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Heteronormativity in Norwegian Social Work Journals

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Abstract

The purpose of this review was to examine whether heteronormativity is reproduced or problematized within Norwegian social work journals. It is based on a study that explored how sexuality is addressed in social work journal articles and extends past reviews by also analysing heterosexuality. The data comprised of 572 articles published in the major Norwegian social work journals between 2002 and 2014. A keyword search and a thematic analysis was used to first determine how many articles addressed sexuality and second to develop a closer analysis of how sexuality was addressed in the identified articles. Queer theory guided the analysis. Findings revealed that heteronormativity was problematized in five of the six (1%) articles that addressed sexuality, indicating that heteronormativity is reproduced in Norwegian social work journals and that those in position in authority in the field of social work routinely deploy heterosexuality as a taken-for-granted resource. If power asymmetries are to be destabilized, strategies that counteract the power basis of the hegemonic norm are necessary, such as addressing the binary opposition of heterosexuality vs. non-heterosexuality, and naming heterosexuality.

Keywords: heteronormativity, sexuality, social work, queer theory, keyword search, thematic analysis

The Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers (FO) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) share the goal of preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012; Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers, 2014). Nevertheless, sexuality is marginalized, understudied, and under-theorized in social work education, research, and practice (Dunk-West & Hafford-Letchfield, 2011; Giertsen & Innjord, 2009; Hicks, 2005; O'Brien, 1999; Wilton, 2000), as evidenced by the scarce studies found that address sexuality in social work journals (Clark & Serovichs, 1997; Johnston & Stewart, 2013; Phillips, Ingram, Grant Smith, & Mindes, 2003; Scherrer & Woodford, 2013; Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2002). Queer theory, by which this article is informed, is a field of post-structuralist theory that emerged in the early 1990s, focusing on gender and sexuality categories. Important to queer theory, Foucault (1978) claimed, is that society produces different forms of knowledge, often in the form of various sciences to understand and talk about sexuality. Rather than liberating sexuality, these discursive formations work to construct and control sexuality. One important aspect of Foucault's research centers on the production of the homosexual: "We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized – Westphal's famous article of 1870 on 'contrary sexual sensations' can stand as its date of birth" (Foucault, 1978, p. 43). By demonstrating that *homosexuals* did not exist before, Foucault shows that social identities result from the way in which knowledge is organized (Namaste, 1996).

Social work is usually concerned with lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, and rarely with heterosexuality (Hicks, 2008b), reflecting the dominant position oppression models have in social work research, practice, education, policy, and advocacy work (McPhail, 2008). This view rests on a knowledge regime of binary categorizations, such as men/women, abled/disabled, wealthy/poor, and heterosexual/homosexual, in which the former groups are considered the privileged, and the latter groups, the marginalized or 'at risk' groups, receive special attention and concern (McPhail, 2008). Several scholars have pointed to how even the best intentions in work with sexual minorities reproduces heterosexuality as normative and preferred, and marginalizes non-heterosexuality (Hicks, 2008a; McPhail, 2008; Røthing, 2008), highlighting the need for sexuality studies within social work that include how heterosexuality is addressed.

Norway was early in enacting anti- and non-discrimination laws concerning sexuality. In 1981, Norway was the first country in the world to enact an anti-discrimination law, and in 1993, it was the second country in the world to enact a law on same-sex registered partnerships, which was replaced by a gender-neutral marriage law in 2008. Despite equality before the law, studies in Norway indicate that young Norwegians generally find it difficult and sometimes frightening to imagine themselves living a non-heterosexual life, therefore leading them to believe that suicide is still a reasonable reaction to having to face a future as a non-heterosexual (Hellesund, 2007; Røthing & Svendsen, 2010). The results of a recent national survey in Norway on attitudes towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans persons is consistent with these studies. A substantial proportion of those sampled, particularly men, had negative views when confronted with various statements: among men, 39% agreed that sex between men is simply wrong, 22% agreed that sex between women is simply wrong, and 24% agreed that gays are repulsive (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013).

Sexuality as Discourse

The idea of sexuality as something that is produced through discourse (i.e., forms of talk or regulated statements, and practices that produce “the objects of which they speak;” Foucault, 1972/2002, p. 54) draws on the shared notion in post-structural philosophy and queer thinking – that language shapes our perception of reality (Namaste, 1996).

