Chapter 11
Epistemic Violence Towards LGBTQ Students in Icelandic High Schools: Challenges and Opportunities for Transforming Schools

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Introduction

Iceland has often been depicted as a progressive society regarding the issues of gender equality and sexual diversity. According to the latest European Values Survey (2008) and the World Value Survey (2015), the country has been ranked among the highest in Europe in its acceptance of sexuality and gender minorities. Gender equality is also ranked highly, at least according to the latest report by the World Economic Forum (2019). With regard to legal frameworks and protections for sexual and particularly gender minorities, Iceland has not been among the top 10 countries according to the latest ILGA Europe ranking (see ILGA Europe, 2019). This indicates a disjunture in terms of attitudes and social values towards sexual and gender minorities, and the actual legal protection and policy enactment for them. In the educational sphere this appears to be the reverse. Queer theory and non-heterosexuality, are included in the National curriculum guides from 2011, both for compulsory and upper secondary schools (Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, 2011). In these policy documents the emphasis is on inclusion and that schools should accommodate different identity categories such as ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. In spite of these progressive policies, teacher education and training programs have failed to follow suit. Few courses are offered which specifically address diversity and current pedagogical approaches appear to (re)produce hegemonic values and cultural norms. Furthermore these courses are not required as part of teacher education. Progressive policy at the school level has therefore not been translated into action and enactment in schools and educational settings. Moreover, LGBTQ students and teachers are not visible in schools and educational institutions.

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Y. Odenbring, T. Johansson (eds.), *Violence, Victimisation and Young People*, Young People and Learning Processes in School and Everyday Life 4,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75319-1_11

This indicates that within the educational sphere, non-heterosexuality and gender diversity is silenced. Such silencing of particular knowledges and subjectivities is defined in this study as epistemic violence towards particular marginalized groups.

In this chapter, our aim is to discuss the concept of epistemic violence and how it can be applied when evaluating how LGBTQ students and their realities continue to be excluded within Icelandic educational spaces, specifically in the context of upper secondary schools (high schools). We pose two questions: How is epistemic violence produced and (re)produced within educational institutions, the high school? In what ways do LGBTQ students resist it by claiming a discursive counter-space? We draw on interviews with eight students – age 18–20 years old, coming from middle-class backround and being white – who identify as LGBT/queer to draw attention to how they are silenced within educational spaces, defined here as both physical (classroom and school spaces) and non-physical (classroom curriculum and textbooks), through institutionlized epistemic violence, by which institutions silence and ignore the voices of the queer Other. The interviews were taken by the first author as a part of a larger ethnographic dataset. The students stories presented in this chapter were selected as they exemplify and illustrate how epistemic violence is structured within an upper secondary school setting. After having read and re-read the narratives as they appear in the interview data, we thematized them and coded according to the type of epistemic violence (exclusion, smothering, silencing, misrecognition) described/narrated and where it took place. After that we used narrative analysis to obtain a deeper understanding of the workings of power and oppression depicted in the stories and which subject positions could be detected in the narratives (Frost & Ouellette, 2011; Squire et al., 2014). Furthermore, we draw on queer theory for our analysis, which provides a theoretical framework and perspective both for teachers and researchers in order to bring about changes and to transform education to meet all students needs. This is particularly important within educational contexts where the values of the dominant class and culture are often reproduced and forced upon the "other" (Levinas, 1989). By viewing and analyzing the data in this way, the narrative and the narrative subject within it are constituted by their subject positions which then draw on discursive resources available at the time (Foucault, 1978). The subjects' (the students) stories illustrate the complexity of the relationship between social and school policies and the impact they have on their lived experiences thereby reflecting their experiences within the dominant cultural constructs and allowing us to better understand how subjects are silenced or experience epistemic violence in a school and classroom setting (Fraser, 2004; Fraser & MacDougall, 2017).

Our chapter begins with a discussion of epistemic violence as a concept with a particular focus on how the experiences of marginalized groups, such as sexual and gender minorities, are discursively and institutionally silenced and excluded. In our findings, we provide a several concrete examples of how institutionalized epistemic violence in school and educational settings presents itself. We then discuss ways in which we can possibly encourage and enact changes to transform schools in order to make them more inclusive in terms of diversity, thereby nurturing epistemic justice instead of epistemic violence.

Epistemic Violence

Michel Foucault in his work explored the relationship between power and knowledge, which he bound together with the French term *le savoir-pouvoir* (Foucault, 1978). According to Foucault, power is based on knowledge and in fact uses knowledge to put power into practice or enhance it. Power also produces and reproduces a particular knowledge that can be understood as hegemonic or dominant. In fact, the ruling classes have both in the past and present produced and reproduced particular knowledges or epistemologies in order to convey a particular understanding of the world, which benefits them. One manifestation of this is the colonial system (both past and present) of oppression, which reproduces particular knowledges of the "colonized other" as an object of investigation. At the same time, it defines what kind of knowledge is considered legitimate and constitutive of the dominant epistemological system, which is shaped by and for the dominant classes. Everything outside of the dominant epistemological system is rendered invisible, excluded from the reality, and remains unnamed. In other words, the dominant or hegemonic knowledge of the elites i.e. the ruling classes has through the interrelationship of power-knowledge silenced the "other."

