points to how increasing “homotolerance” has led to a normalization of LGBT persons as a relevant and justified minority category.

The effect of these legal steps is not unambiguous. Based on the resistance they have met from for example conservative Christians, they can be understood from one perspective as challenges to a hegemonic heterosexual norm. At the same time, I find it feasible to agree with Åse Røthing (2008) when she maintains that although these juridical measures undoubtedly strengthen the safety of LGBT persons and make life more comfortable, they simultaneously—because they presume a stable homosexual identity in opposition to a likewise stable heterosexual identity—create prerequisites for strengthening the privileged position of the heterosexual norm. Based on legal rights and protection for LGBT persons, it would be wrong to describe Sweden as a country that enforces compulsory heterosexuality (cf. Rich 1980), but it is relevant to describe the situation, as Steven Seidman does in his chapter in this book, as a situation of “institutionalized normative heterosexuality”. Heterosexuality is taken for granted as a normative position, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer and transgender persons are made sense of as deviations from this norm.

In the teacher education, this became apparent in several different ways. Besides lecturers “coming out” as heterosexuals in their lectures in order to appear (or be) more personal by drawing on examples from their own life, it was clear that even seminars that had the explicit aim to address questions about queer identities employed a heterosexual vantage point, presuming and constructing queer identities both as “the other” and as in some sense problematic. One seminar that I participated in was preceded by the students reading a book entitled *People like us – voices about sexuality, identity and positions of difference* (Mobacker et al. 2003). It is a book predominantly written for a teenaged audience, presenting different accounts of experiences of growing up and living as queer. The aim of the book is to offer identification for teenagers who do

not feel comfortable within the heterosexual norm. The teacher in the seminar wrote the following questions on the white board:

What essay in "People like us" captured your interest? Why? What does it have to do with you and your future occupation? What question do you want to bring forward? Why?

After reading the questions, she instructed the students to write their answers on a note, and then she would collect the notes in order to redistribute them so that they each received a note with somebody else's answer. They were then to read aloud and discuss the different answers, but without anybody knowing whose note they were discussing. The reason why each student was not simply asked to give his/her own answer was, according to the teacher, that some students might feel "uncomfortable", "ill at ease" about their own answer, and consider the situation "difficult".

The seminar was given a heterosexual framing by different means. The choice of the book, which clearly was not an academic book that could provide the students with theoretical tools to make sense of how notions of normality and deviations are constructed, indicates that the students were seen as needing to become familiar with the lives of persons who identify themselves as queer. They were not seen as being able to make sense of different sexualities by drawing on their own experiences. Furthermore, the way in which the topic was constructed as sensitive and difficult to a certain extent affirmed and legitimized transgressions of the heterosexual norm as something provocative and objectionable. Asking the students to state their opinions anonymously evinces that this enactment of heteronormativity takes place in a context of homotolerance. Nobody had to flaunt answers that might be interpreted as homophobic, recognizing that this would be demeaning to the individual. This is not unequivocal, however, because the anonymity also makes it possible to express homophobia and intolerance. The primary concern hereby becomes the possibility for the student teachers to be honest and express whatever they wish about queers, rather than any concern for not subjecting homo, bisexual or queer students to abusive and offensive talk from their peers.

Several of the questions the students introduced were posed from the position of a taken-for-granted heterosexual position and perspective. One student had written: "How can I get ordinary pupils to tolerate what is deviant?" Another wrote: "How can I make a pupil accept that she/he isn't like others, that she/he is homosexual?" Both these questions are based on the presumption of a self-evident heterosexual majority in opposition to a deviant homosexual minority. This opposition surfaces in formulations

such as “ordinary pupils tolerate the deviant” and “he/she isn’t like others”. While the first question focuses on attitudes among the majority, i.e. how to make them tolerant, the latter focus on attitudes among the deviant, i.e. how to make them accept their minority position. In both cases, it is a matter of promoting tolerance and acceptance of queer subjectivities, but at the same time of stabilizing the heterosexual norm.