In Western culture, sexuality exists as “a way of thinking that divides bodies, desires, and actions into a series of discrete ‘types’, such as ‘the lesbian’, ‘the gay man’, ‘the bisexual’, or ‘the heterosexual’” (Hicks, 2005, p. 142). As constructed ideas, these ‘types’ or labels are part of a discourse that regulates what can and cannot be known or said. Appropriately, Hare-Mustin (1994) stated, “We do not only use the language, it uses us. Language is recursive: it provides the categories in which we think” (p. 22). It is difficult (and sometimes impossible) to think in other than gender-specific terms, such as men, women, heterosexual, and homosexual. We can try to use other terms to signify the direction of attraction (Søndergaard, 1996), but often we translate them back to common-sense terms. From this perspective, language does not represent reality; it constructs reality by producing representations of reality (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999).

A Foucaultian view of discourse highlights the ways in which our use of language reflects hidden ideologies in regimes of truth (Egeland & Jegerstedt, 2008). With respect to sexuality, heteronormativity is the dominant discourse that permeates language, the way our society is organized, and suggests to us what has social value. Heteronormativity is defined in this article as “the institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organized as a sexuality – but also privileged” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548).

Queer theory explores how the dominant discourse of heteronormativity produces and reproduces the hegemony of heterosexuality (Seidman, 1997). There are three central features in the discourse of heteronormativity. First, heteronormativity is the cultural bias in favour of opposite-sex relationships. Heteronormativity sustains the dominant norm of heterosexuality by rendering the diversity of human sexuality invisible (Hudak & Giammattei, 2010). A similar process that upholds the privilege of heterosexuality is *othering*, in which heterosexuality “appears to be ‘normal’ and desirable in contrast to homosexuality as ‘the other’, not-normal, and unwanted by implication” (Røthing, 2008, p. 260). Second, as Hudak and Giammattei (2010) elaborate on, the silence around heterosexuality maintains it as the default position, which is a position of dominance and superiority. For example, the terms *couple* or *family* generally refer to heterosexual couples or heterosexual families. Other couples and families must be named *gay* or *lesbian* because otherwise they would be invisible. Within this heteronormative discourse, heterosexuality and heterosexual forms of relating are considered the norm. This maintains the illusion that only lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals have a sexuality and that it is unnecessary to examine heterosexuality. Third, central to a poststructuralist understanding of heteronormativity is how subjects are produced and reproduced in hierarchical binary oppositions, such as heterosexuals and homosexuals, men and women, normal and deviant, us and them (Butler, 1990). From this perspective, sexual minorities that are marginalized by society are not just victims of power, but they are also produced by power and are an intrinsic part of how societies organize themselves (Beasley, 2005).

There is no agreement within queer scholarship whether sexuality can be studied separately from gender. Butler (1990) insists on an analytical connection between gender and sexuality, whereas Sedgwick (1990/2008, p. 31) argues that sexuality and gender should be analysed separately. Although, it is true that the concepts of homo- and heterosexuality could not exist without the concept of gender, many other dimensions of sexual choice have no such definitional connection with gender. In this study, I follow Sedgwick and make an analytical distinction between sexuality and gender. Although I see gender and sexuality as empirically related, the focus in this study is on sexuality. Therefore, the operationalization of sexuality (see the Method section) does not include gender/transgender categories.

Current Study

In this article, I seek to explore how sexuality, including heterosexuality, is addressed in Norwegian social work journal articles. Social work journals were chosen because material covered in professional journals communicates what is important in the field. Professional journals can also be understood as footprints by which the development of knowledge in a discipline or a profession can be traced (Bush, Epstein, & Saintz, 1997, p. 46). Akin to Hicks and Watson (2003), I believe the journal articles themselves to be practices, not just theory which may or may not influence something called practice, and therefore worthy of study in their own right. The purpose of this review was to examine whether heteronormativity is reproduced or problematized within Norwegian social work journals. To the best of my knowledge, no studies have previously reviewed how sexuality is addressed in Norwegian social work journals. With this study, I sought to extend research into sexuality in social work journals to include a focus on heterosexuality. The aim of the study was to first determine how many articles addressed sexuality and second to develop a closer analysis of how sexuality was addressed.