One example of this is how the language of the dominant group and the means of conveying knowledge, and communicating, excludes those that do not belong to the "in-group" and renders them on the margins of the epistemological system. The Indian literary theorist Gaytari Spivak (1994) in her seminal essay "Can the subaltern speak" raises the issue of exclusion and silencing of those in society who are marginalized and powerless, referring particularly to the "colonized other." Titling such silencing epistemic violence, Spivak argues it is inflicted on marginalized groups through the dominant knowledge or epistemological systems and (re)produced by the ruling classes. Hence, epistemic violence entails silencing or erasure of knowledges that do not fit into the dominant or the official epistemologies, which are often rooted in Western worldviews and epistemological traditions. This kind of violence is "exerted against and through knowledge" (Galván-Álvares, 2010), and is manifested in laws, educational policies and curriculum. Through this kind of violence, certain epistemological traditions and knowledges gain legitimacy and reinforce the dominance and privileges of particular groups, most often being white, heterosexual and Western. Paulo Freire (1996) refers to this form of epistemic violence as "cultural invasion," in which the dominant group imposes "… their own view of the world upon those they invade …" (p. 133).

With regards to the study presented in this chapter silencing gender and sexuality outside of the predefined norms within educational settings and in the curriculum is one aspect of epistemic violence. Kristie Dotson (2011) refers to this kind epistemic silencing as testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. Testimonial quieting occurs when a person is not acknowledged as a knower[1] because they

[1] In the context of this article, the knower is someone who is the keeper of knowledge, understanding and experiences and can give account of such knowledge in an understandable fashion. (Dotson, 2012; Fricker, 2003).

belongs to a particular social group and/or lacks credibility as a knower. Miranda Fricker (2007) uses the term *testimonial injustice* for this kind of epistemic violence in which "… someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower" (p. 20). This kind of injustice is often connected to particular identity categories, whether racial, sexual or gendered identities. As Fricker (2007) has argued this kind of epistemic injustice is a matter "credibility deficit" (p. 21) in which marginalized identities are not given the opportunity to speak about their experiences and thus participate in the knowledge production. The "credibility deficit" arises from power imbalances, which according to Fricker is "directed at a person or a group that has marginalized position in terms of power" (p. 21). Epistemic injustice based on "credibility deficit" is therefore relational as it depends on the situation and the given context. For example, some groups might be constituted as "deficit" in terms of credibility in some context (e.g. within educational settings) but not in others (e.g. in their homes or amongst their peers). What is important here and emphasized by Fricker is that epistemic injustice is connected to prejudices and should therefore be understood as systematic and institutionalized. In that sense systematic testimonial injustice reproduces social injustice based on particular identity categories.

Testimonial smothering, according to Dotson (2011), occurs when the "marginalized other" experiences lack of understanding from the targeted audience. They are not perceived as a subject of knowing and their experiences, background, and culture are perceived as irrelevant to the knowledge system or to knowledge production. Thus, in order to "fit" into the dominant epistemological system the "marginalized other" may "smother" their own testimony or embodied experiences and in that sense silence themselves (Dotson, 2011). For example, epistemic quieting and smothering occurs when queer students do not draw on their experience or can act and behave openly with regards to their gender/sexual identity, when interacting with the dominant culture or institutions, because they know that the audience will not understand their embodied experiences, due to ignorance or lack of education/training, and thus not listen to their arguments. In that sense, the queer other has censored themselves due to lack of epistemological diversity and is thus victimized through the workings of epistemic violence. In this context, they have been excluded from the knowledge community as their epistemic oppression is reproduced. Thus, epistemic exclusion and oppression are manifestations of epistemic violence, which then become institutionalized or systematic within many public institutions, as Fricker (2007) has argued, due to lack of diversity in the production of knowledge. Many LGBTQ students often lack sufficient epistemic resources, those which form the basis of the dominant epistemological system. This is true whether it pertains to the institution of heterosexuality or particular gender performances that are dominant and normalized within particular context. This limits their full participation on an equal basis in the knowledge community and further contributes to their marginalization.

Drawing on Fricker, regarding the harm inflicted by epistemic injustice and violence we argue that: Through epistemic violence the subject, the marginalized other, is undermined as a knower and thus they are perceived as less than fully human.

They are excluded from the knowledge community and depicted as "deficient" in terms of epistemic trust and credibility. These subject positions are thus reproduced discursively and become institutionalized. The "marginalized other" and the "abjected knower" often internalize the epistemic injustice inflicted upon them and starts to believe that they have no worth or value as a knower. They begin to agree with their oppressors that their knowledge is not as valid or important as the hegemonic one and they thus unwittingly participate in their own epistemic oppression. Such internalized prejudices/oppression are similar to what Fanon (1967) considers internalized racism and way that the black persons internalize the value system and attitudes of their oppressor, white Western society. In the case of LGBTQ students, iternalization of the value system and attitudes of the oppressive society, can lead to internalized homophobia/transphobia.

