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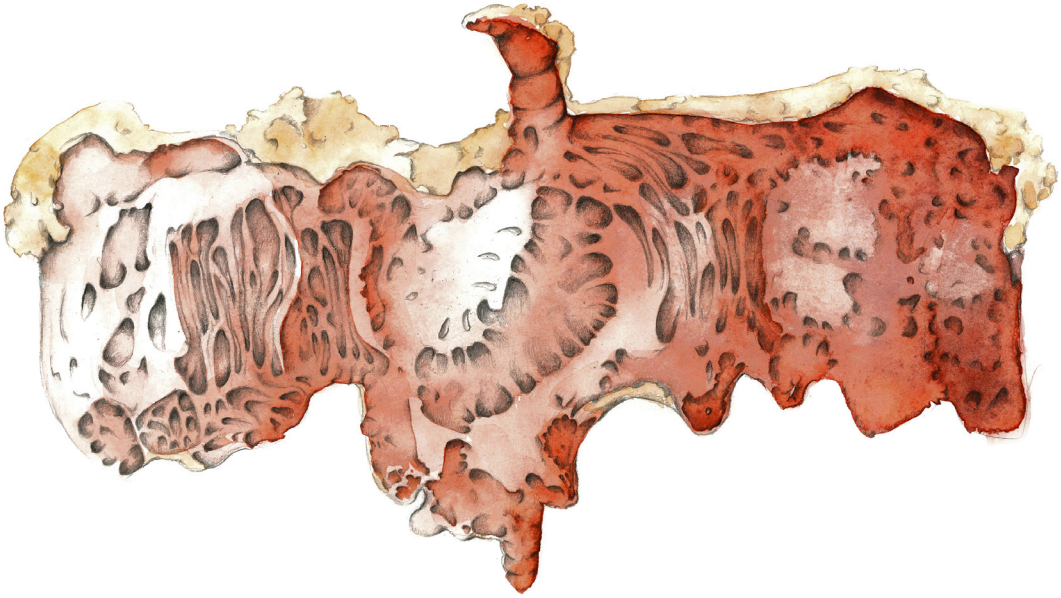

*Rebecka Fingalsson*

# Orientations in Swedish Sexuality Education

This doctoral dissertation contemplates the complexity of providing sexuality education in school to children and young people. Through Sara Ahmed's work, the thesis discusses how orientations affect the perception of what comes into view and what does not. Moreover, the thesis discusses how sexuality education has mediated the conveying of knowledge and ascribed different ways of being in relation to norms.

By studying the work of educators in contemporary as well as past times, this thesis shows how Swedish sexuality education is not only complex but unfulfilling, as it reproduces positions of privilege and marginalisation despite seeking to disrupt and emancipate.

At the same time, as this thesis backtracks sexuality education to a lecture allegedly given by Carl Linnaeus in the 1700s, and from that follows how knowledge and assumptions about the body, gender, race and sexuality have changed over the years, this thesis delivers a compelling argument for why it is necessary to keep providing and developing sexuality education in school. While sexuality education is unfulfilling, it is an important instrument for understanding *who* we are, *what* we know and *how* we are going to be uniquely diverse in a shared reproductive future.

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# ORIENTATIONS IN SWEDISH SEXUALITY EDUCATION

# Orientations in Swedish Sexuality Education

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By Rebecka Fingalsson

The thesis was defended in public at Malmö University, Orkanen D138

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REBECKA FINGALSSON

# ORIENTATIONS IN SWEDISH SEXUALITY EDUCATION

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis contemplates the complexity of sexuality education in schooling by focusing on how Swedish sexuality education has come to be organised, stabilised, and able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation while it, at the same time has been seeking to disrupt and emancipate. By utilizing Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation, this thesis discusses the contribution of four stand-alone articles to explore how the body, gender, race, and sexuality are (re)produced in Swedish sexuality education, how sexuality education is conditioned, and how educators can navigate sexuality education to "do right".

Article I analyses biology education textbooks and interviews with teachers. It shows that a particular form of Swedish exceptionalism prevails within contemporary Swedish sexuality education in the shape of happy stories, which, on the one hand, emphasise important progression in legislation concerning sexual and reproductive rights and, on the other, reproduces exclusion by marginalising or othering anything but the happiness of the open, inclusive, and progressive Swedishness. Article II presents a hermeneutic reading of a Linnaean lecture from the 1700s called *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*]. By discussing this lecture through other scholarly work on Linnaeus and the conceptualisation of the body, gender, race and sexuality, the article discusses how the body was envisioned to be a holistic vessel. Through Article I and Article II, the thesis discusses how conceptions of the body have radically changed and how this has affected both sexuality education and actions in society.

