Placing Heteronormativity

A micro-geographical approach to the school as a space of heteronormative (re)production

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Abstract

Within children’s geographies there has been an absence concerning sexuality and in particular how this can lead to the discrimination and marginalisation of individuals. Similarly, within geographies of sexualities the demographic of non-heterosexual children and youth has been under researched, with studies concerning the space of the school being very limited. This thesis sought to address these absences by carrying out qualitative interviews with non-heterosexual individuals about their school experiences. The interviews showed the importance and variation of both physical and time-spaces in the (re)production of heteronormativities, and that the agency of the individual was asserted through the use of negotiation strategies that sought to navigate or resist heteronormativities.

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1. Introduction

The school as a site of heteronormative (re)production privileges some whilst marginalising others. This is evident in recent surveys of LGBTQ youth within Sweden showing that they are more likely to suffer discrimination than their peers due to their sexuality (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010), and that the space of the school can be one of particular marginalisation (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2015), despite being outlawed by the Diskrimineringslag (Government of Sweden, 2008). Since the school is a site of compulsory attendance for youth it constitutes a space of particular importance for their everyday geographies and also as a site that (re)produces normativities that constitutes broader society.

Within the field of children’s geographies, the school, along with the home, has been studied as a crucial site of marginalisation and social (re)production (Valentine, 2000); giving attention to disability (Holt, 2004, 2007, 2010; Worth, 2013; De Vet, Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2012), race (Thomas, 2005; 2009; Hyams, 2000) and gender (Holloway, Valentine and Bingham, 2000; Smith, Nairn and Sandretto, 2016; Hyams, 2000; Ansell, 2002, 2004; Ambjörnsson, 2004), however seemingly paying less attention to issues of sexuality (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015). Research concerning gender has cast a critical gaze upon how masculinities and femininities are performed and constructed (Gagen, 2000; Holloway, Valentine and Bingham, 2000; Valentine, 2000), but little has researched how these hegemonic heteronormativities can marginalise and are resisted and negotiated by those with non-normative sexualities. Concomitantly the field of geographies of sexualities has under-researched the geographies of non-heterosexual youth (Schroeder, 2015). In particular, there is an absence concerning the space of the school within this literature, with other studies focusing on the home (Gorman-Murray, 2008, 2015; Schroeder, 2015; Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011a, 2011b), public spaces (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015), virtual spaces (Downing, 2013) and specifically queer spaces (Freitag, 2013; Montigny and Podmore, 2014; Schroeder, 2012; Valentine and Skelton, 2003). Outside the geographical literature the school has been labelled a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ due to the pervasiveness of heteronormativities even within more ‘progressive’ Scandinavian societies (Reimers, 2007; Roething, 2008).

This current absence in the literature betwixt these two sub-fields is the focus for this thesis. It is hoped to gain insights into the particular experiences of non-heterosexual youth within the site of the school and how they relate to it on an everyday basis. In particular building on an attentiveness to the micro-geographies of the school found within children’s geographies research (see Holt, 2003; Thomas, 2005; Valentine, 2000). Researching how non-heterosexual youth navigate and resist hegemonic forms of heteronormativity within the school will hopefully produce a better understanding and thus open opportunities to subvert and challenge these normativities.

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to explore how normativities within the site of the school are experienced by those with non-normative sexualities. In particular, focusing on how the micro-geographies of the school can produce senses of comfort or discomfort.

The research questions are:

- Which spaces within the school (re)produce normativities regarding sexuality?
- In what ways are these normativities (re)produced?
- What tactics are employed by non-heterosexual youth to negotiate, resist or adapt to normativities?
2. Heteronormativity, the School and Non-Heterosexual Youth

The next chapter situates this thesis within the current sub-fields of children’s geographies and geographies of sexualities. Firstly, a brief overview of the similar recent developments in emphasising performativity and embodiment pertaining to both fields will be undertaken. Moreover, how these approaches demonstrate the contingent, grounded and spatial nature of heterosexual (re)production, and how multiple axes of difference are important in understanding experiences of space. Secondly, approaches within children’s geographies will be explored, beginning with the idea of youth as a time of transition and subsequently the use of micro-geographies to explore the space of the school. Finally, empirical studies regarding non-heterosexual youth within the field of geographies of sexualities demonstrate how heteronormativities in youth’s everyday geographies have been explored, but the site of the school is markedly absent.

Before continuing a brief definition of what is meant by heteronormativity will be provided, and the relation between gender and sexuality will be succinctly elaborated upon. Heteronormativity is the idea that being heterosexual is normalised within societies and this occurs through a myriad of practices and processes. This process relies on the marginalisation and exclusion of an ‘Other’ because the process of normalising a certain set of sexual practices and desires inherently constructs others outside of this as abnormal. This is intertwined with social constructions of sex and gender as well as sexuality, as part of what Judith Butler (1990) termed the heterosexual matrix. This tripartite system recognises the binary division of sex-gender-sexuality as male/female, masculine/feminine and hetero/homo and the conflation and interrelation of each. This leads to the normalisation of heterosexuality and creates what Adrienne Rich (1980) termed compulsory heterosexuality enforced and perpetuated through social institutions such as schools.

2.1 Normativities and Children’s Geographies

In this section a brief exploration of the similar trajectories and developments in both fields concerning embodiment and performativity leads to an explanation of the idea of intersectionality and the importance of all three in individuals varied experiences of normativities. Secondly, the envisioning of youth as a time of transition within children’s geographies will be discussed, and why this transition should be understood spatially. This leads into an overview of empirical studies utilising micro-geographical approaches to explore the school and importance of social interaction in the development of normativities.

The sub-fields of geographies of sexualities and children’s geographies have undertaken similar trajectories and developments. Within geographies of sexualities there has been a shift from being primarily concerned with gay and lesbian spaces in cities to utilising queer theory to interrogate everyday notions of heteronormativity, masculinities and femininities (Knopp, 2007). Similarly, critical attention has been paid in children’s geography to how the social (re)production of norms is integral to the formation of citizens (Gagen, 2000) and intelligible subjects in general (Valentine, 2000). Feminist approaches emphasising embodiment and performativity to critically engage with this (re)production are increasingly common, interrogating how children and youth consciously and sub-consciously reaffirm and also resist normativities (Colls and Hörschelmann, 2009; Cook and Hemming, 2011; Holloway, 2014; Guittierrez and Hopkins, 2015).

An important influence in the development of queer theory and utilised across both sub fields is the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) and the notion of performativity. Butler’s theory of performativity put simply is the idea that “gender and sexual
identification are continually remade through repetition, or the compelled performance of dominant discourses” (Nelson, 1999; p.331). This notion implies that sexual identities are not pre-determined but are socially constructed and have a greater degree of fluidity than assumed identity categories indicate.

However, Butler’s abstract rendering of the subject, as apart from personal lived experiences as well as geographical embeddedness, limited how geographers could conceptualize spatially-embedded intentional human practice. Nelson explicitly states that the use of Butler’s abstract subject meant that there was “no space for conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity” (p.332). The work of geographers in both sub-fields have sought to ground this abstract subject through empirical work that takes experiential and embodied knowledges seriously, alongside the discursive.

Previous research within children’s geographies demonstrates both how bodies are subject to disciplining practices and also enact agency whilst (re)producing heteronormativities. Gagen (2000) utilises Butler’s idea of performativity to demonstrate how “the regulation of gender is facilitated by the isolation of taken-for-granted body types, and the simultaneous grafting of opposing performances onto each assumed type.” (p.195). The division of gendered activities between boys and girls outlined the desirable roles and values that were to be developed in the children to make them model citizens. Thomas (2004) highlighted that youth became invested in the (re)production and performance of socio-sexual norms as a way to meaningfully enact their own agency. The research conveys how heteronormativities can be institutionally fostered and a policing of non-normative behaviours facilitated (cf. Foucault, 1977), but also the importance of children and youth in positioning themselves as recognisable intelligible subjects (cf. Valentine, 2000; Butler, 1990, 1993). This tension between the two means that heteronormativities are not ubiquitous but are spatially contingent (Hubbard, 2008).

Recent research within geographies of sexualities concerning normativities and performativity have similarly sought to be attentive to the lived realities of subjects. The embryonic field of trans geographies through grounded research has demonstrated that experiential and embodied knowledges are equally as important as the discursive aspects concerning gender and sexuality (Hines, 2010; Doan, 2010; Nash, 2010). Trans geographies counters the body as only discursively produced and reassert the body as a site also of a priori being. The importance of embodiment means that experiences of space are individualised, whilst enabling an exploration of the fluctuating spatial experiences of heteronormativities.

Moreover, this ties with developments in feminist thinking that demonstrate that heteronormativity is but one of the intersecting and co-constitutive structures of power and oppression that shapes an individual’s experience (cf. hooks, 1981, 1984; Crenshaw, 1989; 1991; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992). Intersectionality recognises the existence of multiple axes of identity that can govern an individual’s relationship to power and thus also space (Osborne, 2015). Schüssler Fiorenza (1992) termed this interlocking of power structures the kyriarchy which results in multiple and specific forms of oppression. The existence of numerous axes of difference means that to account for them all is beyond the scope of any one study, and so dilemmas around choices regarding which to focus upon has been termed intersectional anxieties (Brown, 2012). This study suffers from such anxieties as while it primarily focuses upon the axes of age and sexuality, this does not mean that other axes such as race are to be considered as secondary.

Within the social (re)production of heteronormativity the school is of particular importance as a site of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rich, 1980; Reimers, 2007;
Wimark, 2009). This understanding of power and oppression and the body will underpin this thesis’s understanding of the school as a diffuse and structured site of normativities.

2.1.1 Youth as a Time of transition

Youth as a time of ‘growing-up’ is commonly envisioned as a time of transition, and as such has arguably attracted the attention of critical geographers because of this emphasis upon formative change. Worth (2009) argues that youth transition should be seen as an open-ended becoming, because of the key role in the formation of the individual and their identity, for instance their relation to their own sexuality. This time of transition has been described as a negotiation between the individual, peers, and adult society:

“it is within the context of peer group culture that young people have to learn how to articulate their individuality while at the same time conforming with peer group identities which are highly embodied and are predicated on adult notions of heterosexualised gender identities.” (Valentine, 2000: p.257)

Bauman (2002) situates this notion of individual becoming as a particularly modern phenomenon as “no more are human beings ‘born into’ their identities... Needing to become what one is is the hallmark of modern” (p.xv). This ties with Butler’s (1990, 1993) understanding of identity as discursively constructed. Non-heterosexual youth’s ‘coming-out’ stories can thus be understood as crucial to the actualisation of the individual, but formed relationally through the mediation of families and peers (Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003).

The importance of adult-society in the structuring and formation of children and youth has led to a consideration of the degree to which agency can be expressed by children because their lives are governed so thoroughly, from age-limited laws, to parents and to teachers among others (Vanderbeck, 2008). However, this binary understanding of a child as an adult-in-becoming masks not only the complexity of youth, but the on-going complexity of human-life. Worth (2009) in arguing for youth as an open-ended becoming, also argues for it to be thought of as one of multiple becoming’s throughout the life course. Put simply, the idea of youth as a point of critical subject-formation is true to the extent that throughout our lives we are involved in processes of becoming. However, it would be disingenuous to not recognise youth as a time of importance because of puberty and a general greater exposure of the individual to the world around them.

Moreover, there has been an assumption within youth geographies that sexuality is something associated with adulthood (Thomas, 2004), despite an understanding of ‘coming-out’ experiences in LGBTQ geographical research as being an important and formative time which generally takes place within youth (Valentine and Skelton, 2003). Valentine and Skelton emphasise that a traditional model of youth transitions can assume an age-related linear model of progress where “negative outcomes are regarded as failed transitions” (p.863). They found that it was important to recognize the resilience and agency of young people in negotiating transitions rather than a simplistic positive or negative outcome. In particular, it makes sense to spatialize this time of transition and envision the school as a crucial space of subject-formation. This is because of the length of time children are compulsorily required to attend it, and as the primary space of social interaction with peers. The importance of the school in (re)producing normativities and the internal spatial variation is explored further below.

2.1.2 Micro-geographies and Marginalisation

Children’s geographies have investigated the space of the school through an attention to the micro-geographies within to explore its internal spatial functioning. This research
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has also highlighted how normativities are (re)produced and how children and youth negotiate these normativities. This section highlights how the school is a space of social (re)production for a myriad of normativities and that these can vary spatially within the school. However, normativities regarding sexuality have been under-researched in this area of geography.

An attention to the micro-geographies of the school can unveil the moral geographies at work and the gendering of certain spaces. Fielding (2000) through observations highlights how within one classroom there can be a multiplicity of children’s geographies due to the classrooms moral codes being interpreted by different teachers into a set of pedagogic practices, combined with the individual agency of the children. Holloway, Valentine and Bingham (2000) investigated heteronormativities by focusing on the time-space of IT. The gendered institutional cultures concerning IT were similarly found to be an outcome of multiple actors, namely school policy, teacher practice and pupil culture. These studies articulate the potential of using a micro-geographical approach to understand the functioning of the school.

The school operates as a crucial space within the (re)production of normativities because of its institutional and disciplining environment, but also as a space of social interaction amongst peers (Valentine, 2000). This interaction between the two can result in the school as a space where difference is constructed resulting in marginalisation be it race, gender, disability, body shape or sexual orientation among others. Thomas (2005) investigated the spatiality of race in a U.S. high school, finding that the micro-geographies of the school were key to understanding racial performativity. Lunchtime in the canteen was a particularly key space where racial divisions were clear with white children and black children sitting separately, however once outside to play there was no obvious racialization of groups. It was unclear the reasons for this as the girls interviewed insisted that “sitting separately was not a statement of racial identity or opposition” (p.1237). Thomas seeks to explain that this spatialised racial performativity was a result of inherited segregationist practises that have been reiterated in different forms through time, but also as the lunchroom (as opposed to outside) was a space of habit, repetition, and continuity in which students sat at the same tables with the same friends every day. This means that the subjects themselves are guided by the facets of the space and the legacy of segregation in the USA despite articulating a sense of choice and disavowing racism. This unquestioned practise demonstrates the unconscious and banal functions of normativities in the creation of difference.