Education as a Site of Epistemic Violence

Education and more specifically schools are a place where "truth" and the master narratives are taught to the detriment of other groups (Gillborn, 2006; Gilroy, 2008). Institutions of education often position themselves as objective disseminators of knowledge. Since Paolo Freire (1968) penned *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* scholars such as bell hooks and Henry Giroux (to name a few), have explored how and in what ways modern education has used the language and power of normalization to label and control those who do not conform to the educational expectations. Critical theories, such as critical race theory, critical pedagogy, and queer theory, question and problematize such claims in light of the hegemonic status of what is taught and what is silenced (Ayers et al., 2008; Britzman, 1995; Gudjonsson, 2018; Noguera, 2008; Pollock, 2005). Critical education scholars argue that rather than seeing the educative space as neutral where the teachers impart knowledge to their students, teachers need to see their students for who they are and what they bring to the school setting in ways that enrich and empower all students. Giroux (1997), Kinshloe et al. (2011), Anyon (2014) among others argue that it is important to see how power and knowledge interact in the creation of the educational sphere and how these create a right way and a wrong way of knowing and thereby commit epistemic violence throughout the teaching and learning process. These theories draw attention to how schools and educational institutions transfer traditions and knowledge of the dominant class/groups within societies, which more often than not revolve around whiteness, heterosexuality, cis-gendered subjectivities, and middle-class values (Brantlinger, 2003; Francis, 2017; Greteman, 2018; Lareu, 2003).

In her seminal works *Teaching to transgress* (2013) and *Teaching community: Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks encourages readers to move beyond their epistimologies and understandings of what teaching, learning and education are, to understand how these systems and institutions actually affect the learning experiences. She and other encourages teachers and pedagogs to see their students as individuals

who have and maintain their own identities that need not be left behind when entering the school. In order to do this work however, teachers and school administrators must become aware of how power and certain types of knowledges are privileged within their own lives as well as with in the schools and within the educational system as a whole. Thus these theories require that teachers as agents of knowledge transmission need to be aware of their values and views in order to counter every day epistemic violence towards marginalized students. This is especially salient as they themselves are often white, heterosexual, cis-gender, and come from middle-class homes (Hagerman, 2018; Tatum, 2007). In order to bring into the discussion the silenced and minimized narratives, educational workers and researchers need to actively question what is seen as normal and mainstream, and develop students' ability to critically examine what they are taught, so they can make informed decisions both within an educational context and a more national and global context. Teachers need to draw attention to dominant narratives and how they can be deconstructed in the classroom, but also emphasize the need to nurture counter narratives, those of the silenced and marginalized (Helmer, 2016; Mirza, 1997).

Epistemic Spaces and Power at the Micro Level of Interactions

Our analysis and findings indicate that epistemic violence towards LGBTQ students is sustained and committed within different schools spaces, both physical and non-physical, formal and informal. We define these spaces as *epistemic spaces* where particular knowledges/epistemologies are (re)produced, more than often in line with the dominant *episteme* of society. Within these spaces certain knowledge and truth are constituted as legitimate and are made visible and available, while those assumed to be on the margins are silenced and othered. Through focusing on the *epistemic spaces* of the classroom, the locker room, and and the interpersonal/communicative space between the self and the other, we draw attention to the workings of power at the micro level. How power is inscribed on the bodies and actions/practices of students who do not "fit" in and they are marginalized either because of their sexuality or gender expression is illustrated within the students stories. Within these *epistemic spaces*, particular epistemologies with regards to sexuality and gender are (re)produced and sustained. In this section we begin by exploring the classroom.

The classroom

The participants' narratives illustrate clearly that the dominant epistemology within the classroom in terms of gender and sexuality is consititued within the matrix of heterosexuality. For these students the classroom was experienced as a

heteronormative space where heterosexual and cisgendered bodies are privileged and depicted as the norm. Other sexualities and gender identities are excluded and even silenced, which we interpret here as epistemic violence. As the students revealed this was evident in the curriculum and content of sex education, most textbooks, as well as how teachers interacted with their students and delivered their lessons. Dani, who identifies as a bisexual cisgender woman, shares how she experienced epistemic violence during a language class in German at her school:

> I once turned in a German assignment where we were supposed write about what we had been doing during the weekend. I wrote that I had gone on a date with a girl. I used some girl's name for her and female pronouns. However, when I got the assignment back, my German teacher had changed all of this into a male form. I went to her after the class and told her that these had not been mistakes. She realized quite quickly that she had unwittingly expressed some prejudice.