Method

The Data

I conducted an analysis of articles published in the four (and only) peer-reviewed Norwegian social work journals between 2002 and 2014 that address Norwegian social workers: *Fokus på Familien [Journal of Family Studies]*, *Fontene Forskning [Fountain Research]*, *Nordisk Sosialt Arbeid [Nordic Social Work]* and *Tidsskriftet Norges Barnevern [Journal of Norwegian Child Welfare]*. The journal *Nordic Social Work*, which covers social work issues in the Nordic countries, was included because of its importance in the Norwegian social work context. This relates to similarities between the Nordic countries, both culturally and in relation to their welfare systems. Articles written by scholars dealing with questions in another Nordic country are therefore highly relevant in the Norwegian context as well. Peer-reviewed journals were included because they have impact both nationally and internationally on the professional social work community. Empirical articles and articles with an exclusively theoretical approach were examined ($N=572$). Editorials, book reviews, discussions, and comments were excluded.

Operationalizing Sexuality

Analysing the production and reproduction of sexuality *categories* is a core point of queer theory. Consistent with this, I operationalize the concept of sexuality into categories of

sexuality, such as bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, queer, and categories that designate a focus on sexuality, such as heteronormativity. In this article, I use the phrase *sexual categories* as shorthand for all of these categories.

Analytical Strategy

First, to determine how many articles addressed sexuality, a keyword search was conducted. The search included finding articles that addressed sexuality as a topic of the article itself, as part of the analysis, or simply (but importantly for the theory used in this analysis) to narrow the subject under study (e.g., *heterosexual* families). Articles in which sexuality was only sporadically mentioned, such as in a brief comment or in a footnote, were excluded. The search included Norwegian, English, Danish, and Swedish keywords because the four journals also publish articles in these languages. The keywords were *homo*, *hetero*, *seksuell*, *seksualitet*, *sexualitet*, *sexuell*, *sexual*, *bifil*, *biseksuell*, *biseksualitet*, *bisexual*, *queer*, *skeiv*, *gay*, *lesbisk*, and *lesbian*. Truncated versions of the search terms with a wildcard character to find all versions of the terms of interest were used, such as *hetero** to find all words that start with *hetero* (heterosexual, heterosexuality, heteronormativity, etc.). Full text electronic versions of articles from 2002 were available. This made it possible to do full text keyword searches of the articles (rather than searching only titles). When reporting the results from the qualitative data analysis, I present quotations to show how sexual categories are used in journal articles, followed by an analysis of how the quotations epitomize the themes.

Second, a thematic analysis was used to analyze more closely how sexuality was addressed in the identified articles. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6) and can be applied both inductively and deductively, at a semantic level and a latent level, by diverse theoretical approaches. A latent approach, which aims “to identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations - and ideologies ...” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 13) was chosen. Two themes as expressions of the latent content were defined based on whether the focus on sexuality could be understood to *problematize heteronormativity* or if it could be understood to *reproduce heteronormativity*. A clear pattern was present, in that, each article was easily subsumed under one of the two theme (regarding the way in which sexuality was addressed). When reporting the results from the qualitative data analysis, I present quotations to show how sexual categories are used in the journal articles.

Results

Keyword Search

The distribution of the 572 examined articles by journal resulting from the keyword search for sexual categories are presented in Table 1. For each journal, the number of articles, number of sexuality-related articles, authors’ names, year of publication, area of focus, and sexual categories used in the articles are listed.

Table 1

Articles in Norwegian social work journals between 2002 and 2014 that address sexuality

Journal	Number of articles	Number of articles addressing sexuality	Author(s), publication year and area of focus	Sexual categories used in the articles (in English)
<i>Fokus på familien [Journal of Family Studies]</i> (2002–14)	242	4 (1.6%)	Borell (2002), Household and family within family research.	Homosexuals, heterosexuals
			Finseth (2010), Drama-based pedagogical working methods.	Homosexuality, gay, homophobe, sexual <i>legning</i>
			Sheehan (2009), The concept of couple within the family therapy literature.	Sexual, homosexuals, gays, heterosexuals, heterosexuality, lesbians
			Øfsti (2008), The romantic discourse taken for granted in couples therapy.	Sexuality, heterosexuality, gays, lesbians, asexuality, heteronormativity
<i>Fontene Forskning [Fountain Research]</i> (2008–14)	76	0 (0%)		
<i>Nordisk Sosialt Arbeid [Nordic Social Work]</i> (2002–08)	163	1 (0.6%)	Fahlgren & Edvall (2006), Gender discourses in a social work textbook.	Sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, heteronormativity
<i>Tidsskriftet Norges Barnevern [Journal of Norwegian Child Welfare]</i> (2009–14)	91	1 (1.1%)	Thørnblad (2009), Public statements of new guidelines on choosing foster homes.	Gays, lesbians, heterosexuals, sexual <i>legning</i> , heteronormativity
<i>N=</i>	572	6 (1%)		