Lunchtime was similarly important for Valentine (2000) in the establishment of norms due to being free from adult supervision and control. Valentine states the division into small groups at this time aids the establishment of boundaries of normality and “negotiate and manage difference or individual narratives of the self” (p.261). Moreover, Valentine describes this as a time when hegemonic groups dominate the main spaces of the school and can result in ‘vulnerable’ pupils, such as non-heterosexual individuals, turning to ‘safe spaces’. Thomas (2009) through focusing on race highlighted how territorialised identities are intersubjective, and this can lead to pain and discomfort for individuals who enter certain spaces, but have the ‘wrong’ bodies. This research emphasised the inconsistency of normativities throughout the space of the school, and the importance of certain spaces in (re)producing normativities that marginalise and cause discomfort for non-normative individuals.

By focusing on micro-geographies the importance of the school as a space of social interaction has been highlighted. Teachers are important as authority figures being the legitimised providers of discipline and structure, however this traditional perspective has been decentred by studies focusing on the centrality of school as a space of social interaction for children. Worth (2013) focuses on the (re)production of disability in the
school and the resulting marginalisation of those who are non-normative. The relational construction of disability in the school guided by ableist metanarratives leads to the impairment of the young visually impaired people’s social lives “rather than their ability to minimize difference” (p.119). Morris-Roberts (2004) similarly interrogated the idea of the school as a site of compulsory heterosexuality by exploring social interaction through the development of friendship groups. Morris-Roberts displays how processes of (dis)identification lead to the construction of a discourse of distinctive individuality. The social spaces created by friendships groups can enable the contestation of hegemonic normativities. The emphasis on the school as a site of sociality enables a fuller comprehension of the (re)production of normativities and how they can lead to the marginalisation of individuals, or they can be subject to contestation.

An example is, Larsson, Quennerstedt and Öhman’s (2014) use of Foucault’s (1986) idea of heterotopias to understand an event that queered the heterosexual norm within a Swedish traditional dance lesson. Instead of the gendered partnering of dance couples as girl-boy, the teacher reacted to the request of non-heterosexual girls to allow them to dance girl-girl and in the next lesson the teacher sought to gender-neutralise the dance couples. This emphasises the transformative potential of the learning environment to question and query heteronormativity, but recognise that this kind of practise is not the norm, particularly in physical education lessons where questioning is usually dismissed.

Even within distinctly heteronormative environments’ such as the school formal, Smith, Nairn and Sandretto (2016) exhibit how the dominance of heterosexual is not stable and ubiquitous and thus can be challenged and resisted. They argue that school spaces can open up a multiplicity of ways to do gender and sexuality and that same-sex practices do not necessarily map onto queer bodies, masculinity onto ‘male’ bodies or femininity onto ‘female’ bodies. They recognise that these social spaces were mainly heteronormative and dependent on school policy, but also open to contestation by young people's gender and sexual performances on the night.

In Ansell’s (2002) study of school girls in rural secondary schools in Lesotho and Zimbabwe, identities of the girls are constructed in relation to imagined futures. However, these futures are built around the discourse of ‘equal rights’ which conflicts with the likely material performance of their lives. Ansell (2004) demonstrates that only a minority are able to obtain paid employment and so the discourse around equal rights and opportunities forwarded at school and the material absence of these serves to cast the majority of young people as failures in their transitions to adulthood. Ansell’s research highlights the role of the school in gender identity formation through the eliciting of future potentialities. This can have transformative societal effects through the contestation of current heteronormativities, but result in dissatisfaction when not materially realised. The school as a site of resistance and re-making of societal structures thus must also be understood in a relational context with other societal spaces outside the school.

The importance of social interaction in the school means certain strategies may be used by non-normative individuals in seeking to negotiate the (re)production of difference. Ambjörnsson (2004), in her study of Swedish school girls, found that for non-heterosexual individuals a greater acceptance is granted through conforming to other heteronormative standards, such as fashion, and that the idea of freedom is thus associated with greater conformity. Ambjörnsson notes how this is more achievable for some than others, for instance sexuality is not necessarily visually inscribed upon the body whereas race is. This means that conformity is achievable depending on how and in what ways an individual deviates from certain normativities. This idea of conforming to enable social progression has been termed ‘leaning-in’, and is an ongoing point of contestation and debate in feminist thought.
The publication of *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (Sandberg and Scovell, 2013) sparked controversy because it promoted gender equality within the existing social system, encouraging an individualistic utilisation of existing structures in order to progress. Dawn Foster (2016) and bell hooks (2013) have both found this highly problematic, advocating a lean-out approach seeking to challenge and change the oppressive structures of the kyriarchy. The lean-in/lean-out debate has implications and differences when applied to the space of the school.

Primarily the difference is that children do not have the authority to sanction change in such an adult-regulated environment. But moreover, it can facilitate how we conceptualise an individual’s practises and experiences and how it relates to their embodiment of difference. For instance, the idea of ‘passing’, as in an individual passing as their desired gender identification, assumes the power is located in the agency of the individual to alter their appearance and practices in order to pass, this is akin to ‘leaning-in’. Whereas the idea of ‘being passed’, as in an individual's gender is validated and ‘passed’ by others around them, locates the power outside of the individual. This reconceptualisation thus advocates change in hetero-patriarchal structures regulating gender rather than in the individual.

The compulsory longevity of school means that for most an existence without discrimination is sought and, moreover, the importance of peers’ opinions at school, due to being the primary space of socialisation, can create an environment where deviation from the ‘norm’ is met with derision. This means individuals may regulate their identity by leaning-in to the ‘norm’ which makes their sexuality more acceptable to others as they conform in other ways, or to prevent stereotypical assumptions leading to questions being asked about their sexuality.

The complex site of the school thus is simultaneously a site of (re)production of normativities and resistance to them. The studies concerning difference have highlighted how an intricate interplay between pupils, teachers, and various structuring codes such as the curriculum within the porous space of the school results in a complex micro-geography that can produce marginalisation. However, the experiences of non-heterosexual youth have been generally absent from this literature and so this thesis seeks to start to address this. The geographies of non-heterosexual youth have been studied by other means however, primarily focusing on the home and public spaces. The following section provides an overview of the spatialities of non-heterosexual youth that have been explored thus far and highlights the enduring absence of the school from much of the research.

### 2.2 The Geographies of Non-Heterosexual Youth

Within the geographies of sexualities and children’s geographies literature, the work concerning non-heterosexual youth has drawn out the home and specifically queer spaces as important locations, but considering the compulsory length of time required to attend school it is surprisingly under-researched within this area. The studies highlight how the period of youth can be disruptive for a non-heterosexual individual's everyday geographies, as the heterosexualisation of space can lead to discrimination and marginalisation. However, the studies below also demonstrate that previously heterosexualised spaces such as the home can become queered, and non-heterosexual youth can employ certain strategies to negotiate normativities. Firstly, the limited exploration of the school is discussed. Secondly, the research concerning the home is explored. Lastly, heterosexual and queer public spaces and the increasingly important virtual space of the internet are addressed.
Two exceptions that engage with the space of the school is the work of Freitag (2013) and Schroeder (2012). Freitag focuses on a queer-positive school in the USA and describes how by resisting some of the norms of formal education by committing to, among other practices, simply listening to students’ stories, a safer more inclusive school environment had been fostered. Schroeder, on the other hand, studies queer youths’ relationships with adults and identifies heterosexism within the school as co-constituted through the liberal bourgeois doxa of tolerance. Schroeder argues that the liberal disdain of explicit homophobia does not challenge the more insidious ideas of heterosexism and the normalisation of heterosexuality. This means that the doxa of tolerance only goes so far, and constitutes a ‘messy’ reality for queer youth in which the adults campaigning to reduce homophobia can simultaneously be the people perpetuating spatialised discrimination through heterosexism. Schroeder’s research positions the space of the school as one that fosters individuality rhetorically, but within certain parameters of what constitutes a good heterosexualised homosexual citizen. Both studies demonstrate the potentialities of the school to (re)produce and contest societal normativities. However, both have a limited engagement with the school treating the existence or absence of normativities as absolute and do not differentiate between spaces within the school.

Turning to studies focusing on non-heterosexual youth and the home (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Schroeder, 2015), one can draw out representations of non-heterosexual youth as being in transition and vulnerable, particularly through coming out accounts. Gorman-Murray (2008) in his study on GLB youth investigates how heteronormativity can be overturned by emphasising a non-essentialist view of the nuclear family home as a place of homophobia. His study focuses on positive coming out experiences which result in a queering of the family home. Whilst recognising that these may not be the majority of GLB’s experiences of coming out, Gorman-Murray sought to contest a narrative from previous studies of the nuclear family as conservative and homophobic.

Schroeder (2015), in his study of GLB youth, sought to contest Gorman-Murray’s (2008) conception of queering of the home, by exploring how queering is not a linear process resulting in a final act of being queered. Instead the queering of the family home is more of a random and sporadic process. Schroeder also emphasised the relational spatiality embedded in narratives of the home with connections to other spaces such as the school. An attention to the spaces within the home such as the bedroom reveal the potential for such spaces to be both considered a prison and a sanctuary. The negotiation of coming out by queer youth reveals the production of heteronormativities in terms of functioning to create the space of the closet in which the individual is never just in or out of, but is constructed relationally.

Concerning non-heterosexual youth in public space, Valentine and Skelton (2003) have explored experiences of queer space, whereas Rodó-de-Zárate (2015) focused on a myriad of public spaces. Both make use of Gillian Rose’s (1993) concept of paradoxical space to conceptualise the simultaneously liberating and exclusionary experiences of space experienced by non-heterosexual youth. The underpinning of paradoxical space is that one can occupy both centre and margin non-dichotomously, thus having explanatory use when understanding the relation of the multiplicitous body to space. Paradoxical space is embedded in the idea of heterogeneous spatial normativities which may be contradictory, and in part this creates the ‘messy’ space of social relations. Rodó-de-Zárate (2015) explores this messy space by utilising an intersectional framework in order to understand the complex network of social relations that can systematically oppress non-heterosexual youth. Rodó-de-Zárate focuses on feelings of comfort and discomfort in public spaces which allows an understanding of the (in)visibilities of young lesbians that differs from the common territorialisation of urban space by gay men. In
particular, finding that sexuality was the most common determinant of feelings of discomfort in public space for participants. However, the ability to hide their sexuality demonstrated the elasticity of experience and management of social relations through agency, whilst also evidencing the heterosexualised nature of public space.

In his research, Gary Downing (2013) adds the critical dimension of virtuality, and the now common exploration and construction of the self through the use of the internet. Downing highlights how the internet opens up opportunities for non-heterosexual youth beyond essentialist identity categories such as gay and lesbian, and also contests the dominance of heterosexual discourses in spaces such as schools and homes. Downing finds that the use of increasingly diverse online media platforms means that young people are creating more individualised socio-sexual transitions.

The work concerning non-heterosexual youth has highlighted the importance of sexuality in mediating experiences of spaces. In particular, how these experiences are dependent upon multiple axes of difference, and moreover the nature of how they are negotiated is contingent upon the individuals co-habiting these spaces. The school as part of non-heterosexual youths’ everyday geographies remains under-researched, both in relation to other spatialities, but also and primarily through a lack of attention to the micro-geographies within the school.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of work pertaining to both the school and non-heterosexual individuals across the sub-fields of children’s geographies and the geographies of sexualities. Firstly, the underpinnings of recent developments for both fields revealed the increasing focus upon embodiment, performativity and experiential knowledges. This research highlights how individuals are subject to disciplining and policing processes along multiple axes of difference in the (re)production of normativities. Moreover, the school is particularly important as a space of supposedly compulsory heterosexuality.

The next section demonstrated the conceptualisation of youth as a time of transition and asserted both the importance in recognising youth agency in these transitions, and the importance to spatialize this period of subject-formation. The subsequent section explored the space of the school as an important spatiality in the (re)production of normativities within the field of children’s geographies. The general absence of sexuality and in particular studies concerning non-heterosexual children and youth seeks to be addressed in this thesis by utilising a micro-geographical approach found within other studies seeking to understand the (re)production of normativities, difference and marginality within the school. Similarly, the following section overviewing research concerning non-heterosexual youth demonstrates the lack of critical engagement with the space of the school. The literature positions the non-heterosexual individual as both active agent negotiating their everyday spatialities, and as subject to constraints and marginalisation due to the existence of spatialised heteronormativities.

The phenomenon of heteronormativity is thus not a placeless one (Hubbard, 2008) and is recreated through speech acts and social processes (Butler, 1990, 1993) which fluctuate across space and time. The use of a micro-geographical approach will be used to explore spaces within the school and the experiences of them for non-heterosexual individuals.
3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter will detail the strategy that this research exploits in order to address the absences in the geographical literature concerning non-heterosexual experiences of school, and build on the fruitful techniques and approaches that have been used previously. Firstly, the reasoning behind a choice of qualitative research design will be expounded, leading to a discussion surrounding the choice of methods. Thirdly, the sampling strategy of the study will be laid out and subsequently the implementation of this and the sample attained during the field work period. Following is an exploration of the use of grounded theory as the method of data analysis and the complexities surrounding the position of the researcher. Next the limitations of the study and research method will be explored, and a discussion of the ethical issues inherent in the research and strategies employed to negotiate them will conclude this chapter.

3.1 Qualitative Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research design. This is because, as the above section elaborates upon, qualitative methods have been used productively to explore the everyday geographies of non-heterosexual youth and the micro-geographies of the school. Previous research concerning heteronormativity in the school indicates that those with non-heteronormative sexualities are marginalised, but research, within Sweden, has either been quantitative in the form of agency reports (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010, 2015) or has focused upon other actors such as teachers (Reimers, 2007; Larsson, Quennerstedt and Öhman, 2014) or the curriculum (Schmitt, 2012). This means that the everyday experiences of non-heterosexual youth and their relation to the on-the-ground functioning of heteronormative practices has gone under-researched.