Article III discusses the tradition and pedagogic culture of talking within Swedish sexuality education by analysing interviews and observations of municipality actors working with in-service teachers' professional development. It suggests that talking in sexuality education is neither natural

nor neutral, for it is a cultural performance of pedagogic tradition and ideals in which teachers can embody ideals of professionalism. To get more insight into the embodiment of ideals, Article IV focuses on teachers' experiences of how gender, age and sexuality have conditioned their practices in sexuality education. The article highlights how, especially older women, "tanter", become successful as they embody a heterosexual, yet desexualised, life course. In contrast, men, both young and old, are conditioned to perform safe forms of masculinity.

Together, Article III and Article IV show how teachers' efforts to disrupt and emancipate normative notions of gender and sexuality simultaneously can reproduce positions of privilege.

To conclude, this thesis shows sexuality education to be not only complex but unfulfilling as it reproduces positions of privilege and marginalisation, even if it is seeking to disrupt and emancipate. However, by showing this, the thesis delivers a compelling argument for why it is necessary to continue providing and developing sexuality education in school, as it is an important instrument for understanding *who* we are, *what* we know and *how* we are going to be uniquely diverse in a shared reproductive future.

# SAMMANFATTNING

Den här avhandlingen begrundar komplexiteten i skolans sexualundervisning genom att fokusera på hur den svenska sexualundervisningen har kommit att organisera, stabilisera och reproducera privilegium och marginaliseringar samtidigt som den har försökt att störa normer och frigöra individen. Genom att använda Sara Ahmeds begrepp *orienteringar* diskuterar denna avhandling bidraget från fyra fristående artiklar för att utforska hur kroppen, kön, ras och sexualitet återskapas i svensk sexualundervisning. Avhandlingen syftar också till att synliggöra hur sexualundervisning är villkorad och vad det kan innebära för lärare "göra rätt" inom detta kunskapsområde.

Artikel I analyserar biologiläroböcker och intervjuer med lärare. Den visar att en särskild form av svensk exceptionalism förmedlas genom en mängd glada berättelser som framhåller Sveriges och svenskars progressiva värderingar och lagstiftningar när det kommer till jämställdhet samt sexuella-och reproduktiva rättigheter. Artikeln diskuterar hur de glada berättelserna i sexualundervisningen belyser viktiga framsteg, samtidigt som de återskapar uteslutning genom att marginalisera eller förminska allt som inte är den glada, öppna, inkluderande och progressiva svenskheten. Sexualundervisning har varit obligatorisk i Sverige sedan 1955, men dess historia sträcker sig längre tillbaka i tiden. För att utforska orienteringar bakåt i tiden presenterar Artikel II en hermeneutisk läsning av föreläsning som påstås vara given av Carl von Linné någon gång på 1700-talet. Föreläsningen som kallas *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* diskuteras genom att lägga ett särskilt fokus på hur kroppen, kön, ”ras”, sexualitet och reproduktion föreställs och vad det är för kunskap som den tidens sexualundervisning kan tänkas förmedla. Genom att placera Artikel I och Artikel II i relation till varandra diskuterar avhandlingen hur uppfattningar om kroppen har förändrats och hur dessa idéer om kroppar har påverkat både sexualundervisning och handlingar i samhället.

Artikel III diskuterar hur den svenska sexualundervisningen uppbär en tradition och en pedagogisk kultur av att prata. I artikeln analyseras intervjuer och observationer av kommunala aktörer som arbetar med fortbildning för lärare. Artikel diskuterar hur den pratande praktiken inom sexualundervisning varken är naturligt eller neutralt, eftersom det blir en form av kulturellt framträdande av en ideal pedagogisk tradition. Genom att behärska pratet förkroppsligar lärare idealen om professionalism. För att få mer insikt om hur förkroppsligande av ideal inom sexualundervisning lägger Artikel IV fokus på hur kön, ålder och sexualitet villkorar lärares undervisning. Artikeln lyfter fram hur kvinnor, och då särskilt äldre kvinnor, så kallade "tanter", blir ett framgångsrikt pedagogiskt subjekt eftersom de förkroppsligar en heterosexuell men avsexualiserad livsbana. Män, såväl unga som gamla, är däremot villkorade att genomföra sexualundervisning på ett sätt där de förkroppsliga en trygg och ofarlig maskulinitet eftersom den manliga heterosexualiteten är kodad som en aktiv sexualitet. Tillsammans visar Artikel III och Artikel IV hur lärares ansträngningar att störa och motverka normativa föreställningar om kön och sexualitet i undervisningen blir genomförbara just för att de förkroppsligar normerande privilegierade positioner.

Sammanfattningsvis visar denna avhandling att sexualundervisning inte bara är komplex utan otillfredsställande eftersom den återskapar privilegierade och marginaliserade positioner, trots dess ansats att störa normer och frigöra individen. Denna spänning utgör dock det grundläggande argument till varför det är nödvändigt att fortsätta att tillhandahålla och utveckla sexualundervisning i skolan. För trots allt visar avhandlingen hur sexualundervisning är ett viktigt instrument för att tillgängliggöra kunskap för att kunna förstå *vilka* vi är, *vad* vi vet och *hur* vi ska kunna vara unikt olika i en gemensam reproduktiv framtid.