Sexuality was addressed in only six articles (1%). The *Journal of Family Studies* published the largest number of sexuality-related articles (four articles), whereas *Nordic Social Work*, and the *Journal of Norwegian Child Welfare* published one each. No articles in *Fountain Research* addressed sexuality.

Five of the found articles (i.e., Borell, 2002; Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006; Sheehan, 2009; Thørnblad, 2009; Øfsti, 2008) addressed sexuality in an extensive way, whereas one article (Finseth, 2010) addressed sexuality as part of the analysis. None of the articles narrowed the subject under study, e.g., *heterosexual* families.

The concepts of heterosexuality and homosexuality were used most often in the articles. Five of the six articles [all except for Finseth (2010)] used *homo** and *hetero** categories (i.e., homosexuality/homosexuals/gays/lesbians and heterosexuality/heterosexuals), whereas none of the articles used *bisexual**, *queer* or other sexual categories, such as *androsexual* (attraction to males and/or masculinity), *gynesexual* (attraction to women and/or femininity), or *pansexual* (attraction to members of all gender expressions). Finseth (2010) used several categories of *homo** (homosexuality, gay, homophobe), but did not use any *hetero** terms. Three articles used *heteronormativity* (Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006; Thørnblad, 2009; Øfsti, 2008) and two (Finseth, 2010; Thørnblad, 2009) used the term sexual *legning* (a Norwegian term for the biological or genetic foundation for a sexual orientation [Hegna, 2007]). Øfsti (2008) used the greatest variety of sexual categories. In addition to *homo** and *hetero** categories, Øfsti used *asexuality*.

Thematic Analysis

Of the six articles that addressed sexuality, the five articles that did so extensively (Borell, 2002; Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006; Sheehan, 2009; Thørnblad, 2009; Øfsti, 2008) questioned main notions of heteronormativity within the field of social work. Finseth (2010) was the only article to focus on homosexuality, and does not question heteronormativity.

Two articles problematized heteronormative assumptions relating to the concepts of household and family. Based on recent family research, Borell (2002) refers to homosexuality as a way to introduce the idea that the family concept is more complex than it is usually conceived. He used homosexual family relations as an example of families of choice, while maintaining that families of choice are not unique to homosexuals: “The ... *active construction* of family ties, however, is not unique to homosexuals” (Borell 2002, p. 265). As previously noted, the keyword search for sexual categories showed that Thørnblad (2009) used the concept of sexual *legning*. A closer examination of the article revealed that Thørnblad only used the concept of sexual *legning* when citing public statements. The way sexual *legning*, a concept reflecting an essentialistic discourse, was used in this article is consistent with the author’s critical perspective. Thørnblads (2009) is a qualitative analysis of public statements regarding the proposal of new guidelines for choosing foster homes. The government proposed that foster homes should primarily consist of two foster parents of different genders’ and that gay, lesbian, or single foster parents *can* be chosen if certain particular considerations were present (Thørnblad, 2009, p. 224). In her analysis, Thørnblad (2009) writes that the main discourse of the traditional family is still associated with choosing a foster family: “The heteronormative nuclear family continues,

however, as a norm for the family constellations...a differentiation in family practises does not necessarily weaken the nuclear family as an ideal” (p. 230).