A qualitative research design enables an understanding of these micro-geographies and the emotional experiences of the individual to be studied in-depth. Similar to studies investigating other axes of difference within the school, be it race (Thomas, 2005) or disability (Holt, 2007; Worth, 2013), qualitative design has been used effectively to not just identify spaces where normativities are (re)produced or resisted but also begins to understand the practices and processes at work in these spaces. As Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011b) argue the messes of social reality “do not call for a rational explanation, the identification of a pattern, nor do they seek to embrace the language of statistical rigour” (p.1245). This indicates that the purpose of examining feelings of comfort and discomfort in the micro-geographies of participants is to understand how a focus upon heteronormativity from this perspective can contribute to a development in how heteronormativity is understood theoretically. The nuance of heteronormative practices is best understood through a qualitative methodology as it can flexibly negotiate ‘messy’ spaces of social (re)production where multiple axes of difference and varying discourses create fluctuating geographies that resist simplistic generalizations, such as in the ‘precarious’ space of the school (Philo and Parr, 2000).

In order to carry out this research I have, to a certain extent, utilized an inductive approach in the production of data. The clarification ‘to a certain extent’ is needed because the binary between deductive and inductive in terms of application is a false dichotomy. The understanding of the author is that I have deduced from previous literature and studies a gap in the research deciding the population (non-heterosexual youth), the space (the micro-geographies of the school) and methods in the study (qualitative interviews). I subsequently have exploited an inductive methodological approach in regards to the coding and development of concepts based in the data and having an iterative formulation in interviewing technique, where the last interview informs the next identifying and following particular avenues of interest (Hodkinson,
2008). This means that deduction has set certain parameters for the research, whilst induction enables an explorative method and data-driven conclusions.

Neither exists in a pure form, as Hodkinson notes with regards to his research, “the process of generating theory reflected the ongoing integration of the data with existing theoretical and personal ideas” (p.98). In recognising the messy process of research it is sought to emphasise that one cannot perform a ‘god trick’ as biases and formulation of ideas based on previous reading and experiences are already in place (Haraway, 1991), but to assume and arbitrarily impose concepts upon others experiences would undermine the reason for carrying out research and could subsume nuance and variation which is vital when resisting generalities that overlook the multiple axes of difference that exist. As Browne (2005) has noted “research is a messy process crossing the boundaries and borders between apparently distinct sections of the research process” (p.53). This means that the research design is a general structure that can be flexibly adapted to the messy nature of research and enable an explorative approach to data collection.

In order to not become too enmeshed in language and the existential anxieties concerning the absurdity of seeking meaning in a subjective world, it perhaps is more productive to move-on to the use of grounded theory as inspiration for the treatment of data. Grounded theory relates to the process by which the empirical data drives the emergent conceptual theory, as opposed to fitting the empirical data into pre-determined theoretical concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). According to Glaser (1998) it is the systematic generation of theory that is enabled by a rigorous research method. It is used here as a way of analysing data that is attentive to the complexity of social phenomenon and spaces such as the school. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognise that “it is important to capture as much of this complexity in our research as possible, at the same time knowing that capturing it all is virtually impossible” (p.8). The inability to capture everything is obvious, however a methodology that enables a rich complexity to be reflected in any resultant concepts enables a critical interrogation of what is assumed to be known about certain issues and topics.

Glaser (1998) argues that a major strength of a grounded theory approach to analysing interviews is that it researches what exists from participants’ statements and perspectives, not from what we are told the problem is. Thus in terms of this study this makes sense as we know marginalisation and discrimination exists, and that this thing called heteronormativity is produced through practices and acts, but by navigating the comfort and discomfort of those supposedly marginalised we can enrich our understanding of how this is experienced and what the issues entailed are.

This research was conducted between January and June 2016 with approximately the first six weeks for carrying out a literature review and developing the methodology. The next six weeks involved contacting and interviewing participants and transcribing the audio recordings. The final period of six weeks was dedicated to analysing the data and writing-up the report.

### 3.2 Interviews

Qualitative interviews were used in order to approach the topic of heteronormativity from below. As opposed to analysing the curriculum or interviewing teachers and those further up the school hierarchy, the experiences of students themselves was the focus in order to understand the spaces of comfort and discomfort from their perspective. This perspective was also surprisingly absent from research concerning heteronormativity and school. Qualitative interviews have been used productively before in research concerning the school and masculinities and femininities (Holloway, Valentine and
Bingham, 2000) and when focusing on other axes of difference such as race (Thomas, 2005; 2009) and disability (Worth, 2013). Moreover, qualitative interviews have been used when researching non-heterosexual youths (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015; Schroeder, 2015) and seems an appropriate technique since it enables the personal experience of sexuality to be explored in depth and locates the individuals’ voices centrally in the study. The idea of tackling the issue from below, similarly builds upon the aforementioned developments in sexualities and children’s geographies where embodied and experiential knowledges are taken seriously. A focus on these can challenge and contest hegemonic discourses that have naturalised heteronormativities in spaces.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured in order to allow participants to talk openly, pursue unexpected lines of flight and create the atmosphere similar to a conversation rather than a formal interview that can be intimidating. However, as McDowell (2010) notes the personalisation of interviews is not just a tactic to garner more information, it also is a method to mediate the power relations involved. An ongoing process of reflexivity of the researcher’s positionality was carried out in order to consider the power involved in the interview encounters, and how best to navigate them in order to create an environment in which the participants would yield the best information and also be the most comfortable. This is why private rooms in public spaces were utilised for many of the interviews. The position of the researcher facilitated the creation of comfort too, as being a similar age to participants was perhaps less intimidating than an older more experienced ‘professional’ researcher. This fostering of a relaxed atmosphere sought to minimise stress for participants, but also allowed for the position of researcher to probe events and feelings and create a space for reflection that some participants may never have questioned or critically reflected upon.

The use of semi-structured interviews also allowed a focus upon the topics of interest for the researcher to be covered sufficiently within a relatively short piece of time, whilst vitally enabling elaboration and contestation of points of importance by the participant. This is key to prevent the research from being a form of self-fulfilling hypothesis where the researcher emphasises the narrative that fits their outlook and can overlook or marginalise narratives that contest or complicate the results of a study. This openness to contestation is vital when dealing with research that seeks in some way to participate in the desubjugation of certain knowledges, by rupturing heterosexist discourses that render these voices invisible (Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011b).

Throughout the research process the degree to which the interviews were structured varied. This was firstly according to the willingness of participants to talk openly, providing either lengthy responses that can provide multiple subsequent lines of enquiry, causing less spatial and temporal linearity, or shorter laconic replies meaning the guiding structure was used more explicitly to draw out responses. Shorter replies reflected a discomfort on behalf of the participant talking about experiences regarding their sexuality, and the conversational atmosphere sought was not necessarily able to reduce this discomfort. Secondly, as the fieldwork progressed, familiarity of the structure and topic, and the increasing confidence of the researcher, meant that the interview guidelines acted more as a reminder and check list than providing a detailed linear structure.

The interview guide itself (see appendix 7.1) evolved over the course of the interviews, but kept the same general structure starting with gaining consent from the participant and informing them as to what will be done with the data, and reassuring them that it is their experience and perspective that is of interest and disagreement and dissent with the researcher’s interpretations are fully supported. The next section covered ‘basic information’ in order to gain needed personal information such as age, gender pronouns and location of the grundskola and gymnasiet attended. This was also to put the
participant at ease by generally being easily answerable and leading into talking about school. The question of what term the participant would use to describe their sexuality was left till the end of the interview as by this point it would be hoped the participant was more comfortable with being bluntly asked such a question. They were however informed that they didn’t have to state it if they could not or did not want to. The participants were also given the opportunity to choose their anonymised names.

The main portion of the interview began by asking open questions about school and their experience of it in order for the participant to begin to open-up. This was followed by questions pertaining to their experience in regards to their sexuality, if not already talked about. Spaces of comfort and discomfort were investigated deductively informed by previous research, such as indicating the use of safe spaces such as libraries during unsupervised time periods such as breaks (Valentine, 2000). This is where multiple follow-up questions were asked in order to go into detail of spaces and understand the form and source of (dis)comfort. Such an approach was informed by the use of micro-geographies within literature pertaining to the marginalisation of difference within the school, as elaborated upon in section 2.1.2.

What was sought after was a navigation of the fluctuating feelings of comfort and discomfort in relation to sexuality. This relies on conscious reflection and verbalisation on behalf of participants meaning a complex verbal ballet ensues where the researcher seeks to draw out thoughts that participants perhaps had not realised they had had, without conveying the crux of what the researcher means and is seeking so as to not unduly influence an answer. This is why open-ended questions with long responses are preferred, but more direct questioning may be pursued when with a laconic participant. Moreover, exploring the spatialities of discomfort is perhaps easier than the spatialities of comfort. This is possibly because there is often a source(s) that can be identified for causing discomfort and negative memories can be felt stronger (Kensinger, 2009). Whereas the identification of when and why an individual felt comfortable may be less easy to recall and even harder to explain as it relies perhaps on an absence rather than a presence.

How the space of the school related to other spaces was then investigated enabling a more relational understanding of what constituted dis/comfort. Concluding questions such as number 10 in the guide ‘Are there ways heteronormativity can be reduced?’ were asked not to seek policy suggestions and solutions to negative experiences, but in order to understand where participants located problems.

3.2.1 Sampling Strategies

This study focuses upon youth with non-normative sexualities and their experiences of grundskolan and gymnasiet. Grundskola (6/7-14/15yrs) is compulsory and attending a gymnasiet (14/15-18/19yrs) is not a legally compulsory level of education, but is generally attended by all and could be considered de facto compulsory. This group has been chosen for the aforementioned reasons that the demographic has been under-researched within the geographies of sexualities and children’s geographies, and that research concerning this demographic has neglected the space of the school. In addition, Sweden’s relatively high ranking (6th) in ILGA-Europe’s (European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association) equality index of 49 European countries, and discrimination in school being legally banned under the Diskrimineringslag (Government of Sweden, 2008). Despite this surveys conducted by the MUCF (Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society) indicate that non-heterosexual youth are twice as likely to have been bullied at school (23.9% vs 12.4% for heterosexuals; Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2015) and schools and workplaces are the most common places for homophobic hate crimes to occur (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010). This is despite only 7% of
students having a high degree of intolerance towards homosexual people (Brottsförebyggande rådet & Forum för levande historia, 2004). The higher rate of discrimination despite low levels of homophobia is thus attributed to the normalisation of heterosexuality (heterosexism) and the (re)production of hegemonic masculinities and femininities (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010).

Participants currently attending school were initially sought, but the barriers to contacting this demographic became quickly evident and so participant’s recently attending school were used. This meant that the former strategy of focusing on the everyday time-space pathways of individuals could not be used as this was impractical when talking about a longer time period across multiple sites and perhaps multiple years ago. However, the research is not felt to be denigrated by such a barrier as the time spent out of a school context provided a space for reflection informed by their experience and knowledge of life outside of school.

A non-randomised self-selecting sampling strategy was utilised for two reasons. Firstly, a representative sample of the vast plethora of non-heterosexualities would not be feasible and moreover since the study is not seeking to generalise experiences it was not deemed necessary. As diverse a sample as possible was sought to give richness and comparative depth to the data, but this was primarily limited due to the willingness of individuals to participate, and so the researcher’s requirements for participation was simply being non-straight. A discussion of the nature of the sample gained follows in the next section. This form of non-probability sampling was in order to gain experiences of a population previously under researched.

Multiple sampling strategies were used in order to advertise and inform potential participants of the research. The strategies varied in their degree of success and were; 1. Contacting LGBTQ+ organisations 2. Contacting gymnasium 3. Using social media such as Facebook and Instagram 4. Putting posters around university campuses in Stockholm 5. Using gay dating apps such as Grindr 6. Utilising personal social networks.

The multiple sampling strategies utilised in this study are to compensate for the position of the researcher as an outsider (being a heterosexual recent immigrant) and so lacking access to social and political networks based around sexuality. The outline of the multiple strategies used, and ineffectiveness of many highlight the difficulty in gaining participants. A brief overview of how each was pursued follows.

1. The RFSL Ungdom (Riksförbundet för homosexuellas, bisexuellas, transpersoners och queeras rättigheter Ungdom[The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights Youth]) in Stockholm was contacted as an institution that has a network of organisations including a queer youth centre Egalia and the NNSG (Network for norm-critical school groups). Egalia stated that they no longer allow researchers or journalist’s access to their space primarily because attendees (ages 13-19) are not in control of how the data produced is treated. The NNSG included the call for participants in a monthly newsletter, but did not yield any participants.

2. Gymnasium were contacted via e-mail with a poster advertising the study attached. One school printed and distributed the poster after checking the validity of the study with the researcher’s supervisor. This yielded an enquiry but did not yield any participants.

This method of contacting school staff recognises the regulated space of the school and the legal and ethical barriers that are similar but not comparative to researching an adult work environment. Consent is needed from adults as well as the participants themselves. The position of the researcher as an unknown master’s student perhaps contributed to the lack of response from gatekeepers since the risk for those responsible for the well-being of youth was not worth engaging in the research.
The first two methods are indirect sampling strategies which rely on gatekeepers granting or denying access to spaces or networks. The next four strategies are direct sampling strategies, seeking to contact potential participants directly.

3. Study adverts were made in order to inform potential participants and were put up on university campuses around Stockholm. This strategy was taken when realising that gaining participants currently attending school was unlikely in such a short space of time, due to relying on gatekeepers, and higher probability that potential participants are less comfortable discussing their sexuality as they may still be coming to terms with it. One participant was recruited through this strategy.

4. Social media platforms were used to directly reach potential participants. A short introduction to the research and an online advert (see appendix 7.2) were posted to various LGBTQ+ youth groups on Facebook and a post with multiple relevant hashtags on Instagram was carried out. One participant was recruited through direct messaging after liking a post on Facebook.

5. Platforms constructed for non-heterosexual individuals were utilised in order to direct message potential participants. The Nordic LGBTQ+ social and dating site Qruiser and non-heterosexual male-only dating app Grindr were used, as profiles with intentions and details of the study could be made and filters enabled a targeted messaging of an under 25 demographic. A minimum age for users on Qruiser is 15 and Grindr is 18. Grindr yielded 11 participants. This was due to the functioning of Grindr meaning the proximity and recent activity of individuals could be known and so the likelihood of the individual actually reading the message sent was higher. Messages were sent in various locations of Stockholm in order to overcome residential segregation.