# STUDIES INCLUDED IN THE THESIS

I. Fingalsson, R., & Junkala, H. (2025). "Happy Stories" of Swedish Exceptionalism Reproducing Whiteness in Teaching and Biology Textbooks in Sexuality Education. *Science & Education*. vol. 34, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-023-00454-3

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III. Fingalsson, R. (n.d.). Talking "the talk" in sexuality education. (re-submitted after major revision)

IV. Fingalsson, R. (2023). The teaching body in sexuality education – intersections of age, gender, and sexuality. *Sex Education*, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2023.2254710

# 1 INTRODUCTION

During a lecture on sexuality education in science education with pre-service teachers at the university, one of the students asked me why it was necessary for him to engage with norms and values concerning bodies, relationships, sexuality, and more, since he as a teacher in science education will be teaching the biological facts. In another classroom in a different part of Sweden, Hanna, a lower secondary biology teacher, has her yearly class on sexuality education for the school's eighth graders. During the lesson, one of her students expresses his disgust towards homosexuals. Throughout the lesson, the student continues to express his repulsion and interrupts the class. After repeatedly telling the student to be quiet and focus, Hanna feels irritated and says, "*Can you give it a break? No one is saying it is disgusting to be heterosexual, and no one agrees with you, so please give it a rest! You may have your own opinion, but you cannot express it in this way as you are hurting people*". The student finally stops, and the lesson continues. A student asks, "W*hat would happen if all of us were homosexual?*". The question is intriguing, and the class begins to discuss reproduction and reproductive technologies. This topic could very well represent the biological facts of the subject content in science education. However, as it relates to sexuality, the conversation was soon disturbed by… "*homosexuals are so disgusting*". Hanna is now fed up, and instead of taking time from the lesson to focus on one student, she tells him that she will call his parents. Said and done. After explaining what happened in class, the parents reply, "*yes, we understand, [takes a breath] and we have warned him that the biology teacher will call because we have these opinions at home. You see, we are Christians, and we live according to our faith*". The call ends.

Unlike the imagined professional future of the pre-service teacher, Hanna's experience of teaching sexuality education indicates there is something more at stake than merely conveying biological facts. In Hanna's description, the

student expressing his repulsion for homosexuals is, on the one hand, an expression of violence, but on the other, it is an expression of how the student himself is restricted by norms and religious values from his family. In school, teachers and other staff are to provide sexuality education to ensure young people's health and well-being and strengthen their ability to make conscious and independent choices in life. In school, students are to be given an opportunity to understand their own and other's rights, the importance of consent and critically examine power structures linked to gender and honour-related violence and oppression, as well as critically approach relationships and sexuality in different contexts (see Skolverket, 2022a, 2022b). What the pre-service teacher is unable to foresee is how sexuality-related issues, which biological facts are meant to explain, connect with the social norms and values that permeate students' everyday lives. Hanna's experience in working with sexuality education reveals tensions between the school's fundamental values and mission and the private sphere of the individual.

## Aim and research questions

Through school science and the subject of biology, sexuality education has been ingrained in obligatory Swedish schooling since the mid-1950s. Nowadays, sexuality education is part of the school's fundamental values and mission. As an organising power, sexuality constructs people to become something more than flesh and blood. Therefore, this thesis seeks to understand how schooling of sexuality connects with wishing the very best for the next generation.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to gain knowledge on how sexuality education is organised, stabilised, and able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation while it is also seeking to disrupt and emancipate.

The overall research questions are:

1. How is the body, gender, race, and sexuality (re)produced in sexuality education?
2. How is sexuality education conditioned?
3. How can educators navigate to "do right" in sexuality education?

## A note on terminology

Before continuing, I would like to make a small note on terminology and my use of *sexuality education* rather than the perhaps more commonly known *sex education*. Within this field of research, there is a variety of names existing in parallel to describe education for young people about reproduction, sexuality, relationships, and sexual health. This is simply because different countries have used different names for in- and outside-school-based educational programs. For instance, it can be called 'prevention education, relationship and sexuality education, family-life education, HIV education, life-skills education, healthy lifestyles and basic life safety' (UNESCO, 2018a, p. 12). In the English translation of curricula, 'Finland and Denmark have adopted sex education as an official term, while Norway uses the term sexuality and relationship education' (Kontula, 2010, p. 374). After a recent revision of the curricula, Sweden added the term consent, hence naming sexuality education *sexualitet, samtycke och relationer* [*sexuality, consent and relationships*] (see Skolverket, 2022a, 2022b).