The tendency to argue for the need for inclusion and tolerance at the same time as one fortifies the heterosexual norm was also salient in the suggestions made concerning how to combat prejudice against homosexuality among pupils. One of the students proposed inviting young people from the Lesbian and Gay League who could inform pupils about what it’s like to be lesbian and gay. In that way, she said, “the pupils can learn that homosexuals are normal, that they are ordinary people”. The suggestion, which is a very common strategy in Swedish schools, is based on the presumption that LGBT persons have to be brought into the school in order for pupils to learn about queer identities. It is hereby a construction of the pupils, their parents, and the teachers as self-evidently heterosexual. It constructs the school as a heterosexual space, and is thereby yet another reification of the heterosexual norm. What might seem a bit puzzling about the suggestion is that although the aim of inviting these queer persons to school is to demonstrate that they are “ordinary” and “normal”, they are obviously not seen as normal enough to be found in school unless invited as representatives of queerness. The school, just like the seminary room in which this discussion took place, is hereby constructed as a heterosexual space. Furthermore, the strategy presumes that the queers who are to come and share their life stories are not too deviant. The aim of demonstrating that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons are “ordinary” and “normal” is difficult to achieve if the individuals who are brought into the school present themselves as butch lesbians, effeminate gay men, or with ambiguous gender identity. This shows that the students, in their aim to come up with strategies to promote tolerance of LGBT persons, nevertheless enforced the heterosexual norm in a way that marginalized queerness and made enactments of it invisible. This position was questioned by the teacher, who asked the students if this was really the best way to create possibilities for inclusion. One student answered with a yes, claiming that “you cannot know anything about these issues, unless you’ve been there”. This is a statement that both presumes unequivocal sexual identities, and makes issues of sexuality into pure matters of experience, devoid of any knowledge content. It would be absurd to argue in the same way when discussing for example Geography or Religious Studies, claiming that you cannot teach

about Spain or Buddhism “unless you’ve been there”. Some other students agreed with the teacher that there was a problem with calling on the Lesbian and Gay League or creating “theme days”. One student stated that it could “be a bit dangerous” to delimit these issues to specific theme days. She said: “It is important to make it part of the ordinary and normal.” What she refers to is being aware of how day-to-day school activities offer possibilities to make the pupils aware of the effects of the heterosexual norm. This was enforced and further developed by another student, who argued for the necessity of meeting with every pupil without taking heterosexuality for granted. He said:

It’s important to recognize that you’re part of the heteronorm. It’s important not to presume just one sexuality, and to avoid talking and acting so that some are made deviant.

His statement was followed by another student posing the question: “What’s normal anyway?” I believe that the statements from the latter three future teachers can be seen as—at least the beginning of—making trouble with the heterosexual norm, questioning the notion of an unequivocal heterosexuality with definite boundaries between a heterosexual majority and a minority of homo-, bisexual, queer and transgender persons.

Their position was, however, not the dominant one. Like in the theme day described above, several students expressed concern over how presumed intolerance and homophobia among so-called “immigrants” might affect both the prerequisites of talking about homosexuality in schools, and the situation for lesbian and gay persons from immigrant families. This was partly brought about by a chapter in the book about the love affair between two men who had to hide their relation from their respective immigrant families. There seemed to be agreement in the seminar that it is more problematic to be homosexual in an “immigrant” context than in a “Swedish” context. As one student said: “It’s practically impossible to come out if you’re from another culture.” Another student expressed what this difference might imply in a less straightforward and oppositional way than most the others did. He said:

It can be different if one comes from another culture than the Swedish. But what’s so terrible is the hiding and that beneath all this there is so much intolerance. In that way it can be easier to tackle the outspoken resistance than to handle the unspoken repugnance.

He agreed with the notion that immigrants are more explicitly intolerant of LGBT persons than Swedes are, but unlike most other students that I met

with in my study, for him this did not imply that so-called Swedes were necessarily in favour of LGBT persons' rights and visibility.

Although the seminars had a homotolerant framing, this did not totally prevent opposition and resistance. There were some students who expressed critique both of addressing issues concerning homo-, bisexuality and transgenderism in teacher education, and of the homotolerant position. One student indicated that the "problem" concerns so few, and therefore should not be allotted so much space, neither in their curriculum nor in the compulsory school curriculum. She claimed that it is much more problematic that immigrants don't accept their children's "so-called "inappropriate" love, which in most cases has nothing to do with homosexuality, but with heterosexual relations, "leading to killings of honour and such things". Another student who was also critical stated that he saw "this thing about heteronormativity" as outside his assignment as a teacher. "Pupils get impressions from so many different sources. This is not an issue for the school", he stated. "It must be awkward to talk about homosexuality as something ordinary and normal in connection with sexual education", another student claimed, "because there you explain what intercourse is, how children are made, but how do you then explain homosexuality?" Her critique was based on a notion of sexuality as tantamount to practices aimed at reproduction, a notion that in her eyes made homosexuality unintelligible. She thereby not only stabilized a notion of homosexuality as deviance, but also as a deviance that can't be seen as a legitimate form of sexuality, or as sexuality at all. Her definition of sexuality was opposed by another student who instead of reproduction put love in the centre, stating that all forms of love are legitimate and that "sex is private".

A bit later in the discussion, the critical student above stated her disapproval of the literature in the course, saying:

This literature is trying hard to convince us about something. I find that a bit provocative....It feels a bit like heterosexuality should be erased, but that wouldn't be equality, would it?