In Dani's story the German teacher clearly draws on the dominant epistemology of heterosexuality in her assumption that Dani is heterosexual. By correcting the gender pronouns in the story of her weekend date with a girl, the teacher denies Dani recognition, which is, as the philosopher Charles Taylor (1994) notes, a "vital human need" (p. 26). Dani's experience and sexual identity are silenced or "grammatically corrected", and she is excluded from the dominant knowledge community of the classroom. She is unvalued as a subject of knowledge, because of her marginal sexual status. This kind of misrecognition and assumption on the part of the teacher that all or most students are heterosexual is a form of epistemic violence and injustice, which reproduces and sustains "compulsory heterosexuality" and "heteronormativity" within the classroom (e.g. Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Rich, 1980).

Dani refuses to be silenced, and rather than smothering herself she confronts her teacher by pointing out that she did not make "grammatical" mistakes, but that the words were deliberate choices based on her sexuality. Through this Dani expands the grid of intelligibility in regard to her sexuality within the classroom.[2] Her protest is an act of resistance against the heteronormative discourse and compulsory heterosexuality of the classroom. Although Dani identifies as bisexual, and therefore outside of the heteronorm, she speaks from a privileged position, as she comes from a white middle class family. She is quite active in the queer movement in Iceland and has received training on how to respond to homophobic bullying and heterosexist views. This knowledge and these resources made it easier for her to resist and allow her to confront her teacher by pointing out the epistemic violence and injustice she experienced. The teacher admits that she had unwittingly expressed some prejudices after confronted by Dani which draws attention to the possibilities of resistance. However, not all students have the courage or the epistemic resources to resist

[2] Grid of intelligibility was coined by Michel Foucault in relation to power and social relations. In terms of sexuality and gender, to be an intelligible sexual or gendered subject is to fit within the range of existing norms about sex, gender and sexuality. Thus, to fall outside the grid of sexual/gendered intelligibility is to be classified as alternative, abnormal, and in some cases a social threat.

the dominant discourse by which epistemic violence is sustained without being challenged. This can be identitfied in our next story.

Tom, who identifiifes as a gay cisgender man, also experienced epistemic violence and injustice during classroom lessons. Unlike Dani in the previous story, he does not have the tools to counter it:

> I get quite angry when other people say this word, *hommi* [fag, homo]. Once, one of my teachers said this word when we were talking about the HIV [human immunodeficiency] virus. She was talking about how HIV is more likely to be transmitted through anal sex, and she then used the word *hommi*, to give example of that kind of sexual practices. It hurt my feelings. I should have said something but I did not. I just did not have the courage to do it.

The application of the word hommi usually does not connotate a negative meaning in Iceland and in the beginning of the 1980s gay men claimed this word as their own. Queer and gay activists have since then retooled and used hommi as a means to disrupt and/or expand the grid of intelligibility for constituting sexual minorities. However, during the past decade, hommi has also been used derogtatively, especially amongst young men to shame and police the gender performances and practices of their peers. Tom, as he revealed in the interview, had previously experienced this kind of bullying, being called hommi in the past, because he was somehow thought to be different. Thus, when he hears the word hommi being used by his teachers and in connection to a rather sensitive topic, the negative experience of the past comes to haunt him. In that sense, Tom's story indicates that the use of the ambivalent word hommi and by whom and in what circumstances still depends on the epistemic context. Furthermore, the topic of HIV/AIDS remains rather sensitive for those belonging to sexuality or gender minorities, as it is still used to stigmatize and marginalize, ever since the pandemic broke out. Using the word hommi instead of the more neutral and official word samkynhneigður in connection to this particular topic., Tom felt stigmatized, having what Eva Hoffman (2004) defines as indirect knowledge, about the high fatality of the early years of the pandemic. Tom inherited this indirect knowledge through intergenerational narratives which circulate within the gay community and are also conveyed in the media and films. This knowledge affects his responses and feelings when the teacher associates the words hommi, often used negatively to shame and discipline, and HIV/AIDS.

The teacher, as Tom explained, was unaware of his sexuality, however with her choice of the word hommi in discussing the pandemic, she invoked some negative feelings. At the same time, by using gay men as an example of a high risk group and more likely to contract the virus in contemporary Western societies, she was unwittingly drawing on the past pandemic discourse which depicted HIV/AIDS as "gay disease. At the same time other groups that have been affected by the HIV pandemic were silenced, particularly heterosexual women in the global south. Thus, this lesson left Tom feeling further marginalized and excluded, both reminding him of past experiences of homophobic bullying but also because of how the teacher conveyed what can be understood as *sensitive knowledge* about the HIV/AIDS pandemic, silencing some affected groups while marginalizing others. His first reaction was to complain about this behavior to the school authorities, but he never did, saying that

he did not have the "courage" to do so. As a result, he neither spoke up in class nor confronted his teacher with his discomfort and her misinformation on these issues. He clearly does not feel he has the same resources as Dani. Perhaps, Tom thought that if he did complain, no action would taken by the school authorities. However regardless of his reasons for not confronting his teacher and standing by and saying nothing, he smothered his feelings and *inherited knowledge* about the pandemic. He assumed, that it would not matter or change anything. For him the epistemic space of the classroom was exclusionary as it failed to include other epistemologies outside of the heterosexual grid. Such marginalization, exclusion, and epistemic violence, was also a topic addressed by other participants in our study.