To conclude, in the field of sexuality education, there is 'no consensus with regard to naming' (Allen & Rasmussen, 2016, p. 6). However, emphasising *sexuality* rather than *sex* is important as sexuality is an 'expansive term' that includes more than just having sex or just having a sexual identity (Allen & Rasmussen, 2016, p. 7). Replacing sex with sexuality in education allows for a broader understanding of sexuality to be an act, a way of being, and something in becoming. Therefore, using the term sexuality education rather than sex education allows this thesis to seriously consider sexuality education without confining it to a subject, a certain grade, or pedagogic intervention. Instead, it allows this thesis to expand what sexuality education can *be* and *does* beyond subjects, grades, activities, contexts, and times.

## Disposition

After the introduction above, this compilation thesis moves on to describe the thesis's overarching theoretical framework. In chapter 2, Sara Ahmed's concept of orientation. The intention of introducing this concept early on is to provide you, the reader of this thesis, with a rationale for every chapter following, such as background, previous research, methodology, and so on. To frame Ahmed's concept, chapter 2 begins by introducing phenomenology in general, then

proceeds to describe Ahmed's critique and present the sub-concepts employed in the thesis.

Chapter 3 makes use of Ahmed's framework to present a background of Swedish sexuality education by describing how it has been defined through particular objects. Chapter 4 describes previous research and presents it as being sorted in appraisal to Ahmed's notion on lines. Chapter 5 concerns the methodology of the thesis and the four articles. The methodology is presented in relation to a notion of unfamiliarity that is a ground condition within Ahmed's phenomenology, but the chapter also criticizes Ahmed for not providing sufficient support in operationalisation. Therefore, the chapter also draws upon other methodologies from ethnography. Chapter 6 provides a brief overview of the four stand-alone articles and a rationale for how they can be clustered. Chapter 7 examines the thesis aim by discussing conclusions from the four articles through the previous research and relates them to the thesis's research questions. Chapter 8 finalises the thesis by discussing implications and how to move on.

# 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To gain knowledge on how sexuality education is organised, stabilised and able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation while it, as a practice, also seeks to disrupt and emancipate, this thesis makes use of Sara Ahmed's (2006) queer approach to phenomenology.

The chapter begins by providing a brief and general account of phenomenology, to then explain Ahmed's critique and development of orientation. This is followed by descriptions of how Ahmed conceptualises and relates orientation to objects and objects as orientation devices. As these concepts lay the ground for orientation, these descriptions are then followed by describing orientation as a direction to what comes In- and out of sight and how something can be perceived to be In- and out of line. Finally, these concepts are related to the notion of Being and doing. Throughout each section, there are also descriptions of how the Ahmedian concepts are understood in the thesis.

## Phenomenology - theorising the experience of objects

As a philosophical tradition, phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1931/2012) who wanted to understand all phenomena scientifically to reach a phenomenon's distinctive nature. Husserl argued for the necessity of 'a new way of looking at things /…/ that contrasts at every point with the natural attitude of experience and thought'(Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 3). By acknowledging the involvement of experience and thought in approaching any phenomenon, Husserl's phenomenology explained how the world unfolds as an experience of objects (Hartman, 2004). For the phenomenologist, the body's

ability to experience objects made it possible to access reality. Hence making experience a tool of scientific inquiry.

Husserl's philosophising opened up a new way of thinking; for now, philosophical fundamental laws were complemented by phenomenological laws. In contrast to the explanatory yet abstract, fundamental laws (such as in physics and/or mathematics), phenomenological laws offered descriptive truths of the objects in reality (Ladyman, 2002). While fundamental laws produce objects, such as models, these were idealisations providing truth only within the model itself (Ladyman, 2002, p. 259). Phenomenological laws, on the other hand, claimed purity in the descriptive truths of the objects in reality (Hartman, 2004). To grasp an object, phenomenologists stress that one has 'to learn to see what stands before our eyes, to distinguish, to describe' (Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 3). The style and craft of phenomenological inquiry can be described as a process of making familiar objects unfamiliar and then describing them through that unfamiliarity. These descriptions are guided by perception, and therefore, experience holds a particular place in phenomenology as it is the receptor and tool to provide accounts of social reality.

## Ahmed's critique

Phenomenology strives to approach objects as if they were unfamiliar to provide a descriptive truth of reality. Intrigued by this fundamental assumption in phenomenology, Ahmed dwells upon Husserl's writing to re-consider what it means to assume that the world unfolds as an experience of objects (ontology) and what it means for experiences to be a valid source of knowledge (epistemology) in explaining what happens in reality. To make her claim, Ahmed returns to the beginning of phenomenology. More precisely, to Husserl's *Ideas: general introduction to pure phenomenology* (1931/2012). From this work, Ahmed argues that 'Husserl's gaze fails to wander into other spaces', hence leaving out important 'spaces that are often associated with the "work" that tends toward the body in terms of caring for it and sustaining it' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 63). To craft her critique, Ahmed connects with feminist philosophy and critical race theory to acknowledge how knowledge emerges from more spaces and objects than the philosopher's writing table (as this was the place phenomenology unfolded). For example, through the historical work of Michel Foucault and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, Ahmed begins to locate the idea of having a (hetero)sexual orientation as a form of starting point