Sheehan (2009) and Øfsti (2008) focused on the concept of couples in the family therapy literature. With respect to intimate relations between adults, they both problematized the couple as the dominant idea in family therapy and social work. Sheehan (2009) argued for a wider frame than the couple, whether it be a heterosexual or a homosexual couple, “what implications would it have, if the marriage law were extended to include not only homosexual and heterosexual pairs, but to also include intimate units of three, four or five people?” (p. 111). Øfsti (2008) discussed the romantic discourse that is taken for granted in couples therapy. She pointed out how discourses in couples therapy lack concepts that reflect the complexity of living arrangements: “Practices such as ‘fucking friends’, asexual living arrangements in which the persons involved do not understand each other as just friends, committed sexual relations with several other persons? What should we call these relations?” Øfsti (2008, p. 371) asked. Øfsti (2008, p. 364) also examined how heteronormativity pervades and affects the fight for gay rights: “The fight to be included in the marriage law and the rights to *in vitro* fertilization and adoption are examples of how the heteronormative nuclear pattern is carried out, independent of the two-gender model.” The keyword search showed that Øfsti’s article has the greatest variety of sexual categories. The concept of heteronormativity was also used more extensively, pointing to how gay politics can be understood as reproducing heteronormativity.

Fahlgren and Edvall (2006) is a discursive analytical reading of a textbook used to train social workers and is a guide to practical social work with addicts. The aim of the article was to show how normative meanings of gender continue to be produced and reproduced by gender discourses. They argued that women are being embodied as ‘the other’, as different, as body, and gender, and are being sexualized (Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006, p. 70). They saw gender discourses and sexuality discourses as reinforcing each other: “The conceptualization of two genders is understandable (and ‘natural’) in accordance with heterosexuality as the norm, and concomitantly it makes heterosexuality the norm (and ‘natural’) because of the understanding of gender as two different and opposite bodies made for each other” (Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006, p. 69).

In these five articles, central features in a heteronormative discourse were questioned. The cultural bias of favoring opposite-sex relationships was problematized and in doing so, they were naming the taken for granted and hegemonic cultural norm of heterosexuality. In this way, they problematized the hierarchical binary opposition of heterosexuality and non-heterosexuality. As such, these articles produced sexual landscapes more complex than allowed for in a heteronormative discourse.

Finally, Finseth (2010) presented various drama-based pedagogical methods of working with youths with social anxiety. Sexual *legning* was one of several subjects explored with the drama-based pedagogical working method (Finseth, 2010, p. 324). Finseth (2010) noted: “Subjects like friendship, falling in love, partying, alcohol, questions related to sexual legning, and identity ... We used creative working methods to deal with subjects the youth were interested in” (p. 324). One of the examples of a drama-based pedagogical working method involved a gay boy. The gay boy was presented in the text as having difficulty telling others he is

homosexual: “[...] a sixteen-year-old gay boy who wished (but had not dared) to tell others he was gay” (Finseth 2010, p. 326). The gay vignette in Finseth’s article also included a *homophobe*: “The ‘homophobe’ was encouraged to sit in ‘the hot seat’. This technique allows one to interview persons one would like to know better, such as a person who, as part of the method, has done something critical” (Finseth, 2010, p. 326).

The keyword search showed that only homo* words were used in the Finseth (2010) article; there were no hetero* words. The previously mentioned point by Hudak and Giammattei (2010) was thus illustrated in this article; the use of only homo* words maintained the illusion that only non-heterosexual individuals have a sexuality and that it is not necessary to examine heterosexuality. From a queer theoretical point of view, the Finseth (2010) article can be said to reproduce heteronormativity, as it framed homosexuality as problematic, individualized homonegativity into bad attitudes some people have, and did not discuss how heterosexuality is privileged.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how sexuality was addressed in Norwegian social work journal articles. Of the 572 reviewed articles, sexuality was addressed in only six (1%) articles. Heteronormativity was problematized in five (0.9%) articles (Borell, 2002; Fahlgren & Edvall, 2006; Sheehan, 2009; Thørnblad, 2009; Øfsti, 2008). In the sixth article, Finseth (2010), homosexuality was framed as problematic and heteronormativity was not problematized. Such a minimal focus on sexuality within published literature suggests that heterosexuality is taken for granted, reflecting the high value put on heterosexuality, as the ‘normal’ and preferred sexual orientation.

