FEELING HOMOPHOBIA: THE EFFECTS AND AFFECTS OF INEQUALITY

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OUT/IN FRONT

Is a study seeking to better understand the experiences of LGBTQ teachers in Australia, pilot took place in Victoria between April-July 2013
SCHOOLING AUSTRALIA

Education in Australia is split into 3 major sectors:

1. **Public education:** Run by state governments, open schools that accept any student from a catchment area. Teach to the state (in transition to a national?) curriculum.

1. **Catholic education:** Low(er) fee schools run by the state Catholic Department of Education. Teachers employed at Catholic schools have to sign a disclaimer that they will, in school, uphold the ‘Catholic ethos’ of the school.

1. **Private education:** High(er) fees, can afford facilities that public and Catholic schools cannot.

**ALL Australian school sectors receive government funding**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMeyCrZZUA8
LGBTQ RIGHTS IN AUSTRALIA

Federal vs. state-based legislation complicates Australian social policy:

• Sexual activity between men decriminalised nationally in 1997

• Age of consent for sex between men and heterosexuals equalised in 1992

• Gay men and lesbians able to serve openly in the armed forces since 1992

• Federal recognition of same sex partners – Gay marriage a political ‘hot potato’

• Rights of trans people complex, there is some form of gender recognition in all states and territories but no federal law
THE VICTORIAN CONTEXT

Australian education is a largely state-based enterprise

Fears over the suicide of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people prompted state-based intervention into homophobic/transphobic bullying.

No federal policy protecting LGBTQ teachers

Of all the states and territories, Victoria has the most substantial and supportive policies for LGBTQ teachers
SCHOOLING AND SEXUALITY

Most research in the field focuses upon the experiences of same sex attracted and/or gender diverse children and young people:


Or

Upon the content and delivery of sexuality education:

SCHOOLING AND SEXUALITY

Research findings and political lobbying have arguably led to an increasing awareness of same sex attracted and gender diverse young people in schools.
KEY VICTORIAN ORGANISATIONS FOR SSAGD YOUNG PEOPLE

**Safe Schools Coalition Victoria:** Funded by the Victorian Department of Education and the Victorian department of health
http://safeschoolscoalitionvictoria.org.au/

**Minus 18:** National support network for LGBT youth:

**Yglam:** Performing Arts Project for same sex attracted and gender diverse young people:
https://www.facebook.com/YglamPerformingArtsProject
HOWEVER...

Despite an incredibly supportive policy conditions, schools are still dominated by a heteronormative discourse:

• A particular, normative version of heterosexuality is the dominant, normalised and reified version of sexuality

• The LGBTQ subject continues to exist in schools within ‘spaces of exclusion’ (Foucault 1967)

• A marked presence that is often spoken into existence as other to the dominant heteronorm and is positioned as being ‘at risk’ rather than celebrated.
LGBTQ TEACHERS

Little research that has focused explicitly upon the experiences of LGBTQ teachers. Broadly, the research shows that to ‘be’ a LGBTQ teacher is to occupy complex terrain:

• The negotiation of tricky private and professional boundaries (Gray 2013; Hardie 2012);

• ‘Risky business of choosing visibility’ (Grace and Benson 2000);

• Complexities of understanding oneself as a ‘role model’ to same sex attracted young people (Khyatt 1997; Martino 2008; Rezai-Rashti and Martino 2010)
FURTHER COMPLEXITIES

• “There are few positive historical narratives from which [LGBTQ] teachers can draw” (Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013, 8)

• LGBTQ teachers are often viewed with a suspicion reserved for the criminally deviant (Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013; Rudoe 2010)

• Identifying as LGBTQ may be understood as being incompatible with the teaching profession (Renold 2005).
OUR KEY QUESTIONS...

Why is it that despite the increasing social acceptance of LGBTQ lives within Australia, coupled with state-based political initiatives that offer legal protection to LGBTQ citizens within the workplace, that stories of intolerance, homophobia, transphobia and institutional apathy remain?

Are LGBTQ teachers able to interrupt the dominant discourse of their workplaces? And is it up to them to do this work?
OUT/IN FRONT: THE PILOT

• Nine people identifying as lesbian, gay and queer interviewed between April – July 2013
• 5 currently teaching, 4 former teachers working in education
• Approached through a Facebook page, mailing list of an LGBTQ action group in Victoria and snowball sampling
• 5 females, 4 males
• 5 identified as lesbian, 2 as gay and 2 as queer
• 1 male was transitioning from female to male
• All classroom teachers (no managerial responsibility)

https://www.facebook.com/OutInFrontAustralia
OUR KEY FINDINGS

1. The importance of location: Socio-economic status, local community, supportive ‘microculture’ (Ferfolja and Hopkins 2013) within individual schools.

2. Most teachers in our study were unaware of legal protection or of school policies regarding inclusion generally and anti-homophobia specifically.

3. Teachers experienced homophobia and transphobia from both students and colleagues, school responses varied from apathy and ‘diversity fatigue’ (Thomas and Plaut 2008) to active support.

4. Negotiating private and professional worlds is complex business for LGBTQ teachers that encompassed political sensibilities, personal ‘comfortability’ and a feeling of duty.
HOW DOES THIS COMPARE TO THE ENGLISH CONTEXT?

• Urban/rural divide based less upon social class/socioeconomic status and more upon the perceived social and political conservatism of a schools’ location

• More explicit support from trades unions than in the Victorian context, but a different policy context

• Negotiating private and professional words is complex business for LGBTQ teachers (Gray 2010; Gray 2013; Rudoe 2010)
THINKING ABOUT THE DATA IN NEW WAYS

Although there is a paucity of research on LGBTQ teachers, much of the research comes to similar conclusions:

- The negotiation of tricky private and professional boundaries (Gray 2013; Hardie 2012);

- ‘Risky business of choosing visibility’ (Grace and Benson 2000);

- Complexities of understanding oneself as a ‘role model’ to same sex attracted young people (Khyatt 1997; Martino 2008; Rezai-Rashti and Martino 2010).