6. The social network of the researcher was also utilised and recruited two participants through this strategy.

3.2.2 Implementation

The interviews were carried out during the period 17/03/2016 – 28/04/2016. Fifteen interviews were carried out either over skype or in person. See figure 1 overleaf for an overview of the sample gained. All participants gained were male, partially due to the success of Grindr which is male identified individuals exclusively, but perhaps also due to the gender of the researcher meaning non-heterosexual female and trans* individuals were less inclined to want to divulge personal information to a cis-gendered male researcher.

The success of Grindr was also due to assumptions of the researcher’s sexuality due to being an exclusively non-heterosexual app. The researcher was an outsider due to being heterosexual, but also an insider in terms of identifying as queer and being a similar age to participants. The sexuality of the researcher was disclosed if enquired upon. Nine interviews were conducted in person, and six online via skype. Private study rooms on the university campus were used for the former as this enabled a private space in which the participant would be comfortable talking openly about personal experiences, whilst being in a public space granting a degree of security for both participant and researcher who were meeting for the first time.

Skype was utilised as a tool to accommodate participants who did not have time to travel and possibly felt more secure due to a lack of propinquity to an unknown researcher. The use of skype seemed also fruitful in interviewing participants who may not be used to discussing their sexuality in person, but are familiar with discussing that aspect of their individuality online.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Location of school (In Sweden unless stated otherwise)</th>
<th>Program studied</th>
<th>Interview location</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
<th>Recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicholas</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>70% Gay</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>White Hispanic</td>
<td>Attended Peri-urban gymnasium for 1 year as exchange</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr 25mins</td>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undisclosed</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>South Asian</td>
<td>Rural grundskola and peri-urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Business administration and tourism</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Björn</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>White-Scandinavian</td>
<td>Suburban Grundskola and högstadiet and urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Högstadiet: Arts. Gymnasium: Social science</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr 8mins</td>
<td>FB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaug</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay/Bög</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>White-Scandinavian</td>
<td>Small town peri-urban</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr 15mins</td>
<td>Poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay/Bisexual</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Mixed European</td>
<td>Denmark: Urban Grundskola, suburban boarding school</td>
<td>Sport and Performance</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anders</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Film production</td>
<td>Mixed European</td>
<td>Rural grundskola, urban gymnasium</td>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>50mins</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas</td>
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<td>Male</td>
<td>Homosexuality</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Middle Eastern</td>
<td>Urban, urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>40mins</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>White-Scandinavian</td>
<td>Denmark: Urban, urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>30mins</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>White-Scandinavian</td>
<td>Suburban until urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
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<td>45mins</td>
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<td>Urban grundskola and gymnasium</td>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
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<td>Grindr</td>
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<td>Gay</td>
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<td>White-European</td>
<td>Rural grundskola, urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Music performance</td>
<td>University study room</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
</tr>
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<td>Retail</td>
<td>Swedish-Latin American</td>
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<td>University study room</td>
<td>50mins</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>Mixed European</td>
<td>Urban grundskola and gymnasium</td>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>40mins</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jon</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Suburban grundskola, urban gymnasium</td>
<td>Restaurant and Tourism</td>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>20mins</td>
<td>Grindr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure. 1: Participant Table
Ten of the participants were currently university or college students and five were currently working. This demonstrates the bias in the age group gained with a mean average age of 22yrs. In addition, the locations available to advertise, in terms of posters and Facebook groups as well as the proximity functioning of Grindr (when sending messages from the campus) lent a bias towards university students.

Ten participants were white and five were non-white. However, the relational nature of race was evident with a participant stating in Sweden they may be viewed as Hispanic, whereas in their country of origin they would be deemed white.

Two participants attended school in Denmark, one participant attended gymnasiet in Sweden for one year as part of an exchange, and the remaining twelve participants attended both grundskolan and gymnasium in Sweden. The mix of locations was not seen to be overly problematic as an exploration of a particularly Swedish experience of heteronormativity was not the motivation for the study. Moreover, to delimit the sample to within the borders of Sweden would perhaps make sense when seeking policy implications, but again this is not the motivation for the study. Arbitrarily adhering to nation-state borders in research can perhaps also foster or forward false stereotypes and assumptions of difference.

Participants own self-identifications were used for the category sexuality and displays the diversity and range of terms used by individuals. A few participants conveyed the relativity of terms used depending on the space and the audience, and others found the act of defining sexuality an inherently restricting one.

A sample consisting of those no longer at school proved fruitful in terms of providing a space for reflection upon what their experience of school was in relation to experiencing life beyond school. Generally, participants did not have trouble conveying experiences, and negative experiences were recalled with particular clarity. This bias for greater exploration of negative experiences was generally reflected in the length of interviews and thus the analysis is skewed towards an investigation of spaces of discomfort. This should not be seen to denigrate the positive experiences of individuals, and does not seek to paint a false picture of the persecuted and marginalised non-heterosexual experience. However, in the course of conducting the interviews and the analysis it was evident that spaces of discomfort were more fruitful in facilitating an understanding of heteronormativity from the perspective of those located outside of it.

The mean average for the length of interviews was 56 minutes, and commonly the length of the interviews reflected the willingness on behalf of participants to elaborate upon answers, and the pursuit of previously unexplored aspects on behalf of the researcher.

The fluctuating use of language during interviews also was dependent upon participant’s comfort with speaking in English (for most it was a second language), and the familiarity with jargon associated with the topic. For instance, a clearer and less academic form of language was taken to begin with during interviews; however, familiarity on behalf of the participant with the use of terms such as ‘heteronormativity’ meant the language used by the researcher changed to reflect this. One map was spontaneously drawn in an interview, and is used in the analysis, but it should be noted that this was not pursued as part of a methodological strategy.

3.3 Method of Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and anonymised from the audio recordings. The qualitative research software NVivo was used to code the interviews. An inductive enquiry in the form of grounded theory was conducted as previously mentioned. Specific codes gradually formed emerging concepts and informed the overarching themes that intersected across the interviews. This technique was undertaken in order to be true and sensitive to the data. However, this is not such a transparent process and a brief elaboration upon the subjective and messy nature of research is needed.
Prior knowledge on the behalf of the researcher will always inform their categorization to an extent, but it is key in terms of ethics and methodological rigour that these theoretical abstractions are traceable back to the data. This is because ethically the researcher is in a position of power (see McDowell, 1992) and when dealing with marginalised populations the researcher seeks, to an extent, to render their previously unaccounted for experiences visible. However, if the researcher is not adequately attentive to the empirical data, the results produced can further the invisibility of certain narratives and experiences. Secondly, in terms of methodological rigour it is important for any theoretical abstractions to be traceable to within the data because otherwise these abstractions have no empirical validity and are purely speculative. As Hodkinson (2008) notes coding offers a means to ensure a close fit between “subjective interpretations and the data – thereby protecting against the forced or arbitrary imposition of ‘preconceived ideas’” (p.95).

When engaging with grounded theory Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognise that this process entails a sensitivity to the data rather than an objectivity. This sensitivity over objectivity is in order to recognise the involvedness of the researcher in the process and the importance of this in order to pick up on patterns and areas of significance. However, whilst being sensitive rather than objective, the researcher is expected to avoid ‘forcing the data’ which means imposing ideas and theory external to the empirical data creating non-indigenous outcomes and conceptual theory. One form of structural forcing according to Glaser (1998) is normative forcing in which the researcher due to previously accumulated knowledge is required or expected to discover a certain theory or theorize a certain way. Glaser advocates a simplistic and perhaps hedonistic attitude in being able to suspend one’s preconceptions and ‘just do it’.

Reducing the possibility of the forced imposition of ideas is tricky and has to some extent always already failed. This is due to the data having to be filtered and transmuted through the researcher who determines the emerging concepts. As a researcher one can reflexively situate their own positionality in order to recognise their own biases and attempt to reduce the effect of this kind of imposition. This is, however, a practice that Rose (1995, 1997) argued is often an optimistically futile exercise as the researcher must be able to locate oneself transparently reflecting inwards and outwards – which is an impossibility as one cannot remove oneself from oneself.

The actual feasibility and perhaps dishonesty in realistically achieving such a suspension of knowledge is problematic. Thus grounded theory is utilised as an inspiration to the method of data analysis used, producing conceptual theory that is honestly related to the empirical data gained. However, the inability of this researcher to both be involved and sensitive to a topic and completely ignorant of everything one knows about a topic, grounded theory thus is utilised in a flawed and partial version. This is perhaps the version used by most researchers.

The concepts developed will then be brought explicitly into dialogue with previous research and conceptualizations after development, but to not recognise that they have been throughout their formation would be a falsehood. This dialogue is akin to Browne (2005) describing the research process “as dynamic and formed in the spaces between the researcher and the participants” (p.49), and also the literature.

3.4 Limitations

There are multiple limitations to this study and these can be divided into sampling and methodological limitations and theoretical limitations.

3.4.1 Sampling Limitations

One particular limitation of this research is the use of a self-selecting sample who needed to identify themselves as relevant potential participants for the research. Due to the short space of time available a decision to explicitly advertise to and focus on individuals who were non-straight was undertaken. This does encounter a problem noted by Savin-Williams (2001) in which sexual minority youth research focuses on those identifying as homosexual or under the
LGBTQ banner. This focus can mask the diversity of sexual desire and practice within youth reinforcing the binary of heterosexual/homosexual. For example, youth who are questioning their sexuality or youth who identify themselves as straight but participate in non-heterosexual practices may not identify as LGBTQ but would constitute those who may be marginalised by hegemonic heteronormativities. Due to the time-constraints of this study it was a method of pragmatism to focus on those who identify themselves in some way as non-heterosexual. The absence of female participants highlights the limitations in the sample of this study.

The use of Grindr also creates limitations as it is a primarily sexual forum. This means that individuals gained from this strategy may have other motivations. This can affect the types of things they wish to disclose and the narratives constructed in the interview if also seeking to engage in sex after. This could lead to overly positive or negative representations depending on what they thought may be the most desirable for the researcher to hear.

The types of narratives constructed can also be effected by their time away from school. The longer individuals have been away from school the less differentiation may be made between different spaces, meaning the whole school is represented in a certain way as a smaller part of their overall life story (see Atkinson, 1998). Participants time away from school means they may seek to construct a certain narrative around it, downplaying certain aspects while increasing others in order to construct the story both that they want and that they think the researcher wants.

A further limitation of the study was in being able to partake in the use of theoretical sampling. This is advocated by Glaser (1998) when carrying out a grounded theory approach to data collection. For instance, it was suggested in the early stages of data collection by a participant that they believed the pervasiveness of social media has meant the situation could be worse for individuals now than when they attended school. If undertaking a process of theoretical sampling an investigation of this statement by focusing on those currently attending school could be pursued. However, this strategy could not be followed due to the researcher not having the privilege to modify their sampling strategy to what would be the best theoretically. Instead the researcher was limited to a self-selecting sample.

3.4.2 Theoretical Limitations

A theoretical limitation of this study comes from considering Savin-Williams (2001) who argues that a focus on individuals who identify as LGBTQ (or in this case non-straight) can falsely construct the idea of a queer experience to be juxtaposed against the heteronormative one. An intersectional approach recognises the many axes of difference that are relational and geographically contingent meaning that there is no one ‘heterosexual’ and no one ‘queer’ experience. Similarly, one universal experience of marginalisation and resistance on the part of non-heterosexual youth is not the aim, but the varying processes underpinning a sense of (dis)comfort and strategies used to negotiate this. Despite multiple caveats and an emphasis on the individualised nature of experiences, the construction of results into themes and narratives can falsely give an impression of consistency in experiences.

The depth and richness of the data gained from the fifteen interviews is beyond the scope of full presentation here, and to do justice to the complexity and the myriad of experiences would be unrealistic in the space available. This is due to the plethora of agents involved in the construction of a single school experience – such as the individual, family, teachers, classmates and even they layout of the school can play a part as will be seen. Of course an agent such as the individual themselves is not as singular as the corporeal body indicates and is indeed an assemblage of multiplicities. For instance, variables regarding the individual include, their own awareness and relationship with their sexuality, whether they were ‘out’ or not (of course not always the individual’s decision and is socio-spatially relative), whether they had perceived effeminate mannerisms and whether they identified with a particular form of masculinity.
These variable multiplicities meant that no two experiences were the same and the individualised nature of each school experience and the fluctuating nature of this experience over time means all experiences can be accounted for in the analysis. This means there is a bias in terms of what the author can feasibly address within the parameters of this analysis. Moreover, from the coding process, as previously mentioned, the negative experiences of individuals yielded more data. This is perhaps also because generally participants did not want to envision themselves as having experienced discrimination or marginalisation.

As elaborated upon later, an example of this is some participants who did not associate the lack of non-heterosexuality in sex educations lessons as negative or with feelings of exclusion or discomfort. Thus, a sexuality can be marginalised and yet the individual who has this sexuality does not feel marginalised. This means that within this analysis due to the limited space and bias towards exploration of negative experiences by both the author and participants during interviews, it is perhaps unsurprising that negative experiences form the majority of the analysis. However, the positive experiences of participants were integral to understanding the composition of spaces and a lack of need for certain strategies from participant’s experiences informed an understanding of heteronormativities.

3.5 Ethics

Particular procedures were followed in order to ensure a standard of ethics. Firstly, informed consent was given by participants before the interview started, where they were informed that they could end the interview at any time and that names of people and places would be anonymised. Participants were given the opportunity to choose their anonymised name. Anonymity is particularly important for participants who may not be ‘out’ to friends, family or peers. However, in line with Waitt and Gorman-Murray (2011a), total anonymity cannot necessarily be guaranteed as particular events may make participants identifiable by those who know them. This means that consent must be premised on an informed knowledge of this.

The reduction of stress and harm for participants was of particular concern, and care was taken to ensure participants that they had the right to refuse an answer or not pursue certain lines of thought. Ending the interviews with an opportunity for participants to raise concerns, emphasise areas of importance or ask the researcher any questions was in order to empower participants and take their opinions regarding the research into account.

An additional ethical concern common to research concerning interviews was the concern for the research to benefit the participants, as opposed to just the one way gain of data on behalf of the researcher. There are limitations to how much this can be accomplished as being a master’s thesis it is severely unlikely to gain political and media attention to the topic discussed. However, many participants expressed enjoyment and interest in having the opportunity to talk about their experiences and reflect upon them in a fashion that they would not have ordinarily.