Her statement seems to evince that she felt threatened by efforts from the literature, the teacher and several of her peers to normalize homo- and bisexuality, and the questioning of the hegemony of the heterosexual norm that this implies. This can both be interpreted as a sign of successful teaching on the part of the teacher in the seminar, and as a resistance to this teaching. By not adhering to an expected homotolerance, this student makes explicit what's at stake when homo-, bisexuality, transgenderism and other queer positions become visible (and normalized). They threaten

the hegemony of the heterosexual norm. Adhering to homotolerance, however, and speaking of rights and acceptance do not pose the same threat.

As evinced above, it is not totally foreseeable how a norm of tolerance will work when it is articulated in the context of teacher education. Although it may (re)produce the privileged position of heterosexuality, as Røthing (2008) has pointed out, it may also serve as a prerequisite for other ways of making sense of sexuality. The accounts from the seminar above evince both the different possibilities and limitations of a predominant homotolerance. On the one hand, it can be employed as a vantage point that reinforces a dominant heterosexuality. On the other hand, it can be used as a possibility to question and queer the taken for grantedness of the heterosexual norm. Third, it can be apprehended as a disturbing affront to a conception of heterosexuality as the only legitimate form of sexuality. Fourth, it can be employed as a position that at the same time as it effaces or conceals opposition between a heterosexual majority and a minority of LGBT persons, induces opposition between a so-called “Swedish” majority and a “non-Swedish” minority. Attitudes and opinions about queer people are made into a signifier of ethnic and cultural differences.

Homotolerance and the desexualization of sexualities

Although there is convincing evidence from different countries of homophobic (Cavanagh 2008, Ferfolja 2008, King 2004, Kumashiro 2001) or heteronormative (Epstein, O’Flynn & Telford 2003, Kissen 2002) practices in schools, several studies also depict a similar homotolerant situation as the one found in Sweden. This means that the framing of issues on sexuality and gender identity in teacher education in terms of minority issues, or identity politics, is not unique to Sweden. A study of how sexual orientation was addressed in US teacher training (Sherwin & Jennings 2006) found that where the issue was addressed, which it rarely was, the topic focused on risk and on homosexuality as a deviance and a problem. This can be seen both as a construction and effect of homotolerance. Like in the study of Swedish teacher education, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transpersons are not condemned, i.e. there are no explicit expressions of homophobia, but by either obscuring or marginalizing other sexual desires and identifications than the heterosexual, the heteronorm together with homotolerance are enforced and naturalized.

Several studies indicate that even if homotolerance predominates when LGBTQT issues are addressed in the schools, this does not really disturb

heteronormativity. Although the preferred attitude is to assert that homo-, bisexual and transgender performances are legitimate and okay, identities as well as individuals become marginalized or closeted (see, e.g., Epstein & Johnson 1998, Ferfolja 2007, Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh 2004, Røthing 2008). Even if the analysis above is a bit less unambiguous, in that it shows that homotolerance can induce challenges to heteronormativity, it points in the same direction. In most cases, the result is a stabilization of the notion of a non-heterosexual minority in opposition to a heterosexual majority. Why is this so?

I have elaborated elsewhere (Reimers 2006, 2008) on schools and teacher education as asexual spaces (cf. Epstein, Johnson 1998, Epstein et al. 2003), and drawing on, cf., Gordon et al. 2000 and King 2004, pointed to how homo- and bisexual identities can be seen as threats to the conception of (heterosexual) teachers as devoid of sexuality, and thereby not threatening to the likewise strong conception of school children as non-sexual beings. The bulk of research on homo- and bisexuality, and queer and transgender issues in school and education (see, e.g., Epstein et al. 1998, Gordon et al. 2000, Weber & Mitchell 1995) evinces that the topic is, if not taboo, at least addressed from a very heteronormative or sometimes even homophobic perspective. However, when these issues are brought forward, the framing—like in my data—seems to be equal rights and discrimination, i.e. sexuality is addressed within the frame of homotolerance. My claim is that this frame fits well with the notion of schools as asexual spaces, because it makes it possible to maintain the notion of differing forms of sexualities as something other than sex, i.e. as matters of identity categories and positions. Because the presumption and vantage point for a homotolerant position is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender persons and queers as minority categories, and because it frames the issue in terms of rights connected to identity and anti-discrimination, it facilitates addressing issues of sexuality without talking about sex. The norm of homotolerance hereby paves the way for addressing sexuality without disturbing the norm that constitutes schools as desexualized spaces.

This does not imply that homotolerance is without value. I do believe it is a notion that creates possibilities for future teachers to become aware of the discriminatory effects of the heterosexual norm, which of course is a good thing. However, like Andrea Allard and Ninetta Santoro (2006) have discussed in connection with class and ethnicity, this awareness tends to be limited to how hegemonic identity norms shape the identities of pupils, i.e. the learners, and neglects to explore how they affect teacher identities or—like in the case of the study in question—identities of student teachers. By