My finding that sexuality was only addressed in one percent (n=6) of articles, is similar to previous research of sexuality in social work journals. For example, Clark and Serovichs’ (1997) study found the least, with only 0.006% (N=77) of the reviewed articles having included sexuality and Van Voorhis and Wagner (2002) found the highest, at 3.92% (N=77) (and between these: Johnston & Stewart (2013) with 0.03% (N=50); Phillips et al. (2003) had 2.1% (N=119); Scherrer & Woodford (2013) found 2.6% (N=56)). However, as noted previously, these studies focused solely on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer (LGB/LGBTQ) issues, whereas the focus on sexuality in this study was wider, including not only minority categories, but sexuality categories, in general. The inclusion criteria in these studies were also narrower, as they only included articles with a significant focus on LGB/LGBTQ issues. In comparison, the inclusion criteria in the present study was broader, excluding only articles in which sexuality was sporadically mentioned (cf. the ‘Method’ section). For example, I included the Finseth (2010) article because sexual categories were used more than sporadically. However, relative to previous research, the Finseth article (2010) did not significantly focus on LGB issues because the gay vignette was only five paragraphs long and only one of several examples used to illustrate a social work method. Because of the wider focus on sexuality and broader inclusion criteria, compared with previous research, I would have expected that the number of articles addressing sexuality would be higher in this sample. Therefore, having none of the articles significantly address LGB issues, it is clear that LGB issues are examined to an even lesser extent in Norwegian social work journals than they are in international social work journals.

A limited focus on sexuality is considered by Sedgwick (1990/2008, p. 8) to be “ignorance of a knowledge ... these ignorances, far from being pieces of the originary dark, are produced by and correspond to particular knowledges and circulate as part of particular regimes of truth”. This type of knowledge regime not only renders sexual diversity invisible, but also upholds the hierarchical binary opposition of heterosexuality vs. non-heterosexuality. As Jeyasingham (2008, p. 147) stated it, “This system of knowledge/ignorance operates to keep certain ways of knowing sexuality out of circulation – not just discourses of queer desire and pleasure but also ways of questioning the significance that is attributed to the difference between ‘heterosexual’ and its others”.

The strong emphasis on equality in the Norwegian welfare model, and a core cultural value in Norway, may help to explain why sexuality is hardly addressed in social work journals in Norway. Roseneil, Crowhurst, Hellesund, Santos, and Stoilova (2013) suggested that the welfare regime plays a role in the construction of sexuality. The legal equality in Norway concerning sexual orientation could, as suggested by Roseneil et al. (2013, p. 184), be understood as an expression of “having instituted equality as a firm principle of governance”. Research (e.g., Andenæs, 2004; Kriz & Skivenes, 2010; Østby, 2008) shows that social workers and social work educators in Norway typically identify problems and solutions at the individual level, lacking a focus on diversity, structural factors, and oppression. This same logic of a power/inequality blindness may also apply to social work scholars in Norway, at least concerning sexuality, and therefore contribute to understanding why sexuality is scarcely addressed in social work journals in Norway.

That only five articles problematized heteronormativity indicates that no other article in the sample narrowed their subject to include *heterosexual* youth or *heterosexual* families. O’Brien (1999) found a similar pattern in her examination of articles on lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth; no other social work publications cited them. She “suggests that there are processes through which they are constituted as a subordinate form of knowledge” (O’Brien, 1999, p. 146). Following the argument of Røthing and Svendsen (2010), such processes concern heterosexuality being valued to such a degree that no one, apart from those working specifically with heteronormativity issues, sees a need to problematize sexuality.

The manifest intent of Finseth (2010) was to show the applicability of various drama-based pedagogical working methods, one of which is sexual *legning*. When the gay boy was the one who had the problem – and when heteronormativity was left unchallenged – the centrality and invisibility of heterosexuality is maintained, which is a core aspect of the tradition of anti-discriminatory practice (Hicks, 2008a). Within this discourse, the rationale for social workers addressing sexuality is the belief that social work involves work “with those who are the disadvantaged in society” (Fish, 2012, p. 15). This approach is based on ideas derived from what Epstein (1987) termed the *ethnic identity model* of sexuality. This model promotes the idea of lesbians and gay men as a minority culture or a community-based interest group and it forms the basis of liberal, rights-based rhetoric (Hicks, 2008a). Although the ethnic identity model can claim political victories with respect to human rights, in light of liberation as a goal of social work, it fails to examine why sexual minorities came to be understood as minorities and how the hegemony of heterosexuality is (re)produced.