for a person's arrival into the world. Whereas Judith Butler's notion of repetition and performativity as materialising the body as gendered and sexual informs how orientation shows an invisible 'straight line' (p. 70) that is orienting towards a promise of reproduction for future generations. A compulsion of heterosexuality that simultaneously produces heterosexual objects as it is giving up on other love objects. Through the work of Frantz Fanon, Ahmed considers how the body is ready for action but conditioned by the objects around to do things since doing things depends on how the space is available for action. From Fanon's proposal of looking beneath the surface of the body to see the historic-racial schema of the body, Ahmed connects with whiteness, and through scholars like bell hooks, whiteness is further linked to the sexual desire for reproduction.

Informed by a rich source of scholarly work, Ahmed re-considers phenomenology and the objects surrounding its emergence (Husserl's writing table). From these accounts, other tables, such as the kitchen table, emerge and show how people have gathered and developed epistemic knowledge that describes more sides of reality. This notion informed Ahmed's philosophising to then claim phenomenology to be 'full of queer moments' of disorder as well as filled with accounts of how disorder is overcome (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4). So, instead of continuing on the path to argue for coherent descriptive truths, Ahmed redirects the attention of phenomenology to look for the queer moments in coherent descriptions to account for how the gendered, racialised and sexualised realities come to be.

In this thesis, I will primarily stay within the thinking in *Queer Phenomenology* for it grounds Ahmed's scholarly work even if Ahmed has continued to follow objects around and lend a feminist ear 'to hear who is not heard' and understand 'how we are not heard' (Ahmed, 2021, p. 4). For Ahmed (2006), developing a queer phenomenology is an orientation towards '"support" to those whose lives and loves make them appear oblique, strange, and out of place' (p. 179). Her scholarly work of describing how life unfolds as orientations in spaces has continued. Hence providing a rich account of what diversity impacts and how dominance is organised and experienced by queer bodies (see for example Ahmed, 2010a, 2010b; Ahmed, 2012, 2021). However, in this thesis, I return to *Queer Phenomenology* because it orients the questions of gender, race and sexuality to be a matter of the individual, the collective, and the social over time and space. This allows the thesis to stretch over long periods of time and include various objects. As you continue reading chapters on background, methodology, and so on, you will see how

orientations in sexuality education appear through descriptions of the familiar by approaching it as unfamiliar. But for now, I will continue describing the theoretical framework.

## Orientation – conceptualising directions

To understand 'how it is that we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes, depending on which way we turn' (2006, p. 1), Ahmed begins to craft the concept of orientation. Orientation becomes an answer to come to grips with a reality that is simultaneously fluid and concrete, constantly anew and emerging as given. Informed by the phenomenological sentiments of un-familiarising, the concept of *orientation* is developed from the work of moving around to explore where someone begins and become, due to what objects are around and what objects come into view as a result of location and directions in the social world.

### *Orientation, objects, and objects as orientation devices*

To fully grasp orientation, it is necessary to invite the concept of *objects*. In Ahmed's phenomenology, objects have a particular function because it is objects that give and reveal orientation. From a phenomenological perspective, objects can be physical or ideal, for what signifies an object is that it comes into existence through the intention of perception (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58). With this view, objects become objects through 'what an action is directed towards' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 52). In other words, objects (physical or ideal) exist because of what they can do or are perceived to be doing.

In the thesis, objects become a way of naming what comes into view within sexuality education. These objects can be ideal, like a normative notion of heterosexuality, or physical, like the flesh of a human body. The concept of objects can also be used to describe how ideas concerning sexuality education have gathered (see chapter on background), or how objects appear as knowledge or practices (e.g. see chapter on previous research) within sexuality education.

For objects to take shape, they are given a tendency through re-collection. This means that whatever the object is, it 'exists in relation to *what is already gathered* by consciousness'(Ahmed, 2006, p. 36). This means that no objects exist in solitude but that 'each impression is linked to the other' (ibid). Hence,

objects take shape and are continuously re-shaped by gathering in different formations.

In the thesis, this means that how an object, like the body, is comprehended through a gathering of objects. For example, the body is more than an individual sensation or a substance of skin and flesh. The formation of being human happened through the gathering of ideal objects of gender, sexuality, and race as well as physical objects of genitals, hair, skin colour, and so on. By introducing the ability to gather, the thesis follows objects of the body, gender, race and sexuality around to understand how formations have shifted and how these shifts relate to an orientation in sexuality education.