The use of social media – particularly socio-sexual apps - entailed meeting participants for the first time and so the safety and security of both the researcher and the participants was taken into consideration. Due to the sexual nature of Grindr a miscommunication of the intentions of both parties was also seen as a feasible possibility. In order to provide security and convey the academic intentions of the meeting the university campus was the venue for all in person interviews. There was however one incident where the researcher was misled as to the age of the individual and it became apparent their intentions were far from academic, seeking a rendezvous at a cruising area located on campus. Due to the public nature of the meeting space the author was able to politely decline with no further problems. This incident highlights that even locations thought of as primarily spaces of academia and learning will always be imbued with sex and sexual relations.

Perhaps the most problematic ethical concern is that of representation in the analysis. The researcher seeks not to overemphasise a narrative or give a false idea of a particular ‘gay experience’ as this can perpetuate damaging stereotypes. The author sought to overcome this
throughout the research process by reflecting on their own positionality, capacity and motivations for carrying out the research. Moreover, the grounded theory approach was in order to develop a framework that is generated directly from the data.

The selection of quotes to use in the analysis is particularly tricky when dealing with such individualised experiences. England (1994) notes the use of extended quotations in feminist work in order to create a degree of polyvocality and decentre, to an extent, the voice of the researcher. However, this does not necessarily enable a succinct analysis and would still be problematic when trying to fairly represent all fifteen opinions or experiences. Thus multiple quotes are used for each section in order to allow the voices of the participants to come through, whilst forming a coherent structural narrative required of academic writing. The quotes were chosen at each point because they summarised a common experience, were a previously unheard voice, or demonstrated the complexity of a topic. However, despite this attempt for polyvocality or a decentring of the author, the ultimate power dynamic of the author being in control over the selection of narratives and experiences remains (England, 1994).

3.6 Summary

This chapter has laid out the methodology of this thesis and engaged with the various issues and limitations arising during the course of the study. The qualitative research design built upon the overview of previous literature addressed in the preceding section. Qualitative interviewing was carried out in order to approach the topic of sexual normativities in the school from below, and an interview guide was developed in order to explore the micro-geographies of non-heterosexual individuals in the school. The multiple sampling strategies used sought to overcome problems of access to the targeted demographic, and demonstrate the pragmatic development of these strategies taken in order to gain participants. The section on implementation presents and explores the facets of the interviewees gained through these strategies. The limitations of the overall methodology and the sampling strategies are discussed subsequently, in particular the limitations regarding the presentation of results in the next section. The sections on ethics and limitations reflected upon the positionality of both researcher and participant and the contextual nature of both during the course of the study.
4. The Micro-Geographies of Sexuality in the School

In order to understand the micro-geographies of sexuality within the school for the non-heterosexual individuals interviewed, three themes that arose from the analysis are used to structure this section; these are physical spaces, time-spaces, and negotiation strategies. Firstly, the construction of masculinities is elaborated upon and then explored further through an attention to both physical spaces and time-spaces. The first of these spaces concerns school space outside of the classroom and explores the policing and hegemony of heteronormativities. Secondly, the classroom as sanctuary discusses the physical but also the psychological dimensions of sanctuaries in the school. Thirdly, the section gymnasi et as liberation highlights the temporal dimension of heteronormativities. Fourthly, nudity and hypermasculinity in changing rooms is explored. The time-spaces of physical education and sex education are presented next, highlighting in particular the binary gendering of school space and an absence of and how this perpetuates heteronormativities.

The next section on negotiation strategies emphasises the resilience and agency of individuals and the tactics undertaken to navigate heteronormativities in the school. This consists of female friendships and leaning-in, both strategies highlight the importance of the school as a social space that is imbued with heteronormativities. Together the themes provide a partial overview of the functioning of heteronormativities within the school and their variation across it, developed from the standpoint of non-heterosexual individuals.

4.1 Masculinities

This section on masculinities highlights the intermingling of both the body and the discursive in the construction of narratives concerning sexuality. This discussion conveys how hegemonic masculinities were often constructed with homosexuality as its ‘Other’. The spatialities of non-heterosexual individuals’ experiences of masculinities are then explored through both physical and time-spaces.

Perhaps a reflection of all the participants being male (one participant was exploring gender fluidity and did not identify with being male but was generally perceived as male), the topic of masculinity was important when speaking about their experience of school. Commonly a determinant of a participant’s level of comfort would be the existence or the spatial co-presence of individuals who embodied the hegemonic masculine norm. One participant, Smaug, articulated how the normalization of certain forms of binary gender expression resulted in homophobia:

“Well since homophobia’s just an extended arm of sexism like anything showing femininity was really spat on, so I mentioned that I cried publicly a few times and that was commented on like don’t be a girl e.g. don’t be gay.”

The association of traits and practices perceived as feminine with being homosexual demonstrates how homosexuality commonly was constructed as the antithesis of the kind of masculinity at play in schools. The most common expression of this was the use of gay or faggot as demeaning slights. One participant, Kristofer, stated: “kids used to call me names, like fag got thrown at you. It’s not because they thought I was gay it was just thrown around. So I didn’t feel so bad about it”. The presence of the words gay or fag, whilst not necessarily seen as being homophobic, contributed to an atmosphere, particularly at grundskolan, where what is gay was constructed as a negative ‘Other’. This meant that the sexuality of an individual did not have to be known in order to be a receiver of heterosexist insults.

This atmosphere, experienced by several participants, where homosexuality was only addressed in negative ways, meant that multiple participants chose not to ‘come out’ whilst at school. Sebastian stated:
“They openly said ‘yeah, fucking gay you’re so ugly’ and those kind of things so yeah of course I think that and the general atmosphere overall had the effect on me that I didn’t want to come out while at grundskola”.

Whilst for Richard witnessing the treatment of someone who was ‘out’ influenced his decision, “I could see what would happen if maybe you are wrong for other people; you get mistreated”. This highlights how for many participants grundskolan was not a space where ‘difference’ generally was tolerated.

Commonly the participants stated that homophobia did not seem to exist as a problem at school until puberty began and this led to degrees of insecurity for individuals. Kristofer stated:

“the way kids talked about it [being homosexual] at grundskolan was probably their own insecurity and when people get less insecure they get less afraid […] It’s just insecure behaviour calling someone a fag, it’s got nothing to do with the fag word, it’s just a way of protecting yourself”.

In multiple experiences this insecurity regarding other individual’s expression of gender and sexuality led to the reinforcement of a particular crass form of masculinity where anything detracting from this was open to derision. In participants experiences it was common that certain groups of boys were the main advancers of this, constructing a hegemonic form of a certain masculinity. However, it is not merely the presence and absence of this group that affected comfort levels, but whether a participant identified with this form of masculinity or not. It would be a mistake to conflate the exclusivity of a particular form of masculinity and being non-heterosexual. As one participant, Matthew, stated “I was not a stereotype gay, so it was kind of easy not to be judged so much”. Clearly what is indicated is that the stereotype of being gay for men is to embody femininity to a greater degree than heterosexual male individuals. Thus, for some participants who did not embody perceived feminine traits, the existence of a hegemonic masculinity could be unproblematic, it was whether this masculinity relied on the othering of homosexuality or not. The reasons behind why in some participants experiences this hegemonic masculine group did not exist or was not constructed in relation to a homosexual ‘Other’ is unclear. However, this could be evidence of a more homo-tolerant hegemonic masculinity present in some schools (Røthing, 2008), highlighting an uneven fostering of acceptance and non-discrimination across the schools contrary to the Diskrimineringslag.

The commonplace mapping of homosexuality onto effeminate male bodies was experienced by some participants when ‘coming out’ to classmates:

“when I told them they were like ‘yeah we know’ […] I kind of didn’t like they said that they knew, like why would you know […] They were only going on prejudice thoughts about how a homosexual man would act” – Abdullah.

This conflation of masculinity and sexuality demonstrates one way in which heteronormativity in the school functioned. When correlating them it resulted in normativities surrounding expectations of homosexual expression. The poor representation of non-heterosexual individuals in the media, and how these shaped expectations was brought up by several participants. Highlighting not just the porosity of the school but also as a space of social (re)production where knowledge of varied experiences is restricted somewhat, and so stereotypes can play an important role.

This highlights how spaces such as the school are constructed through social relationships, as underlined by Worth (2013). This meant that expectations and perceptions of difference if confronted could mean the undoing of certain heteronormativities, however, generally these meta-narratives went unchallenged in grundskolan meaning they exercised a power in the formation of social relationships.
The centrality of embodied performances runs throughout, and the explicit hostility or micro-aggressions experienced by several participants from young ages such as 11 through to the school leaving age of 19, highlights how the body of non-heterosexual youth is produced in relation to real and imagined bodies (Colls and Hörschelmann, 2009). Throughout the interviews, the importance of real and imagined sexualities in the construction of masculinities and bodily performances, and an understanding of the social space of the school was abundantly clear. This ties with aforementioned recent trends in focusing on embodiment in the discussion of children, youth and education spaces (Cook and Hemming, 2011; Colls and Hörschelmann, 2009). However, the influence of both real and imagined sexualities has been absent from this literature, and the centrality of these in participant’s experiences demonstrates the need for the inclusion of sexuality as not only applicable to the adult body.

The intersubjective construction of sexuality and its relation to the body occurring within the space of the school complements analyses regarding the construction of difference in the school within children’s geographies (Holt, 2007; Worth, 2013; Thomas, 2009). This is because it grounds the axis of sexuality as a legitimate point of investigation when exploring spaces such as the school. The overwhelming absence of it from the field of children’s geographies belies the material realities of these spaces. The next section seeks to demonstrate the social (re)production of sexualities further by focusing on how hegemonic sexualities become hegemonic.

4.2 Surveillance Outside the Classroom

The physical spatiality of time outside the classroom is explored in this section. This space is characterised by a lesser absence of adult authority, meaning social hierarchies and normativities are constructed, sustained, and enforced most commonly outside of the classroom. The positioning of a certain masculinity in a hegemonic position was often constructed and reinforced through surveillance practices. This policing of difference marginalised those outside of the hegemonic masculinity and highlights the active construction of difference as opposed to a benign naturalization. The intimate space of the school meant rumours circulated quickly and this can act as a regulating gaze in monitoring and marginalising non-heterosexual individuals.

One participant, Björn, recounts their feelings regarding this:

“Sometimes, when I was just walking around in school, during breaks, I could hear people I don’t know talk about me and they know my name, and that made me feel really uncomfortable because then I know that word spreads around school.”

This is a subtle form of heteronormative policing that marginalises those by making an individual’s non-heterosexuality a topic of conversation and gossip. This differs from the more explicit policing practices such as name calling or violent actions, but nevertheless reinforces the ‘natural’ normative position of heterosexuality.

The experiences of one individual particularly conveys how the policing of bodies in space constructed a hostile heteronormative environment. During their interview, Smaug, drew a map of their school layout (see Figure 2 overleaf for author’s version and appendix 7.3 for original) in order to facilitate an understanding of how this surveillance occurred in their experience of högstadieskola. Smaug stated how a group of boys who were the hegemonic masculine group occupied point A, a bench, in the main hall. This point would need to be passed when entering or leaving the school, going to the dining hall, or attending lessons.

Thus, Smaug stated that “sitting here [point A] was the power stance […] so if you sat here you could observe everyone and monitor everyone. And the teachers’ lounge was three staircases up here [above point B], so when they [teachers] were working it was free roaming and especially for these guys”.
Smaug was then subjected to loud verbal abuse, such as “you fucking faggot you need to die”, multiple times a day. Smaug indicated that this regularity of abuse led him to internalise this way of thinking about his own sexuality contributing to attempting suicide multiple times. The absence of teachers from this space, and a strong presence of hegemonic homophobic masculinity facilitated by the layout of the school meant that a very hostile heteronormative environment was constructed. The resulting internalization of the idea that homosexuality is wrong demonstrates the power of what Foucault (1977) termed the inspecting gaze, and the power of the space of the school in fostering heteronormativities.

Both forms of policing regulated the sexual normativities tolerated within a school and marginalised those individuals who were outside of this narrow masculine heterosexuality. This policing of bodies by peers emphasises the disciplining nature of the school, but as opposed to Fielding (2000) and Gagen (2000) where adults are the authors or instigators of disciplining action, it is the students who primarily police and enforce normativities concerning sexuality. This relates to Valentine’s (2000) study where she emphasised the importance of the school as a space of sociality, meaning children seek to position themselves as intelligible subjects. However, it is also clear from the interviews that often the search for intelligibility for some students (the hegemonic) is conducted at the expense of others. Unlike in Thomas’s (2004) study where heterosexuality was affirmed through practices of play and sex, it was instead found that often individual’s heterosexuality was affirmed through the denigration of homosexuality.

The extent of non-heterosexual individuals embodied performance of femininity and the existence of a hegemonic masculinity meant that often non-heterosexual individuals were situated as intelligible subjects by and for others. The school was experienced both as a sanctuary and a prison depending on the extent to which a policing of sexuality took place. However, unlike the bedroom for Schroeder (2015), the school was made a prison or sanctuary through the proximity to others, not an isolation from them. An absence or low-level of this policing was experienced by a few participants and this both enabled and was perhaps an outcome of the individual being able to have space to come to terms with their sexuality.

### 4.3 Classroom as Sanctuary

Both incidents above concerning the policing of sexuality highlight a difference found between how individuals experienced break times and being inside the classroom. For some participants being inside the classroom was a form of sanctuary because teachers regulated the space more strictly. For Björn this meant that “you don’t have to think what will I say to make them like me, or how I should act, how I should hide this part of myself”. This meant classrooms could act as oases of comfort in amongst the constant negotiating of social
relations. This contrasted with Isak’s experience, who whilst only experiencing name calling in the corridors, felt more uncomfortable inside the classroom due to the intimate proximity and restrictions on movement. Isak argued that:

“It’s a different thing being name called in the corridor because it’s a one-way communication, but if you get name called in class it’s a different kind of bullying because it’s in front of everyone and just there and people can see your reaction [...] in fact it never happened, but I always was afraid it would happen. Therefore, I felt more uncomfortable in those places.”