Several students provided examples of how they experienced the classroom space, different subjects and lessons at their school as spaces of heteronormativity and the marginalization of queer experiences across curriculum content areas:

> Once in sociology my friend told me that our teacher had spoken negatively about trans people when the topic was about "deviation" and he used a rather bad word to describe them, using *kynskiptingur*, instead of more neutral word *trans.* [Vala, transgender girl, bisexual]

> It is interesting because in history we always talk about heterosexuality but I know that there is more to it than that. The Romans and the Greeks, during that time same-sex sexuality was not seen as something bad. [Gabirel, gay, cisgender man]

> If we talk about sexuality in class we most often focus on heterosexuality, for example in sociology or history. I think there should be an equal discussion, talk about queer issues as well. [Hreinn, gay, cisgender man]

These exerpts demonstrate how the dominant epistemology of heteronormativity is produced and sustained within the epistemic space of the classroom, and across the curruiculum in for example during sex education, sociology and history classes. Sex education is a good example of how heterosexuality is constructed as the norm, and thus given more epistemic space during lessons and in the learning material. Sex educagtion is most often incorporated into life skills classes (lessons) which are obligatory for all first year upper secondary school students in Iceland. As Gunnar, who identifies as a gay cisgender man, recounts, the dominance of heterosexual epistemology during sex education lessons has the effects of marginalizing other sexualities, which are then only referred to in connection to some "deviant behavior" (as in some sociology textbooks) or when discussing diseases such as HIV/AIDS. "My feeling is that because non-heterosexual sex is not talked about in sex education then it somehow becomes strange and unatural, even for some disgusting". Thus, it is somehow assumed that "badness" and unhappy existence are inherent in the lives of the sexual other, producing an image of the "sick" and "abnormal" subject. As Gunnar mentions, this particularly comes to the surface during sex education, whereas heterosexual sex practices are discussed and depicted as normal while non-heterosexual sex is silenced, not talked about, as it does not exist. "In sex education we mostly talk about sex between man and woman. If they mention something about gay sex it is in connection to HIV and that we [meaning the gays]

should use condom" [Gunnar]. Gunnar furthermore, assumes that the exclusion of any discussion of non-heterosexual sex makes it "disgusting" for some.

Sara Ahmed (2004) has pointed out, that disgust "is clearly dependent upon contact" and "involves a relationship of touch and proximity between the surfaces of bodies and objects" (p. 85). Accordingly, students need to be exposed to an object of disgust to become disgusted, and some objects or actions are constructed as more disgusting than others. Thus, by incorporating a discussion about disgust in regards to gender/sexuality into their classroom curriculum, gives teachers opportunity to deconstruct "disgust" and discuss different way of doing and enjoying sex. However, this kind of approach or perspective is not encouraged, as the current Icelandic sex education curriculum, focuses on protective or preventive measures which silence any discussion of non-heterosexual sexual practices, through assuming that particular aspects of human sexuality should not come into close contact with the surfaces of the heterosexual and normal bodies of the students. Through the erasure of the others bodies, epistemic violence is committed, not only towards LGBTQ students, but in fact all students irrespective of their sexuality or gender identity, as they are denied knowledge and understanding, because it does not fit into the dominant classroom epistemology. This is also the case in other subjects (lessons), such as history and sociology. During lessons and in the learning material LGBTQ students are unable or prohibited from drawing on their background and personal experiences. Students often feel excluded as there are no references to sexual or gender diversity in the curriculum (or textbooks). These gaps or exclusions emphasize that the dominant heterosexual epistemology becomes institutionalized even if it is most often not wittingly or purposefully pursued by individual teachers. However, there are exceptions as Vala mentioned, where some teachers overtly demonstrate transphobia and hateful speech about trans people or those who do not fit into the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990).

The Locker Room

Locker rooms and restrooms are found to be the most heteronormative and heterosexist spaces within schools (Atkinson and Kehler, 2010; Ingrey, 2012, 2013; Messner and Sabo, 1994). Within these epistemic spaces, hegemonic heterosexual masculinity/femininity is played out and institutionalized, not only in the practices and individual performances but also in the organization of these spaces (Kehler and Martino, 2007). These spaces are regulated and constructed on the basis of gender binaries and, as such, inscribe disciplinary power on gendered bodies that do not conform to the hegemonic gender regime. For trans/transgender students and other gender-non-conforming students, these spaces are experienced as hostile and problematic (Beemyn, 2003, 2005). "Locker rooms are always strange … I feel a bit awkward being there because I feel a bit as a woman in the men's locker room. I feel as if people are watching me" (Gabriel, gay cisgender man). In Icelandic secondary schools, locker rooms are generally gender-segregated, and as reported by LGBTQ

students in our study, can be a difficult place to navigate, because of the dominant heteronormative epistemology produced and sustained within that particular space. But what does that epistemology entail?