Another way to think about objects is to think of them as *orientation devices*. According to Ahmed (2006), objects 'gather in their very availability as things to "do things" with' (p. 88). These objects are orientation devices as they 'complete specific actions' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 52). As orientation devices, objects do not only occupy space, but they orient it by extending '"the reach" of our actions' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 44). They become tools that allow bodies to extend into spaces as they enable bodies to *do* something or to become something. In other words, objects occupy spaces, but they also orient it by establishing a sense of something familiar and already given or re-directing it to complete an action. As an orientation of space, this prepares spaces and allows some bodies to appear without hesitation, for they become given, whereas others appear in spaces as strangers standing out or appearing rather queer.

In the thesis, the concept of orientation device is in use to describe how some objects have particular and intended functions, hence creating a strong orientation towards a particular direction. As Swedish sexuality education is installed, protected, and directed through curricula, this type of policy document is thought of as an orientation device in the thesis. Other examples of orientation devices can e.g. be activities or teaching manuals within sexuality education.

### *In- and out of sight*

To understand how something can be perceived to be given or not, Ahmed proposes that the given is the effect of the repetition 'of tendencies of what they are '"tending toward"' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58). This means that the given is acquired through repetition that will put 'certain "objects" in view' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 58). As spaces are occupied by objects gathering, Ahmed describes

that '[t]he move from object to object is shaped by perception' and that 'the gaze that turns to an object, brings other objects into view, even if they are only dimly perceived' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 88). Within this notion, Ahmed elaborates and states that 'orientations make things near, which affects what can be perceived' (ibid). In other words, what is put in view and toward what directions someone is facing, can be thought of as showing an invisible 'straight line' between a starting point and its surrounding (p. 70) that, as an orientation also reveal what is left out of sight.

In the thesis, this notion of how some things come to be *in-and out of sight*, is another way of addressing how orientation is not only describing how sexuality education is occupied but that orientation is connected with positionality, which in turn makes some things appear to be close, and others far away. This way of thinking of orientation also brings forth the idea of positionality, as this provides a partial perception.

### *In- and out of line*

From the idea of what has come in sight, an orientation of something, like an orientation in sexuality education, can be thought of as revealing a line. For Ahmed, lines describe orientation. At the same time, these lines do not predict or guarantee movement toward particular purposes. As lines are merely reflecting an arrangement of divisions in spaces, talking about lines becomes a way to address what is aligned (*in-line*) and what is not (*out of line*).

To exemplify how social spaces are divided and people oriented in relation to these lines, Ahmed describes lines to be drawn 'between public and private spaces' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 175). In the thesis, the school can be thought of as having a line. This line separates the space of schooling from other spaces, so when entering school, individuals become teachers, students and so on. Other lines in school can be between subjects and grades. In the case of Swedish sexuality education, the overarching model of subject integration can both mean following the lines of each subject or drawing a new line across subjects.

To understand how some objects and people appear to be in line, it is necessary to understand that for something to be in line is a result of actions. According to Ahmed (2006), what is in line is the result of a 'repetition of bodily and social actions over time' (p. 66). This is another way to talk about norms and how its directions can be normative. In the thesis, norms and disruptions of them are discussed in relation to sexuality education, both as an educational practice but also in relation to experience and knowledge.

To understand what the state of in lineness do, Ahmed describes how the line of genealogy happens through a repeated action of making family and kin. Ahmed (2006) stress that '[h]eterosexuality as a compulsory orientation reproduces more than "itself"', for in this metaphor of lines, heterosexuality, as an orientation, 'is a mechanism for the reproduction of culture' and its attributes (objects) 'that are assumed to pass along a family line' (p. 161). When thinking about family lines, like genealogy, Ahmed argues that for something, or someone to be in line is a form of inheritance, as well as a direction towards the future, as it is a hope for a continuation of something that has come before. This expands the notion of in line as it connects it to a long line of actions and orientations happening before, as well as connecting it to a desire for reproduction to secure the lines of the future. In other words, expanding the notion of lines is helpful to contemplate what it is that sexuality education gives to the next generation.

In relation to what is in line, orientation also describes what is out of line. Out of line is most likely what Foucault (1998) would label as deviance, whereas Butler (2006) would call it queer. For Ahmed (2006), out of line is also an orientation, but unlike what is in line, it happens outside what is given to be in line. Therefore, out of line also describes an orientation towards 'forming new patterns and new ways of making sense' in the world (p. 171). For Ahmed, out of line is a form of 'twist' of the otherwise aligned (p. 67). When something is out of line, it can provide a change of perception and a disorientation of what is in line. Ahmed argues:

> When bodies take up space that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the fact of the matter happens. The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies /…/. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 62).

In the thesis, the tension between in-and out of line, is productive for it adds motility to describing what is aligned, how objects are rearranged and how orientations are re-directed, but also to understand how individual experiences and events are located in relation to orientation.