A reverse discourse that produces positive images of homosexuals, as is often advocated by scholars working within an anti-discriminatory school of thought (e.g., see Fish, 2012; Gates & Brian, 2012) will not solve *the problem* of homosexuality being framed as problematic. Within a binary understanding of sexuality, heterosexuality is still associated with the normal and desirable relative to homosexuality. From a post-structural and queer theoretical perspective, one would argue that heterosexuality needs homosexuality for its own definition (Namaste, 1996). Homophobia is thus built into a binary understanding of sexuality, as the hegemonic norm of heterosexuality is what homosexuality is not.

A Final Reflection on Studying Identity-based Categories

The way sexuality was operationalized in this study, including an identity-based set of categories, such as *bisexual*, *gay*, *heterosexual*, and *lesbian*, illustrates the kinds of paradoxes described by Hare-Mustin (1994), in which discursive practices uphold power relations. From a queer theoretical perspective, sexual identity-based categories are products of a knowledge regime aimed at controlling sexuality. However, queer theory recognizes the impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of sexuality. What we can do, queer theory suggests, is to think about *how* current conceptions create boundaries (Namaste, 1996).

Addressing critically the focus on homosexuality in the Finseth (2010) article, is not meant to disregard studies of lesbian and gay identities and communities. A sexual-minority focus has served to acknowledge sexual differences and has enabled political progress, as in removing discriminatory regulations (Francis 2012; Sedgwick, 1990/2008). Further, because of the absence of studies on homosexuals, as this study also illustrates, scholarship on homosexuality and homosexual identity is needed. However, as Namaste (1996, p. 202) points out: "... ironically, the attention accorded to homosexuality serves to strengthen the heterosexual/homosexual opposition even further". Therefore, I argue in this article that it is important for social work to pay attention to how power asymmetries are reproduced through the hegemonic and binary way of understanding sexuality.

Practical Implications

If power asymmetries are to be destabilized, strategies that counteract the power basis of the hegemonic norm are necessary. As earlier commented upon, the gay vignette in Finseth (2010) can be said to reproduce heteronormativity by framing homosexuality as problematic and by not problematizing heteronormativity. Instead of understanding the gay boy as having the problem, an alternative approach to this schoolroom situation, as well as in other social work arenas, is to problematize the *binary opposition* and *hierarchical* structure of heterosexuality vs. non-heterosexuality: Anderssen (2005) suggested that this could be done by reflecting on how sexual categories discipline all of us. Morton, Jeyasingham, and Hicks (2013) recommended reflecting on how sexuality in social interaction is done, with a particularly focus on what is taken for granted. Walls et al. (2009) proposes reflecting on heterosexual privileges. Fantus (2013) recommends using peoples' own personal narratives, rather than making assumptions based on prescribed categories. McPhail (2009, p. 17) suggests teaching critical questioning by asking questions such as "Whom do these categories serve? Who do these categories include, and whom do they exclude? Who has the power to define the categories? How are the categories

policed? How do these categories change over time and over cultures?” Finally, MacKinnon (2011) and McPhail (2009) argues for including queer theories in the social work curriculum.

When heteronormativity was problematized in only 0.9% of the reviewed articles reflects the taken for granted position regarding heterosexuality. I therefore suggest that social work, in policy documents, research, client-orientated work, and teaching should practise what Hudak and Giammattei (2009, p. 11) describes as “the simple but very powerful act of naming heterosexuality”. This could seem counterproductive to queer-theoretical thinking, which has as a main goal to problematize sexual categories. However, using the concept of heterosexuality has two advantages. First, and most obviously, to not take heterosexuality for granted, and second, simultaneously producing an understanding of sexuality as a diverse phenomenon. As argued in this article, using categories should be done with caution. The suggestion to use peoples’ own narratives (Fantus, 2013), instead of being understood accordingly to prescribed sexual categories, is therefore an important contribution in light of the binary way of understanding sexuality. However, if the hegemonic norm is silenced, this maintains heterosexuality as the default position, and non-heterosexuality as a deviation from that default.

A Concluding Remark

The main objective of this article was to examine whether heteronormativity is reproduced or problematized within Norwegian social work journals. The analysis showed that heteronormativity was problematized in five of the six (1%) articles that addressed sexuality. Social workers who would like to prevent discrimination and marginalization based on sexuality face considerable problems because their professional literature takes the norm of heterosexuality for granted. If hegemonic knowledge regimes within social work are not critically explored, social work is in danger of reproducing hegemonic understandings of sexuality and, in so doing, marginalizing those who do not fit into heterosexuality’s hegemonic mold.

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