> When I am in the locker room I am always well aware of myself and others, and I try to look up into the ceiling or just down on the floor. I am always trying to not look directly at anybody because I don't want anyone to think I am looking at them. [Þorbjörg [Thorbjorg], a bisexual cisgender woman]

In the students' narratives some of the most common epistemic themes regarding the locker room are invoked. Firstly as Þorbjörg's story illustrated a locker room is a de-sexualized space but at the same time has the potential of becoming sexualized or eroticized. In fact, this is the inherent paradox of this particular space, and can make it difficult for bodies that identify and/or are read as queer to navigate at ease within it. They are seen as sexual predators entering this "de-sexualized" space, which they transform with their embodiment and presence the space into a *kjöthlaðborð* ("meat buffet"):

> For me the locker room is not some kind of *kjöthlaðborð*.[3] I do not feel at all better than someone else who is with me there. It is about nudity and taking shower and I just try to get it over with as quick as I can. [Dani, a bisexual cisgender woman]

Within this epistemic space of the locker room the cultural narrative of the "gaze" is enacted, cited and materialized; it becomes a buffet item. Naked bodies navigate this space trying to avoid any physical contact, keeping a distance, and avoiding direct eye contact, or looking, by either looking down or up, or simply not looking at all. The gaze and being an object of a gaze intersect with the feelings of shame at being naked, of exposing your bare body to others. The "gaze" is also at odds with the dominant epistemology of the locker room and should therefore be avoided.

Our participants stories indicate that they have genuinely internalized the cultural narrative of the "gaze" and tried to render themselves "invisible" to minimize any discomfort that their fellow students might feel. They describe feeling a bit awkward at being in the locker room, and expressed that they somehow did not belong there. Being naked and read as queer within the public space of the locker room made them vulnerable, as they became both objects and subjects of the gaze. Most of the student participants tried to minimize their queer bodies and/or censor their ways of being, when entering the locker room space in order to make their fellow students feel more comfortable. Thus, the epistemic space of the locker room (re)surfaced their bodies and made them smother themselves (Dotson, 2011). Their own existence and embodiment within that particular space became unintelligible. They felt the pressure to "fit" into the dominant epistemoglogy of the locker room, which values heterosexual and cis-gendered bodies.

Bodies that do not "fit" into the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) are rendered unintelligible in terms of gender and sexuality, and perceived as not belonging within

[3] Literally translated as "meat buffet" which has can mean a selection of bodies to admire and desire.

the epistemic space (i.e. in the context the locker room). These unintelligible bodies evoke affective responses of disgust and fear. These feelings arise from the dominant epistemology of the locker room and how queer bodies are (mis)understood and (mis)perceived within the epistemic space. This epistemology draws attention to the privileges accorded to white heterosexual cisgender abled bodies, thereby rendering the marginal other unintellegible within some epistemic spaces. Such reactions can lead to hate speech and overt manifestations of violence, both epistemic and interpersonal, such as homophobic bullying, as Tom so poignantly discusses:

> I went into the locker room and took a shower. I always go some minutes before the class finishes because I know that the guys don't feel fully comfortable having me around in this particular space. But this time, the class finished some minutes earlier and all the guys came into the locker room when I was coming out of the shower. I walked towards my clothes at the other end of the locker room and when I then turned around all the guys had left and I could see some running out of the locker room. I found a bit hurtful and degrading, but this is only ignorance, I know that, but still it was hurtful (Tom, a gay cisgender man).

Here, Tom draws attention to how he was excluded and bullied by his homophobic fellow male students, when they left the locker room after having seen him there half-naked. In leaving the other students indicate that this particular space was not his to occupy. For them, his presence was somehow a threat to the heterosexual/cisgender epistemology of the locker room. Tom's narrative also draws attention to how disciplinary power operates within such a epistemic space and how bodies that are on the margins are rendered unintelligible in terms of gender and sexuality. Tom makes this evident when he mentions how he self-censored his body and behavior, adapting to the space of the locker room by leaving class earlier for a shower in order not to disturb his fellow students with his queer presence. Through his and his fellow students actions, Tom becomes victim of epistemic violence, both by smothering and silencing his own epistemic existence as a gay identifying male, but also by not being recognized and acknowledged as subject within that particular epistemic space. At the same time, Tom excuses the bullying and homophobic behavior of his fellow male students, blaming it on ignorance, which is deeply embedded in the dominant epistemology of heteronormativity. Fine (2011) has argued that in order to cope and protect their selves, LGBTQ students sometimes minimize the effects of homophobic remarks and violence have on them, which is a strategy they use to adapt to heterosexist and/or hostile school environment. They often work to reduce their queer visibility as Tom did within the space of the locker room/PE class and do not openly confront homophobia or heterosexism.

Interpersonal Communication

The interpersonal or communicative space between the self and the other can be defined as an informal space within schools, consisting of social activities and interactions between students outside of the classroom. Within these spaces dominant

epistemologies in terms of gender and sexuality are sustained and (re)produced, and any "deviation" from the established norm can raise questions about the epistemology of the self:

> At first everybody thought I was gay, maybe because I behaved a bit girly. I felt bad about that and started to get more isolated and stayed more at home playing computer games. ... [After I came out as a trans-woman], I sometimes still hear that people at school are calling me gay behind my back. One guy for example asked my girlfriend why I could not just admit that I was gay, just like ordinary people! (Vala, a bisexual transgender woman).