### *Being and doing*

As an overarching concept, orientation comprehends the endless unruliness of the social landscape. In this endless mess, the lines that are in line appear as a well-trodden path to understand what has come before (history), what is here

(objects gathering) and what can be sighted (positionality). In relation to these lines, ways of being and doing appear as embodiments and actions of human subjectivity. In conceptualising orientation, *being* and *doing* cannot be separated. Instead, ways of being and doing reinforce each other. According to Ahmed (2006), objects give tendencies to the body in such a way that, for example, 'gender shapes what we "do do"', but it also 'shapes what we can do' (p. 60). What bodies are and what bodies can do, is 'organized rather than casual' for a reproduction of lines 'shape what becomes socially as well as bodily given' (p. 158). Within the lines of the given, 'the body that is "in line" can extend itself into spaces (p. 66). Hence, bodies appearing to be in line can extend more by doing, and doings appearing to be in line, will reinforce the body's way of being in line. Inside the dividing lines of the public, spaces such as 'institution comes to have a body as an effect of this work' (p. 133), for 'what bodies "do" leads them to inhabit some spaces more than others"' (p. 58). This means it is possible to talk about spaces as being prepared for some actions (*doings*) and people (*beings*) over others.

In the thesis, being and doing are concepts that are able to address how individuals, like teachers and students, navigate in sexuality education but it is also concepts that can address how sexuality education, as an orientation in itself, organises and allow different ways of being and doing to gain ground and emerge and make sense in the social.

# 3 SWEDISH SEXUALITY EDUCATION – A BACKGROUND

The concept of orientation challenges any assumption that spaces are arranged naturally, 'as if they are originary' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 80). Therefore, in this chapter, I will give an account of some of the objects occupying sexuality education to give insight into how sexuality education has developed and been understood, as objects tends to also bring other objects into view.

More precisely, this section gathers accounts of the past by addressing them as *objects of beginnings*, *objects of reason* and *objects of quality*. Through these new formations of objects, I will facilitate an understanding of how sexuality education has been occupied and how these objects have gathered to overshadow ambiguities and smooth out potential conflicts.

## Objects of beginnings

The Swedish history of sexuality education is often considered to be beginning in 1955, when it became compulsory for all children and adolescents in school. However, tending to the *objects of beginnings,* there are several other beginnings in the history of sexuality education.

As a formal practice, sexuality education is claimed to have happened already in the 1700s when Carl von Linné [Linnaeus] lectured *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*] (Bolander, 2009; Centerwall, 2000; Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013). The lecture is cheerful rather than moralising or restrictive and has mainly functioned as an anecdote to vigour Linnaeus's biographic account. Gazing upon Linnaeus's lecture shows that the history of sexuality education stretches far back in time. However, gazing into the distance of the past also makes other objects come into view. Therefore, it must

be noted that Linnaeus's lecture is not the beginning of sexuality education in Sweden. Instead, what comes into view is that Linnaeus simply followed what his successors in Uppsala had done before him. According to the history of ideas, medical doctors have a tradition of schooling both students and others on the topic of sex and reproduction (Broberg, 2023). In other words, Linnaeus's lecture likely happened as one of many other practices; however, unlike others, it has been documented. Another early example of sexuality education and sometimes considered a beginning, is Karolina Widerström's lectures. Widerström was Sweden's first female physician and an active reformist for women's rights. In 1897 Widerström gave lectures on sexual hygiene at *Stockholms högre flickskolor*[1] [*Stockholm's Higher education for Girls*] (Bolander, 2009; Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013; SOU, 1974). It is unclear whether it was strictly given to the students at the school *Ateneum*, or if a wider audience could take part. Regardless, these lectures were highly popular, for despite not being advertised, they had to be repeated five times (SOU, 1974). Widerström's lectures gave rise to what later would become the formal education on sexuality in schools. In contrast to the puritan approach of silencing concerns of the sexual (something completely going against Linnaeus's lecture), Widerström favoured educating children from an early age. For her, educating children before their sexual curiosity had awakened was important for then, both boys and girls would better understand human reproduction and pregnancy. In this way, they would be prepared to face the responsibilities of parenthood when engaging in sexual activities as adults. Instead of focusing on the horrors of sex, sexual morality was to be cultivated by emphasising the natural aspects of sex by studying both animal and human reproduction. In her lecture, Widerstöm stated:

> Mercifully let them have other enlightenment first, let them see the beauty, the harmony, and that for a long time, before they learn of the ugliness and disharmony[2] (Widerström in SOU, 1974, p. 78).

Widerström's vision and practice was a pedagogic turn of sexuality education that established what Swedish sexuality education is and how it should be taught. However, while Widerström stands out, she was not alone. Around the 1900s when Widerström was active, the issue of sexuality education in schools

[1] At that time, higher education was considered schooling beyond middle school SCB. (2021). *Flickor och pojkar i skolan. En historisk översikt på grundskolenivå* [Girls and boys in school – A historical overview at the primary school level] (S. centralbyrån & S. s. o. analys, Eds.). urn:nbn:se:scb-2021-a40br2107_pdf .