The more static regulating geography of the classroom thus gave comfort for Björn acting as a sanctuary, whereas for Isak it had an imprisoning effect.

These experiences reinforce the centrality of break times as the primary space of social interaction where teachers are absent and normativities are (re)produced (Valentine, 2000). However, further recognition is needed of the seeming intrusion of these normativities into the space of the classroom that can cause greater discomfort. Thus the micro-geographies of the classroom, as identified by Fielding (2000), are importantly experienced as comforting or not depending on their facilitation of oppressive heteronormativities or a stemming of them. This is elaborated upon when discussing sex education, as the wildly differing moral codes and pedagogic practices of teachers concerning sexuality greatly influenced whether the classroom at this time was experienced as marginalising or not for non-heterosexual individuals.

The classroom as a sanctuary highlights the importance of ‘safe spaces’ for non-heterosexual individuals in negotiating a heteronormative school environment. A few participants made use of physical spaces such as the library during break times similarly found by Valentine (2000). However, the capacity of the classroom to be a sanctuary has not been explored. This could vary according to the perception of disciplinary restrictions, as above, but also in terms of whether the lessons fostered certain masculinities.

Jonas commented that compared to break times “there wasn’t much of an element of being exposed or made fun of in maths or in English or history or things like that, so I didn’t have a reason to feel uncomfortable.” Smaug found solace in lessons that privileged femininity over masculinity:

“In Sweden we have shop classes like woodwork and sewing from quite an early age. And then when it was woodwork of course everything was masculine and erggh ‘doing things in metal’ but when we got to choose [...] obviously I chose the sewing part. And so of course it’s like all the nerdy sissy boys and the girls chose sewing and sort of the class dyke went with woodwork and all the boys. [...] And so anything embraced by femininity was a haven.”

Similarly, Matthew found the freedom of feminine expression within the dance studio the one place of comfort within his boarding school, where his close friendship with another male student was used for homophobic mockery;

“the most comfortable place there was the dance studio because I could be as feminine as I wanted to be, I could do it as people were not judging [...] and when I dance I could forget about all the rumours but the second class ended I was uncomfortable and some of the girls would start ‘oh why aren’t you running down to your boyfriend?’”

The multiple examples here are given to demonstrate the variation in which spaces could be the sanctuaries of comfort for individuals and the particular relief found in classroom spaces that enabled the expression of perceived feminine traits that were constrained or subject to mockery in others.

However, an expansion of the idea of ‘safe space’ or sanctuary is needed from a bounded place to account for spaces of comfort that were found in mind-sets or in friendships. For example, Abdullah mentioned that at grundskolan his outwardly expressive demeanour retrospectively was a sanctuary for him as “I was so up in my head I didn’t see what was going on around
me and I became safe in that way by expressing myself a lot”. This decentring of sanctuaries as bounded places enables an emphasis on the intersubjective and psychological construction of space. This understanding of sanctuaries is also important for the intimate place of the school where geographical remoteness may be unachievable and avoidance of particular individuals or groups is not realistic. Valentine’s (2000) use of ‘safe spaces’ assumes the geographical relocation of the body which means a certain temporal relief at the expense of knowingly ‘Othering’ oneself.

Furthermore, ‘safe spaces’ is problematic in its acclaimed universality, as experienced by Abdullah below during a sex education class where binary gendering assumedly created comfort. The idea of sanctuary, taken from Schroeder (2015), is useful because it enables the non-dichotomous facets of paradoxical space by being perhaps both sanctuary and prison. Schroeder’s concept can be furthered by a de-centring of space, meaning what is a prison or a sanctuary may be a mind-set or a state of being that is a product of the spatiality of heteronormativity. The classroom as a sanctuary demonstrates the facilitation or truncating of expression through particularly spatialised performances of masculinity or femininity within the school.

4.4 Gymnasiet as Liberation

The transition from grundskolan to gymnasiet frequently meant a lessening of the hostile heteronormative atmosphere experienced by some participants. A few participants moved from rural or peri-urban grundskola to urban gymnasium, and this could perhaps generate a sense of a progressive urbanism and a backwards rurality. These individuals chose to move to gymnasium that were for high attaining students or specialised in certain subjects where the majority of classmates were also girls. This commonality in focusing upon performance and a decrease in masculine bodies, meant differences such as sexuality were not as socially important. This selectivity reinforced the backwards rural/progressive urban stereotype for those participants, as otherwise the location of schools in terms of rural or urban did not make a significant difference to whether individuals experienced discrimination or marginalisation. This is perhaps unsurprising due to narratives of rural-urban flight being seemingly less important and outdated for contemporary youth (Wimark, 2014), however the limited findings here perhaps hint at how selective educational trajectories can construct narratives of tolerance.

For example, Björn, moved from a suburban högstadieskola to attend a ‘progressive’ urban gymnasium which you needed high grades to attend (thus according to him not accessible to his bullies) and was populated mainly by girls finding that:

“people were just not making that many assumptions about people. It’s not only that people were avoiding to point out that that person is gay, it’s that they did not assume that they were straight.”

However, conversely for Abdullah, a greater acceptance of homosexuality on behalf of his fellow students did not result in a more positive experience. Previously Abdullah had attended an urban international1 grundskola where the diverse background of participants fostered a space for questioning and discussion:

“they weren’t as accepting of the sexuality itself but being in that environment made me able to be more open as a person and discuss. [...] Being at that grundskola made me able to discover my sexuality and relationship to my gender much more in the future”.

Then Abdullah attended an urban gymnasium composed of mainly white Swedish students stating that:

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1 There are 29 international schools at present in Sweden and teach in English meaning they may be attended by a greater proportion of students from migrant backgrounds.
“you usually get to hear that ethnic Swedes are more open-minded about being gay. They probably are more acceptable of it but couldn’t think outside the box as much as they haven’t heard of different experiences”.

The transition from grundskola to gymnasiet for Abdullah thus resulted in an environment which whilst more tolerant of homosexuality was experienced as more restrictive in the performance of difference and gender expression. Abdullah’s experience is one of inhabiting paradoxical space because of race, gender and sexuality. In this case Abdullah’s sexuality meant he was deemed ‘cool’ by classmates and in this way occupied the centre, but occupied the margin due to feeling confined by the parameters of expression.

The benefit of having a temporal dimension to studying the space of the school meant the fluctuation of heteronormativities across time and space could be explored. This has been used within the geographies of sexualities (Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011b) However, most approaches considering the construction of difference in the school are case studies. The advantage of case studies is in their positioning of participants in the here and now, however, in doing so a false sense of stasis of the materiality of a school experience is fostered. This approach focusing on school ‘careers’ enables a better understanding of the dynamism and multiple sites that compose the school, and how heteronormativities are experienced and modified relationally.

Moreover, the focus upon non-heterosexual youth in the geographies of sexualities literature (see Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015 for an exception) foregrounds coming-out stories as the means by which to explore youth as a time of transition (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2011a, 2011b; Schroeder, 2015; Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Valentine, Skelton and Butler, 2003). This approach is key in understanding heteronormativity and the unequal expectation for non-heterosexual individuals to come out. However, it does centre non-heterosexual youth experience on a point of difference rather than similarity. An advantage of focusing on a school career - which of course may entail an individual’s coming-out experience – is perhaps the similarity to others experiences such as effeminate male heterosexuals. An emphasis on the existence of normativities and a recognition of the multiple and specific experiences of those marginalised by them, can provide grounds for cross-sexual solidarities.

4.5 Nudity and Hypermasculinity in Changing Rooms

Changing rooms were the most commonly experienced spaces of discomfort within the school. There were a variety of factors that contributed to this; the absence of teachers, the absence of girls, hypermasculine performances and the co-presence of naked bodies. Each factor intertwining with the others. There were two common themes emerging from the interviews in terms of the changing rooms as a space of (dis)comfort, firstly the naked body and secondly hypermasculinity.

The functioning of the changing room as the only space within the school where there is a co-presence of nudity, perhaps means it unsurprisingly was the space of most discomfort for many participants. The practice of compulsory showering in most participant’s schools meant that nudity was commonplace. The comfort in one’s own body image was an important mediator in how individuals experienced such a space. An important intersection with religion and race was bought up by Abdullah whose Muslim upbringing meant the public display of genitalia was forbidden. The mix of cultural and religious backgrounds at the international school meant students were not required to shower, differing to other schools were individuals spoke of being reprimanded by teachers if trying to avoid showering.

Jonas stated that: “I was always really embarrassed to go to physical education because the shower room is completely open, everyone could see each other […] later when I grew up and realised my sexuality I was afraid I would be erect and people would see that and I had this nightmare in my head and had this anxiety every P.E. class”.
This anxiety surrounding the naked body and becoming erect was the case for a few participants, but many also said that they never had a problem with nudity. Jesper was one participant who found changing rooms unproblematic: “I just showered with them. I always thought that it wasn’t really my problem so didn’t do anything to make them feel more comfortable”. This indicates how for others in the changing room there was sometimes a discomfort with showering with a non-heterosexual individual. Dennis, for instance, in gymnasium co-ordinated the timing of showers with a friend, “it was like ‘ok Dennis you’re going to shower first, and then I’m going to shower […] he didn’t say it to be mean but it would just be weird for both of us”. The willingness to avoid creating discomfort for others meant that in grundskolan Dennis sometimes changed in the girls changing room which the girls found unproblematic because his sexuality was known. Many participants had some form of strategy like this in order to negotiate this space where heterosexuality had been normalised and privileged through the binary gendering of physical space.

However, for most participants who found the changing room a space of discomfort it was not the showering and nudity that caused the most discomfort but the related hypermasculine atmosphere fostered inside the changing rooms. This atmosphere was primarily generated through the actions of a hegemonic masculine group. Many participants stated that any bodily difference, be it too fat, too hairy, not being well endowed, could be used to ridicule an individual. The frequent use of misogynistic language such as rape jokes was highlighted as key expressions of this hypermasculinity.

Björn stated that “there was this atmosphere that was in school and was amplified a whole lot in the changing room” and Anders recalled that “you can’t even defend yourselves. They would do this wolf pack thing and sort of attack together”. This somewhat atavistic amplification of a masculinity was constructed in opposition to a perceived weak femininity. Björn believed it was due to the co-presence of naked bodies that meant that male classmates felt they had to go above and beyond the usual measures to assert their heterosexuality. This loud performance of hypermasculinity generally dominated the intimate space which teachers were absent from, fomenting a sense of freedom and control for the hegemonic group. Moreover, for participants whose friendship group was composed mostly of girls there was an insecurity in the space from not having friends as a social barrier. The binary gender division of changing rooms premised on the assumption of heterosexuality often incubated hypermasculine performances. Most participants dis-identified themselves from this form of masculinity.

The idea of hypermasculine spaces within geography have been allocated to spaces of adulthood such as prisons (Rosenberg and Oswin, 2015) or nightclubs (Boyd, 2010). The belittling of youth or children as adults-in-becoming within children’s geography (Worth, 2009), perhaps means that often crass- or hyper- masculine performances in youth are seen as a reflection of immaturity (Ambjörnsson, 2004; Røthing, 2008). This belies the similarities across age in these performances and misunderstands the process of social (re)production. Taking the agency of children and youth more seriously, instead of a condescending assumption of immaturity, can enable alteration in the social (re)production of oppressive normativities.

Moreover, the commonly shared experience of discomfort in the changing rooms conveys the territoriality of masculinity similar to Thomas’ (2009) study on race where intersubjective constructions of racial difference led to a territorialised discomfort for individuals. However unlike with race, the lack of corporeal inscription of sexuality meant there was an elasticity for individuals in being able to regulate their experience (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015). This elasticity provided by the regulation of identity is addressed further in the section below on leaning-in.

The inconsistent experiences of variable masculinities across multiple sites of the school, be it grundskola or gymnasium, or spaces within the school such as the changing rooms, highlight the importance of embodiment and place in the experience and functioning of heteronormativity (Hubbard, 2008). What is revealed is that heteronormativity is constructed
and enforced through a myriad of sub-components such as masculinities and binary
gendering. The physical spaces above demonstrate the integral coexistence of masculinities,
heteronormativities and spaces. The differentiation between such physical spaces within the
school reveals the fluctuating micro-geographies of heteronormativity within the school.

The next section explores the time-spaces of physical education and sex education. These time-
spaces differ from the physical one above as they are not grounded in particular physical
spaces, but can exist across multiple sites. Time-spaces proffer another dimension to the
micro-geographies of heteronormativities, demonstrating that in exploring the spatialised
(re)production of normativities both physical and time-spaces must be taken into account.

4.6 Physical Education

Discomfort in the physical education lessons themselves was mainly experienced by
participants who dis-identified with the masculine conduct of the activities that emphasised
competitiveness, but also the somewhat arbitrary binary gender division of the activities. This
meant that for those whose friendships groups were primarily girls, there was an insecurity
which was compounded by the masculine milieu fostered by binary gendering. However, this
binary gender division could also be experienced within mixed gender lessons. For instance,
Björn, stated that during dance lessons discomfort was not from dancing with either girls or
boys, but that it was “mandatory, one boy and one girl and if for some reason you break this
rule people won’t react in a nice way.” This highlights how the parameters for dance partners
are set by teachers and this routinization normalised this practice so that classmates would
also police difference. The common discomfort binary gendering can provide for non-
heterosexual individuals reflects the banal heterosexualization of spaces within the school
(Browne, 2007). The agency of the teacher is key in being able to open-up opportunities for
subversion (as found by Larsson, Quennerstedt, and Öhman, 2014) or reinforce the
routinization of heteronormativities.

However, feelings of comfort were also expressed by some participants during physical
education. Anders and Isak both stated that their ability to perform well in physical education
lessons meant they did not feel like they were being judged due to their sexuality. Isak
highlighted how his ability and the team camaraderie created a comfortable space:

“these people you’re in a team with they could be your bullies outside of school, but if you’re
in the same team playing football you end up being friends. [...] Guys are very simple so if
you’re good at football guys tend to like you.”

This highlights how performance at sport goes against the stereotype of the effeminised
homosexual, and so can be a space where the reproduction of heteronormativities is
challenged, however, poor performance can then also be witnessed as evidencing stereotypes.
The greater disparity between male homosexual and heterosexual participation rates than
female homosexual and heterosexual participation rates in sport (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010),
reflects the normativities surrounding gender performance and sexuality in sport.