Vala's narrative of the representation of her "new" gender identity, at least within the social context of her school, shows how it (her gender identity) did not fit into the grid of intelligibility. Her gender identity was not acknowledged by her fellow students, and in that sense her knowledge of the self was undermined.[4] She was not recognized by others as being a woman, which for her is important and part of her self-knowledge. "I find it very important that people see me as a woman, and I get hurt if people do not think of me as a woman. For me it really matters to be addressed as a woman. I find it so offensive if someone addresses me as a male." Thus through misrecognition and being undervalued as a subject of her own knowledge, she experienced epistemic violence in her interactions with fellow students. Within that epistemic space, and in line with the dominant cisgender epistemology sustained there, the category of a woman should fit the inherent gender logic where there is a complete match between biological sex and gender identity. Bodies that do not adhere to the strict gender regime are assumed to be outside of the norm, and disturb the logic of binary gender/sex categories even within informal spaces. In order to put Vala on the axes of gender binaries, her fellow students read her as gay male. The gay category was for some students seen as more "normal"—or at least less destabilizing than the transgender category, which fellow students had difficulty grasping. This led to her experience, even after she formally came out as a transgender woman, being addressed as male and thought of as being gay. To begin with this made her sad and she isolated herself. This isolation symbolized withdrawal of herself as a knowledgable subject and was an act of smothering her knowledge of the self, and censoring herself and her body in the presence of others.

Smothering was a common theme in the students narratives. Gunnar recounts how he had to smother himself as a subject of knowledge in terms of his sexuality: "What I found very difficult was the pressure, this underlying pressure. This pressure about talking openly about your sex life, it was not put forward directly by the kids; it was more underneath." Gunnar describes how he is excluded from the epistemic space where students interact and talk "openly about their sex life" because his self-knowledge does not fit into the epistemology of heterosexuality. "The kids at school talk very openly about their sex life [of heterosexual students] and of others and it was expected that I did the same. I couldn't do this, I couldn't participate

[4] Self-knowledge refers to knowledge of my own thoughts, beliefs, body, sensations etc.

in this kind of discussion, and I felt therefore somehow different, like I was less valued as a man" [Gunnar, a gay cisgender man]. He does not feel comfortable hearing the stories of his peers, about their imagined or real sexual practices or how their relationships with the opposite sex were developing.

This kind of knowledge makes him sad as he is constantly reminded that he is somehow different from his classmates, "less valued as a man". He cannot express his feelings or tell his fellow students about who he is, as he was still in the closet (he was not out to his school mates). He could not draw on his background and self-knowledge in his interactions with fellow students when sharing and expressing their feelings and thoughts regarding their sexual practices. Gunnar's final point that his felt "less valued as a man" is quite telling. It draws attention to how some knowledge or knowledgable subjects are more valued than others. As in the case of Gunnar, those who are not considered to be part of the dominant epistemologies, here in terms of sexuality, are made to feel that they are less valued as individuals. They are excluded and their self-knowledge is not valued or recognized within that particular epistemic space. This kind of exclusion becomes then even more obvious through homophobic remarks, made by some students in their interaction, as Dani illustrates:

> I sometimes hear some guys in my school say: ´You damn/fucking fag´[In Icelandic: helvítis hommi], to their friends, just as a joke. They think it's okey but they do not realize that maybe someone that is gay or lesbian might hear it too, maybe just walking past them or being closeby. Once I was walking past two girls talking and I heard them say that a girl is such a lesbian. I stop and said to them: 'Hey this is not right and you can hurt someone talking like this'. I don't like people using these words when they are used in this way. I mean it's okey to say that I am dyke or whatever to describe my sexuality but not to use these words to offend each other.

Dani describes here what C. J. Pascoe (2007) has called the *fag discourse* within educational settings. By drawing on that discourse in their interactions students are, wittingly or unwittingly, committing epistemic violence towards those who identify as LGBTQ. In using the signifier *fag* or *dyke* as an offensive words, with the intention of teasing someone or shaming them for some silly act, the speaker creates hierarchies and boundaries between those who are straight and "normal" and the ones that identify as queer/non-heterosexual. Through semantic extension, the *fag/dyke* comes to symbolizes something "bad" or even "silly". This "new meaning" (knowledge), which is constructed by the dominant group, draws attention to the power dynamics inherent in the process of knowledge construction and production. Those who are in the position of power and have the right resources or capital, whether cultural or social, produce knowledge in line with their interests. Dani draws attention to these power dynamics of the extended meaning of the words *fag* and *dyke* and how she feels violated hearing them used by her peers in a pejorative fashion. She goes on to explain that those who use the words *fag/dyke* are "stealing" (appropriating) her identity to offend others. By doing so they are neither respecting nor recognizing her as a knowledgable subject, and use their dominant position to construct new knowledge based on already marginalized identity categories.