The Out/In Front data provides an empirical trigger point and invites us to extend our analysis.
THE AFFECTIVE TURN

Influenced by the work of Deleuze and Guattari

- Affect theory popular since 2000 in social sciences and humanities – exploring sensation in cultural formations
- Need to investigate and develop the notions of affect and emotion
- Part of the poststructuralist/feminist project, for examples see: Sara Ahmed, Anne Cvetkovich, Bronwyn Davies, Jessica Ringrose and Marg Sellers
Teachers in the Out/In Front study reinforced what we already know about the experiences of being an LGBTQ teacher but their articulations necessarily mean we need to turn to different theoretical resources to think about the effects and affects of inequality and the idea that “we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one” (Ahmed 2004).
THIS PRESENTATION FOCUSES ON THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

Normativity and otherness as written on the body: the effect of inequality

Affective inequality

Political depression

Altering the ‘chain of meaning’ (Youdell 2011)
Jodie is 34 and identified as gay female, has worked for two years in the same school (1st job after graduating). It is a secondary public school in a semi-rural location outside of Melbourne. Jodie is a classroom teacher and teaches art and design/metalwork.

Michael is 35 and identified as male gay/queer. He taught literacy for four years in secondary public schools in an Indigenous community in remote Northern Territory and at an inner urban school in Melbourne. Michael is no longer teaching but works in education.

Ned is in his 20’s and identified as male and queer. He has worked for four years (since graduating) in a secondary public school in an outer urban suburb of Melbourne. He is the year 10 coordinator. At the time of interview Ned was transitioning from female to male.
NORMATIVITY WRITTEN ON THE BODY

Well normal is, if you’re a female […] having acrylic nails, career is certainly not at the forefront at all, it’s more getting maybe some kind of job but really just getting a man […]. If you’re a male, it’s certainly what trade are you in, who’s your wife, do you have a sexy wife, what car do you drive (Jodie).

Very low socioeconomic status individuals in this area. There are exceptions but majority are…the great Aussie battler […] they’re not overly academic in any way. They are here mostly for the socialisation process […] there’s a lot of social problems in this school. There’s continuous homophobia, there is continuous racism, sexism especially in my department (Jodie).
I was playing substitute teacher for a class and there were a group of year nine science boys, practical science, all boys in the class [...] I started writing something on the board, I asked one of them to come up the front and write something on the board and ‘dyke’ was written on the board. So at that point I actually walked out and I had the class taken over [...] that’s probably the most uncomfortable I’ve ever felt because there was a gender imbalance and that had a huge impact. I was feeling like there’s nothing I can do in this situation, (I felt) helpless, completely helpless (Jodie).
AFFECTIVE INEQUALITY

Sexual orientation involves bodies that leak into worlds; it involves a way of orienting the body towards and away from others, which affects how one can enter different kinds of social spaces (Ahmed 2004, p.145)
MICHAEL

Being at the school here in Melbourne, teaching there was, yeah, very much triggering a lot of stuff from my own experiences as a student at school and homophobia that I dealt with at school growing up and being in the closet before coming out I suppose. Well it’s amazing how automatic that stuff is as well and at the time you are just doing it […] it is very much you are just compelled to and you are not necessarily thinking about how much energy you are expending to kind of keep that performance up.
The sense that customary forms of political response, including direct action and critical analysis, are no longer working either to change the world or to make us feel better (Cvetkovich 2012, p.1)
I definitely put off taking hormones because I was afraid of what would happen, and I didn’t want to give up teaching […] And I think that publicly transitioning, as painful as it like is in an ongoing sense at work, is like something that’s going to affect the kids that I come into contact with. And so yeah, I mean, making the decision to stay with teaching despite it being not the easiest decision to make, yeah, is definitely influenced by that sort of belief.
I was never worried about (the students’) reaction. [...] I gave them permission to ask questions as long as they were respectful and that kind of thing. And it’s been fantastic [...] mean, they all call me Mr.________ and use male pronouns, and even if they slip up, they’re not – they’re not bad about, like – when staff members slip up, they tend to be really like make it, it’s all about them. It’s all about, “I’m so sorry, I’m trying, it’s just so hard,” that kind of thing. Whereas with kids, they’re like, “Sorry,” “Oh, all right.” And just, let’s move on (Ned).
CONCLUSIONS

• In spite of policy that protects LGBTQ teachers within the state of Victoria, in some schools LGBTQ issues are still being addressed within their schools within a reactive paradigm, due to direct and explicit homophobia

• Schools cannot be safe spaces for young people if they are not safe spaces for adults

• Gender and sexual identities need to be understood in all their complexity within social institutions such as schools in order for us to fulfil our potential as questioning, learning and knowledgeable beings
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

We need to re-think the way in which we ‘do’ diversity education in schools and to create a new educational space:

It is a semi-formal space that is physically accessible, welcoming and comfortable; it is a space of listening, exploration and openness; it is a space of dialogue where consensus and disagreement are both important, where uncomfortable truths are spoken and where the intolerable is named and responded to; it is a space where there is time for and interest in children and young people’s lives, ideas experiences, feelings, imaginings and hopes [...] it is a space where feelings of all sorts [...] are not simply allowed but are acknowledged as a vital part of living and learning (Youdell 2011, p. 143).
“There’s only one thing more powerful than evil, and that’s us” (Buffy Summers 2003)

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