4.7 Sex Education

The time-space of sex education commonly (re)produced heteronormativities surrounding
sexuality, and because of the direct discussion of sex it could be an acutely marginalising space.
Sex education consisted of lessons specifically focusing on sex and relationships, biology
lessons and visits from specialist groups.

One particular experience demonstrates the discomfort felt when both not identifying with
their socialised gender and being non-heterosexual. Abdullah was in the third grade of
gymnasiet when:
“we had people from ungdomsmottagning2 come to us [...] and there was a guy and a girl and the guy was like ‘ok you guys follow me’ and you girls follow me. Like are you serious, are you fucking with me? What if there was someone in this classroom that was neither boy or girl, where would they go? [...] they said ‘it’s to have a safe zone to talk about stuff’, but I was like I’m not in a safe zone right now, it’s not a safe zone for a person who looks like a guy but doesn’t identify as one at all. [...] we started talking sex and they were like ‘so what do you guys think about girls?’ Like this is so boring this doesn’t apply to me whatsoever, and I had a homophobic guy in my classroom [...] and was like ‘I don’t hate gay people I just think it’s gross how they have sex’, and it was like right you don’t hate them.”

Abdullah thus has discomfort from the tyranny of the binary gendering of space, anger and discomfort from the assumption of heterosexuality and the uneasiness of being exposed to homophobic views. Heteronormativity thus was constructed through multiple practices particular to that space and time by the manifestation of multiple interlocking systems of oppression.

A few participants received a sex education that highlighted and talked about homosexuality with positive outcomes, such as a questioning of homophobic language. However, most participants either had purely heterosexual sex education lessons or experienced the topic of homosexuality as a brief addendum to the main topic of heterosexuality. Kristofer stated that the absence of homosexuality meant “it felt abnormal being homosexual at that time” and Sebastian explained that:

“I just thought to myself that it didn’t affect me using a condom or not, because the most common example they were using was that if you don’t use a condom maybe you’ll be a father.”

Both experiences display how the absence of homosexuality resulted in feelings of being ‘Othered’ and misinformation. Dennis, infuriated by the lack of knowledge on behalf of the teacher took drastic measures:

“D: So when we came to homosexuality, the guys in my class were asking how does this work, and she couldn’t answer. I think I remember one guy asked ‘if homosexual guys are masturbating themselves in the mirror?’ like a really really weird question. And the teacher was like ‘oh I don’t know, because homosexuals...’ and I said ‘Stop stop stop! This is totally wrong’. And so I went up to the desk and said ‘Stop, you be quiet, and you can ask me instead.’ So I basically took over the class.

M: And so did people then field questions to you?

D: Yeah they did, and that was the first time in three years they actually did listen to me”

Dennis’ take-over of the sex education class re-located homosexuality not as abstract theoretical and elsewhere, but immanent, living and breathing. By centring homosexuality, if only temporarily, the doxa of tolerance that relies on the power relation of the centre accepting the margin was also reconfigured. Homosexuality’s validity and existence became independent of heterosexual acceptance. This incident highlights the findings of Freitag (2013) in that the act of simply voicing and listening to students’ stories can queer normativities. This incident also reiterates Nelson’s (1999) critique of Butler (1990, 1993) in demonstrating the agency of the individual in shaping identity formation and not just being subject to heteronormative scripts.

The absence of non-heterosexuality for many participants meant a cementing of heterosexuality as the norm. Similar to Røthing (2008) the exclusion or brief addendum of non-heterosexuality meant sexual desires correlating with the heterosexual matrix are not questioned, naturalizing a hierarchy of sexualities. The importance of the agency of educators

2 Translates as ‘youth clinic’ a nationwide Swedish service that provides advice and education on sex, the body and relationships.
and their pedagogic practices can result in a questioning of heteronormativities or a perpetuating of them. Some participants commented that this absence was unproblematic because they were able to educate themselves via the internet and that most students were heterosexual anyway. This exhibits the use of the internet by non-heterosexual individuals to create more individualised socio-sexual transitions (Downing, 2013).

Non-heterosexual education should not be seen as just for the benefit of those that are non-heterosexual (unlike how heterosexuality commonly is, see Røthing, 2008), but for all. For instance, one participant recalled that a school biology textbook labelled a feature of the anus as also being where gay men have sex, as if heterosexual individuals do not. One participant, Jon, recalled that a teacher explicitly stated “don’t do anal”. This indicates the moralisation of sex and sexuality within education. As opposed to Fielding (2000) where moral codes regulated movement, here the varying application of teacher’s personal moral codes can determine the sexual geographies of individuals in and out of the classroom. The paucity in much of the sex education received by non-heterosexual individuals meant that alternative spatialities of education, such as the internet, were required.

The exploration of physical spaces and time-spaces reveals the intricate and complex micro-geographies of heteronormativities within the school. Together both highlight spaces of comfort and discomfort for non-heterosexual individuals, and the variance in experiences demonstrates the individualised nature of this. The strategies particular to spaces have already been touched upon with the use of sanctuaries and tactics to negotiate the changing room. The next section highlights two strategies that cut across the spaces of the school as methods to lessen and negotiate feelings of discomfort.

4.8 Negotiation Strategies

From the interviews a number of unconscious and conscious strategies were participated in by individuals in order to navigate the space of the school. The most frequent forms are elaborated upon below and are female friendships and leaning-in to masculinities. The ability to utilise such strategies depended upon the willingness of the individual and the resources available to them. For instance, two participants commented upon how their generally positive experiences of school were perhaps facilitated by their white ethnicity considering how other non-white individuals at their schools were social excluded. Resources can thus be embodied characteristics such as race or masculinity, or friends and access to spaces.

4.8.1 Female Friendships

A common strategy whether conscious or unconscious was having a friendship group composed of mainly girls. This should not be seen as a manipulative practice to look after oneself but more as an outcome of dis-identifying with masculine performances and the common construction of the hegemonic masculinity in opposition to homosexuality. A few participants experienced homophobic abuse from both female and male classmates, but generally in participants’ narratives girls were more tolerant of male homosexuality. Dennis recalls that “I knew about ten girls in each class and so I knew a lot of people so the guys couldn’t be too mean to me because then they couldn’t get a girl[friend]”. Abdullah commented on the penchant amongst female classmates to have a ‘gay best friend’;

“even though I didn’t like the fact that all the girls wanted to be friends with me, just because I liked men, it was a kind of security [...] because the boys are scared of the girls and were scared of doing something to harm me because they would have to deal with the girls.”

Abdullah’s and Dennis’ experiences demonstrate how the heteronormativities within the school were utilised as a social survival strategy to prevent or reduce discrimination.

However, this varied on the dynamics within certain schools. For instance, Björn recounted that in his högstadieskola “it was very segregated, so even if I wanted [...] friends who are girls I could not have that [...] and in gymnasium it’s not like I had a choice I mostly had female friends”. Moreover, the bias towards female friendships was dependent upon not just
a dis-identification with masculinity, but a hostility or subtle discomfort displayed by male heterosexual classmates. Jesper recounts the gradual process of feeling marginalised by male classmates leading to more female friendships:

“J: I could feel that they were definitely behaving differently around me than they would around the other guys. [...] some of them felt afraid of being too close to me [...].

M: So was your friendships group mixed or ...?

J: After those kinds of experiences it was more and more dominated by girls, at least within my classmates.”

And Nicholas recalled that “it was a lot easier with girls to become friends” and that when they find out about an individual’s sexuality the “risk of facing rejection is a lot lower.”

This diversity of motivations for female friendships is clear, whether it was an unconscious ease compared to male friendships, or a conscious protection strategy, the commonality between the experiences was a – sometimes pre-empted or presumed - marginalisation by male classmates either through explicit discrimination, subtle discomfort or a fear on behalf of male classmates of being ostracised by hegemonic masculine individuals for befriending a non-heterosexual individual.

This strategy varied across the physical space and time-spaces of the school. Female friendships were most beneficial during break times and mixed classes, however spaces that disabled this strategy were spaces of binary gendering such as the changing rooms and physical education. In Thomas (2005) where racialized friendships groups at school were seen as a reflection of the ‘way things are’ by participants, belying the history and legacy of race relations. The idea expressed by several participants that it is just easier to make friendships with girls highlights a normalisation of heterosexuality within male friendships at school.

Similar, to Morris-Roberts’ (2004) study where friendship was grounds for producing and resisting compulsory heterosexuality; female friendships could be strategies for non-heterosexual male individuals to not just resist masculine heterosexuality through (dis)identification, but also resistance through the actual or possible confrontation between individuals as a protective strategy. The literature within geography concerning non-heterosexual youth has focused upon relationships within the family (Gorman-Murray, 2008; Schroeder, 2015) or friendship in terms of queer solidarities (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2003; Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Schroeder, 2012), but absent is the importance of gay-straight friendships in enabling less oppressive space to be developed. This is perhaps because of the absence of the school also from this literature, and as the primary space of social interaction for non-heterosexual youth an understanding is needed in order to comprehend social relationships in other spaces.

4.8.2 To Lean or Not to Lean

A second strategy revolved around the idea of leaning-in to certain forms of masculinity. Several participants altered their style and mannerisms in order to have greater acceptance and respect among classmates. This could be if an individual had particular mannerisms that were perceived as effeminate, but some participants also embraced their marginality such as Isak; “I was being myself and I remember that being myself made more friends than being effeminated made me enemies”. This differed from Björn’s experience where at the start of högstadieskola he felt pain from being misgendered and so made a concerted effort to lean-in to masculinity as a social survival strategy. He cut his hair short, bought clothing with the ‘right’ brands and repressed effeminate mannerisms while exaggerating masculine ones. He did this by taking up more space in his body language, lowering his voice and talking about more masculine subjects when in conversation with male classmates. After this Björn was passed by classmates and “wasn’t bullied that much because I had hidden so much of what I actually wanted to do at that age so there wasn’t much left to bully.”
This construction of a seemingly ‘inauthentic’ self in order to survive was experienced by Dennis. When asking if he ever dreaded going to school he replied:

“Yes a normal morning for me was like drinking five or four pints of beer before I went to school, I was like an alcoholic when I was a young kid. I started when I was like eleven, so eleven through fifteen.”

At this age Dennis stated he met classmates who bullied him, such as by throwing stones at him and sending threatening texts, with equal aggression. This meant that:

“I felt very constrained in who I was because I felt like I am a decent guy but because everyone was bullying me if I’d been decent they would have totally knocked me down and wouldn’t be going to school, I couldn’t have got out of bed. So I had to be hard, angry, aggressive to survive, and that made me very mad because I felt it was so unfair because I knew that I was not this person I was becoming to survive”.

Both Dennis and Björn altered themselves, leaning-in to the hegemonic masculinity, in their social strategies attempting to navigate a hostile heteronormative school environment. This was the inverse of Nicholas’ experience, who found his time in Sweden a liberating one “because before coming to Sweden I thought ‘yeah ok this is how it is, it is a faggot thing’”.

The strategies displayed by participant’s highlights how the school can be a space for questioning assumptions, but also a space that is disciplining and facilitated the (re)production of heteronormativities that were inscribed upon the body.

The practice of power in social relationships is evidenced through the ability to pass an individual or not, empowering those most aligned with heteronormativities. The need for such a strategy varied depending on whether the site of the school harbourcd heteronormativities or enabled space for the exploration of difference. Unlike in Ambjörnsson (2004) where leaning-in was tied to the idea of freedom, more often leaning-in was associated with survival. However, unlike the debate in feminism on leaning-in or leaning-out, a normative judgement regarding either will not be made when considering the space of the school.

Both strategies, predicated on social interaction, seek to position the individual as an intelligible subject (Valentines, 2000). Unlike most adult environments or most other spaces in children’s lives (notwithstanding the home), there is little freedom of choice in whether to inhabit the space of the school, and unlike public spaces where there can be an elasticity of experience due to the use of certain tactics and the variability in other people (Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015). The school experience can be particularly inelastic because of the repetition of experiences due to being inhabited by generally the same individuals. The sense of surviving and waiting out their time expressed by several individuals in relation to grundskolan in particular, conveys the capacity of the school to be imprisoning. Two participants who undertook international exchanges found them to be liberating influencing their decisions to ‘come-out’ and revealing the previously stifling school milieu. The longevity of grundskola of around seven years, meant a familiarity and comfort in experience could cast it as a sanctuary for some individuals, whereas discomfort and social truncating of sexuality could mean it was imprisoning. However, a knowledge of how imprisoning a space is, is constructed relationally, and perhaps is unknown until no longer attending it. This highlights a spatial and temporal dimension to the discussion concerning leaning-in or out which has previously been unexplored.

This section has sought to emphasise the agency of non-heterosexual youth that is often overlooked because of a simplified view of adults-in-becoming (Worth, 2009), or because of the assumed position of victim and thus subjected to power and oppression (Savin-Williams, 2001). Whether conscious or unconscious the selected practices above argue for the agency of children and youth to be taken seriously, but also highlight the navigation, resistance and conformity to heteronormativities by non-heterosexual youth within the school. Both strategies rely on the sociality of school space, as opposed to previously studied strategies seeking to gain influence through interacting with adult authority (Schroeder, 2012). The
informality of these negotiation strategies contributes to our understanding of the functioning of heteronormativity in the school. This because it highlights how interacting with adults in authority is not the only avenue pursued by non-heterosexual individuals when seeking to manage their school experience.

4.9 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the micro-geographies of sexuality and heteronormativities within the space of the school that were found from analysing the interviews conducted. Structuring the findings according to physical spaces and time-spaces draws out the distinct spatialities of participants experiences, and highlights how space, masculinity and heteronormativity coexist as the latter two are not placeless phenomena. The construction and policing of masculinities mainly occurred outside of the classroom in a space free from the surveillance of teachers (cf. 4.2). The primacy of this space for social interaction displayed the intersubjective (re)production of normativities, and the absence of teachers could facilitate the hegemony of a particular form of masculinity. Concomitantly, the classroom could be experienced as a sanctuary, where there was a relief from the hegemony of masculinity, and simultaneously experienced as imprisoning due to restrictions on movement (cf. 4.3). Similarly, the privileging of certain masculinities or femininities in particular classrooms portrays the co-construction of heteronormativities and space. The idea of sanctuary is not just dependent on the discursive construction of normativities, but the relation between these and the body of the individual.