Transforming Schools Through Pedagogy of Hope and Epistemic Justice

Through the use of power and knowledge the student experiences in this chapter indicate that discourse both in the more public spaces such as classroom and informal hallway settings as well as in the more private sphere of the locker room are exclusionary for LGBTQ students. These students experience epistemic violence at the hands of their peers and internalize the normative school and social expectations for behavior and self idenitification. For many students their school experiences are negated during a period of development that marks the most experimentation, yet LGBTQ students receive regular reminders that their bodies, desires and selves are unwelcome within the school context. They are expected to conform to the normative structures of the heterosexual cisgender binary that characterizes secondary school spaces. Many students are unequipped to respond to the demeaning, hateful homophobic discourse or gestures that they encounter, as Gunnar and Tom's stories clearly indicate, instead they retreat into themselves, accommodate other "normal"students needs and expectations. They make themselves less, sublimate their identities and experiences in order to not interrupt the heteronormative discourse of the schools. As a result they not only experience the epistemic violence of silencing at the hands of their peers and teachers, but they also learn to smother their own knowledge and sense of being in order to not stand out or become the victims of bullying or further exclusion. Other students, such as Dani, who had been active in the LGBTQ youth organization, showed more resistance and had the epistemic resources (vocabulary and activist training) to confront heteronormative discourse and violence. However, it needs to be emphasized, that by focusing on epistemic violence and how it is produced and experienced in different educational contexts, has some limitations. This kind of analytical focus can for example reinforce ´otherness'of particular subjects (Aboim, 2020) by reproducing and sustaining the dicsoure on victimhood. We are fully aware of that and in this chapter we both discuss and draw attention to how some LGBTQ students in Iceland experience and narrate about what is here defined as epistemic violence, but at the same time we give some examples of resistance and how it possible to counter this kind of violence. In that sense, we emphasize the importance of emancipatory pedaogy and anti-oppressive education (see Kumashiro, 2002), in order to make schools more inclusive and just as we will now elaborate upon.

In his work in the *Pedagogy of Hope*, and other works Paulo Freire discusses the concept of critical consciousness (conscientization, or *conscientização).* This concept requires that individuals reflect critically on their experiences to develop a critical understanding of the world and take a stand against oppressive language, behavoir or regimes. In the context of LGBTQ students in upper secondary schools this means engaging in resistance similar to that which Dani displays when she confronts her teacher regarding the use of "correct" pronouns. She also confronts her peers when she points out to them that they are (mis)using terms and

denigrating others by using terms that they have no right to use and which are demeaning. Dani of all the students in this study was able to do this because she had experiences and had received tutelage and support through a queer organization that helped empower her to speak up. However, in the school setting where the power resides with the dominant groups, i.e. the cisgender heterosexual students and the teachers, it is important to create this critical consciousness within the group so as to allow deeper exploration of gender, sexuality and the lived realities of all students.

Schools are places of power and deeply embedded epistemologies where certain knowledges are privileged over others. Yet schools are intended to be safe spaces of learning for all students. So the question remains how we can transform schools in order to counter epistemic violence and othering of marginalized groups? Franz Fanon (1967) provides us with ways to identify how epistemic violence, as we have discussed in this chapter, works within schools and how they problematize the "minoritized", and their "inability" to adapt to the dominant culture of schools, through the process of pathologization and medicalization (Sefa Dei & Simmons, 2010). Thus, in order to counter this view, teachers and researchers need to draw attention to the fact that it is not the minoritized, racialized or non-heterosexual individual or/and community who are pathologized or pathological, rather it is the system, the institution which needs to change. Thus the schools and the educational systems themselves constitute the problem and thereby commit and sustain epistemic violence (Sefa Dei & Simmons, 2010; Valencia, 2010).

As bell hooks (2013, 2014) argues, teachers and school staff must critically engage with their own epistemologies in order to dismantle their deeply held beliefs and understanding of both learning and the students with whom they engage on a daily basis. When this is done then lessons such as the one where the teacher describes HIV/AIDS incorrectly, as predominantly affecting homosexuals and silencing the historical struggle and the discourse of gay men, and women in the global south, would not have occurred. It is therefore important to show respect for the students' identity and personal lives which creates an understanding and accepting learning environment where they feel empowered to practice and develop based on their own experiences and drawing on their own knowledges. It is the role of an educator to help their students to develop as full fleged ethical beings, and while Iceland is quite forward in their acknowledgement of gender equity and supportive of sexual diversity, Icelandic upper secondary schools do not appear to be as supportive of all of their students as they can be. Regular training and open discussion among the staff as well as information for students is a critical tool to developing the critical consciousness that schools need in order to dismantle the hegemonic gender/sexuality discourse that continues to shape queer and LGBTQ students experiences. In other words, in order to transform education into an inclusive space for all students, we need focus on changing the institutions that reproduce and sustain the epistemology of the dominant culture.

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