The next the relational formation of the school as a space of (dis)comfort displaying the differential experiences of grundskolan and gymnasium was discussed (cf. 4.4). The perspective given by interviewing participants about their experiences across the whole of their school careers meant differentiation between tiers of education could be made, and how this informs participants narratives. This perspective displays how normativities are (re)produced as age-appropriate behaviours within the physical spaces of school careers. The hypermasculinity of the changing rooms in many participants’ experiences highlighted the particularities of the micro-geographies within the school (cf. 4.5). The binary gendering of physical space, the relative absence of teachers, the school’s policy concerning showering and the masculine performances of others all shaped the dynamics of comfort and discomfort within the school. The space of the changing rooms conveys the territorialisation of masculinities and heterosexuality in a particularly acute manner.

This differs from the time-spaces of physical education and sex education. The mixed experiences of the time-space of PE demonstrates that normativities of binary gendering and masculine performances could be negotiated through performance of the task (cf. 4.6). Whereas in the time-space of sex education comfort or discomfort for the individual relied on the structuring of the space by teachers (cf. 4.7). The frequent location of non-heterosexuality as elsewhere (re)produced heteronormativities by othering non-heterosexuality. This was experienced by several participants as being made to feel abnormal. However, other participants’ online activities outside of school meant they felt more secure in their sexuality and were able to negotiate this process of othering.

Negotiation strategies were utilised by many participants in order to navigate the heteronormative spaces of their schools (cf. 4.8). The formation of female friendships highlights the dynamics of strategies as both conscious and unconscious, with some participants using it as a protective strategy, whilst others were guided by the functioning of heteronormativities in social relationships within the school. The strategy of leaning-in highlights the power in social relationships possessed by those embodying heteronormativities. The peer pressure of school space could be negotiated through both leaning-in and embracing a position of marginality. The adaptation to certain masculinities led for some participants to the construction of an inauthentic self. This along with the discussion of sanctuaries demonstrates the capacity of the school to both facilitate the formation of the subject and be imprisoning.
5. Discussion and Conclusions

This thesis has sought to address the absences within children's geographies and the geographies of sexualities laid-out at the beginning. The interview data situates the axis of sexuality as an important one for understanding the micro-geographies of the school. The lack of attention concerning the school as a space of sexuality (Wimark, 2009) meant that the idea of the school as an institution of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) masked the spatial differentiation of heteronormativities, the functioning of the (re)production of heteronormativities, and the variation of this in lived experiences. Moreover, it has mapped out the space of the school as an important site within the everyday geographies of non-heterosexual youth, and how the functioning of physical spaces and time-spaces within the school create spaces of comfort and discomfort which particular strategies seek to negotiate. The idea of sexuality pertaining to adult bodies has been problematized (Thomas, 2004), and this thesis contributes to research engaging with youth sexualities by demonstrating the inherent spatialities of heteronormative (re)production.

The qualitative investigation of non-heterosexual experiences carried out here complements and expands upon quantitative surveys (Ungdomsstyrelsen, 2010, 2015) by providing a grounded analysis of how heteronormativities within the school can or cannot marginalise or discriminate non-heterosexual individuals. By focusing on the micro-geographies of the school the importance of place in the (re)production of heteronormativities has been shown (Hubbard, 2008). The variable functioning of normativities undermines their supposed ubiquity and opens up space for subversion.

The school as a site of heteronormative (re)production is less absolute and the individualised experiences convey the sometimes desultory nature of the heterosexualisation of space. The capacity of the school and various sites within to reinforce heteronormativities, marginalise individuals or provide spaces of comfort and questioning reflects the precarious assemblage that is the school. The school as a space of social (re)production has been understood along other axes of difference, but this study contributes to an understanding of the school as a sexualised space. Moreover, an understanding of the particular spatialities of sexualities within the school. The differentiation between inside and outside classrooms and between grundskolan and gymnasium contributes to an understanding of the differing functioning of physical spaces that constitute the school. In particular, the functioning of these spaces as social spaces that are regulated and policed by both teachers and hegemonic groups in determining what expressions of sexuality are allowed. The facets of the physical space of the school itself facilitating the disciplining of non-normative bodies.

The idea of sanctuary has been developed in order to reflect the psychology of what is meant by ‘safe space’. Schroeder’s (2015) use of sanctuary as non-dichotomously liberating and imprisoning is complemented by recognising that the idea of sanctuary does not rely on the relocation of the body away from others, but can be a mind-set that enables the inevitable and ongoing interaction with others that exists in school. Moreover, the idea of the classroom as sanctuary furthers the idea of sanctuary to not be a space of separation, but a space that (re)produces differing normativities to the space outside. The facets of the classroom as regulated and disciplined means it can facilitate and enable expressions, and constitute an important space of comfort within individuals’ everyday geographies.

The hypermasculinity of the changing rooms demonstrates the concomitance of physical space, masculinities and heteronormativities. The spatialised division of tasks by physical space in the school means that some spaces privileged and facilitated the expression of certain forms of masculinities whilst marginalising others. Attention to certain sexualised time-spaces facilitates the understanding of school space being both physical and temporal. Negotiation strategies engaged in by non-heterosexual individuals facilitates an understanding of the experience of both physical and time-spaces as dependent on the body and how it positions itself within these spaces socially. The unproblematic absence of homosexuality from sex education for some individuals conveys the banal routinization by which space can be
heterosexualised, but the actions of individuals such as Dennis demonstrate the possibility and proximity we always have to queer space.

This complexity and variation in school space was absent from previous research focusing on non-heterosexuality (Freitag, 2013; Schroeder, 2012), where the space of the school was treated either as a unitary entity or experiences were independent of the spatialities within. These studies have also tended to focus upon the relationships with and roles of adults within the school meaning the individualised and often conflicting nature of non-heterosexual experiences has been overlooked. In particular, the importance of differing ways in which heteronormativities are (re)produced and the spatialities of these practices. The processes by which heteronormativities were (re)produced was through policing, absence, certain masculine and hypermasculine performances and binary gendering.

The spatialities of policing were primarily the space outside the classroom and the changing rooms, particularly in grundskola. This policing was tied to the construction of and performance of certain masculinities that sought meaning, validity and hegemony through the denigration of non-heterosexuality. Heteronormative (re)production through absence was primarily experienced in the time-space of sex education, where othering and feelings of discomfort and abnormality were frequent. However, inclusion is not enough to negate othering, because the foundations of sex education were heterosexual. Since the heterosexual relationship was often the starting point inherently non-heterosexuality is othered and made abnormal.

Lastly binary gendering was integral to the (re)production of heteronormativities and subsequent marginalisation. Primarily through the physical space of the changing room and the time-space of physical education. However, it was not just the materiality of binary gendering, but also the discursive in terms of roles and performances fostered in certain spaces. This micro-geographical approach has unveiled the myriad of processes and practices that (re)produce heteronormativity and marginalise those who are non-heterosexual, and the this differs from previous literature (Schroeder, 2012; Valentine and Skelton, 2003; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2015) regarding non-heterosexual youth where marginalisation is focused upon in terms of policing of space by others. The multiple and intersecting practices and spatialities of heteronormative (re)production must be understood in order to develop and implement norm-critical policy and aspirations, and create a non-discriminate school environment.

Moreover, the school and the spatialities therein within children’s geographies had been located as important in youth’s subject-formation (Valentine, 2000) and as a space where normativities and narratives of difference were (re)produced (Ansell, 2002; De Vet, Waitt and Gorman-Murray, 2012; Thomas, 2005; Holt, 2007; Holloway, Valentine and Bingham, 2000). However, the sexual dimension of the spaces within the school had been neglected, meaning the findings of this thesis contribute to the micro-geographies of the school by underpinning the importance and in some cases primacy of sexuality in individuals negotiating of them.

The variable and inconsistent experiences of spaces such as the changing rooms, physical education, and sex education classes demonstrate that any norm-critical perspective should be grounded in the experiential and embodied knowledges of those it seeks to speak for. It is clear from the interviews that the fostering of even a liberal notion of homo-tolerance in schools is haphazard in application.

The resilience and strategies deployed by individuals displays a recognition and utilisation of agency that is often neglected in perspectives concerning not just non-heterosexual children and youth but children and youth in general (Savin-Williams, 2001; Vanderbeck, 2008). The performativity of youth exhibits how as beings they express power and agency and are not just affected and controlled by normative mechanisms (Cele and van der Brugt, 2015). Moreover, how these strategies were contingent on the micro-geographies of the school, in terms of the social processes, but also the dependent upon the composition of the physical spaces and time-spaces within.
5.1 Future Lines of Research

This incredibly modest foray into investigating non-heterosexual youth and the space of the school opens up a range of avenues where further investigation would be fruitful. Firstly, a notion of sanctuary/prison has been developed with regards to the experiences of non-heterosexual individuals. However, it is believed a more nuanced understanding of hegemonic masculine groups could be enabled through an application of this idea. The conveying of youth as a time of insecurity by participants means that a more-rounded understanding of the composition and construction of hegemonic groups could foster an insight to the comfort and discomfort and multiple masculinities at work within. This would further facilitate an understanding of the social (re)production of heteronormativities within the school.

A clearly complementary analysis would be offered through a focus on non-heterosexual female experiences of school, and an exploration of hegemonic femininities and contrasting strategies undertaken by individuals to negotiate differing normativities. Similarly, a focus on trans* individuals would highlight differing facets of heteronormativities, such as the functioning of cis-normativities within schools. Both would also contribute to queering our understanding of how masculinities and femininities are constructed and the false mapping of these onto sexed bodies. This further mapping of heteronormative school space if brought into dialogue with each other could highlight the gendered particularities of heteronormative spaces, and the functioning of them.

Another line of flight would be an investigation of the educational trajectories taken by non-heterosexual youth, and the variation of these in relation to coming-out narratives. The finding of participants’ perceptions of a progressive urbanism versus a rural backwardness seemed dependent upon their migration occurring due to attending gymnasium or finishing school completely. The increasing autonomy and selectivity of individuals in the spaces they inhabit perhaps falsely constructs this spatialised narrative of tolerance. Further research into the motivations and experiences of individuals through their educational trajectories can perhaps enhance an understanding of how these perceptions are formed.


6. References


---------- (2015) Sanctuary or prison: queer youth and the family, household and home, Social & Cultural Geography, 16(7), 783-797.


7. Appendix

7.1 Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. The audio for this interview will be recorded and transcribed and your name, names of others and specific places will be anonymised. If at any time you want to end the interview you can do so without an explanation. Also if afterwards you want any portions of the interview to not be used directly even when anonymised you just need to contact me. Information will be used for my master’s thesis, and a full transcript of the interview will not be attached.

2. Basic Info

Age. Preferred gender pronouns. Ethnicity. Occupation
Location of school (rural/peri-urban/urban)
School type (arts/mechanics/science; free school/private/state. Gymnasieskola Programme.

General: What did you think of school? Did you like it? Did you prefer a school?

School pathway and Sexuality

3. Do you think the school is a good environment for non-straight people generally?
   - What makes it positive/negative?
   - Was difference in sexuality treated in a certain way, is it accepted or discriminated against?
   - Did different levels of school or grades very?

4. At school did you feel constrained in the expression of your sexuality?
   - Did you change how you dress/present?
   - Could you be open about it to others?
   - Express and act upon desires in relationships (holding hands/showing affection)
   - What was your emotional reaction to this?

5. Did your sexual identity ever led to you being treated differently at school?
   - Were there spaces where you felt comfort or discomfort in particular?
5a. - General marginalization or at specific points?
   - Particular incidents you can remember
   - Forms discrimination takes, name calling, violence, made to feel abnormal generally
   - Particular spaces more likely to occur/safer spaces
     - Why these spaces, does layout of these spaces influence it
   - What your reaction to it is – neutral, confrontational, have safe spaces
   - Do others react, staff take action on discrimination, other students
   - How does this make you feel
     - Change rest of your day
     - Have you ever not attended school because of it

5b. - Times of day when this happens
   - Did you have preferred classes because they’re more welcoming
     - What made them more welcoming/others unfriendly to be in
   - Particular classes some better than others, P.E., religion, sex education – assumed dev of sexuality
M. Smith

- By teachers, other students, support staff – treatment by these three groups
  - Was it different to being at grundskola?

6. Would you say the typical day consisted of discrimination or marginalization or was it very variable?
  - What places do you go to in a typical day?
  - Did you avoid any particular spaces either not welcome, or not enjoyable?
  - Space you hang out prior to school
    - Who with
    - Enjoy this time
    - Did other students do the same

7. Was lunchtime a particular time when you experience being treated differently?
  - What form of discrimination, bullying, violence
  - Where did you go
  - Did you enjoy this time
  - Were there any places others generally went that you didn’t and why?
  - Did you change where you go over time due to incidents?

8. Did you do any after school activities?
  - Did you use to?
  - Would you have liked to?
  - Have you or did you know anyone discriminated against?
  - Particular activities more marginalizing than others?

9. Do you think school is different to the rest of society?
  - Relation to different spaces, more or less friendly, relative comfort/discomfort at home or in public places?

10. How would you prefer it to be? Are there ways heteronormativity can be reduced?

11. What particular term. If any, would you use to describe your sexuality?

12. What would you like your anonymised name to be?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add or emphasise?
7.2 Online Study Advert

Being non-straight at school

I am looking for non-straight individuals who are currently at or have attended gymnasieskola in the last 5 years in Sweden to participate in the project by being interviewed for around 30mins-1hr either in person or over skype (which will be anonymised).

In Sweden non-heterosexual individuals still regularly encounter discrimination in schools.

This is why I am researching how non-straight individuals experience school focusing on the gymnasieskola level for my Masters thesis in kulturgeografi at Stockholms universitet

If you are interested in participating or want more information you can contact myself via e-mail, Instagram or twitter.

You can also contact my supervisor Thomas Wimark on +46 816 4826 for more information.

Contact Matt Smith via

Instagram: @queerying_sverige
Twitter: @queerying_swe
E-mail: matthewcsmith00@gmail.com
7.3 Smaug’s Drawing of the Layout of the School