[2] I original: "Låt dem av barmhärtighet få annan upplysning först, låt dem se skönheten, harmonien, och det under lång tid, innan de får veta om fulheten och disharmonien"

was investigated by the state and up for debate in both Parliament and the public (Lindgren & Backman Prytz, 2022; SOU, 1936). In 1908 *Svenska läkarsällskapet* [*the Swedish Medical Society*] arranged a competition to find the best teaching manuals for sexuality education (Lindgren, 2018). According to Lindgren (2018), the prize-winning manual was geared towards ambitions of fostering a positive attitude towards body and sexuality and gender equality. This was not unlike the pedagogic vision of Widerström. However, according to a state report, SOU 1974:59, this vision did not lead to any actual changes on an institutional level until 1942 when the curriculum for upper-secondary school was copied into the elementary school curriculum (Lindgren & Backman Prytz, 2022). The report (SOU 1974:59) states that *Folkskolans*[3] syllabi on hembygdsundervisning[4] and natural science ordained students to learn about the human body, how to take care of it, gender differences, and human foetal development. Apart from teaching subject knowledge, sexuality education was part of ethical education in school and therefore recommended to underscore values of morality, sexual restraint or even abstinence until marriage, and homemaking. Regardless of gender, all students were to be taught the same content, but it was possible to separate boys and girls when speaking on the subject of sex. Moreover, similar to today's sexuality education, it was also to be taught across subject borders to make it a natural part of schooling. It was up to the single teacher to undertake this task, but assigning the teaching to another teacher or expertise, such as a physician, was possible. To support the teachers, the Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs commissioned a *Sex Education Expert Committee* in 1943 to formulate guidelines and teacher training (Lindgren & Backman Prytz, 2022). In 1944, the first official teacher guidance on sexuality education was published but due to heavy criticism led by RFSU [*the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education*], the publication was retracted and revised (SOU, 1974). The guidance was criticised for spreading an outdated view on morality and sexual life as the strict message stood in sharp contrast to the social and sexual life of the working class and people in rural areas. In 1945, a new and revised guidance was released. The previously moralising over some families and uplifting superiority of others was now erased while the focus on abstinence and marriage was replaced with individual maturity for engaging in sexual activities.

[3] The educational level of Folkskolan can be compared with today's middle school.

[4] Hembygdsundervisning refers to the study of local nature, its animals and plants, its history and social life.

Sexuality education existed as an idea, content and practice before 1955. However, why 1955 stands out is because this moment crowns Sweden to be the first country in the world to make sexuality education compulsory for all children. Through the formalised writings in the curricula, Sweden sets itself apart from the rest of the world (exception) and becomes an example for others to follow (Habel, 2012; Martinsson, 2021; Zimmerman, 2015). However, even if it is not explicitly stated, it seems as if sexuality education was formalised into compulsory schooling via a reform of unifying the Swedish school system (SOU, 1974). Objects such as the curriculum direct orientation, but for the teachers working around 1955, the orientation of whether or not they were supposed to teach sexuality education was ambiguous (even if most of them did teach it out of necessity). To set it all straight, at a teachers' conference in 1956, chief physician and former expert in the "sex education committee" from 1943, Carl Wilhelm Herlitz clarified the orientation of sexuality education and told the auditorium that 'sexuality education is now on compulsory in all forms of school' (SOU, 1974, p. 116, own translation).

Regardless of when or how sexuality education begins, it does not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, this section has shown how more or less organised lectures, competitions, debate articles, statements, syllabi, teaching guidance, investigations, reports, and so forth have been occupying and simultaneously producing sexuality education in school. Between an imagined beginning and today, the gathering of these objects indicates a line of what has been but also points towards *what* and *how* teaching within this field is supposed to be. To achieve a supposed being, action needs to take place. Therefore, in the next section, I will discuss how *objects of beginnings* have gathered with *objects of reasons*.

## Objects of reason

Sexuality education is known to change in line with society as it deals with social problems, (Iyer & Aggleton, 2015; Lennerhed, 2002). By targeting issues of importance (often through policy), it also assists in framing the boundaries of normality and deviance (Lukkerz, 2023; Roien et al., 2022). Informed by strong discourses of the individual (Lamb & Randazzo, 2016), contemporary policies on sexuality education emphasise the importance of sexuality education for the well-being of young people and their sexual agency to make sound sexual decisions (e.g Skolverket, 2022a, 2022b; UNESCO, 2018b,

2021). However, current policies favouring individual well-being are a fairly new *object of reason* in sexuality education.

Looking at the past objects of beginnings, like Widerström's lecture or the prize-winning manual on sexuality education, it becomes possible to see that the object of reason to support sexuality education was shaped around promoting a scientific and natural view of body and sexuality. This object stood in sharp contrast to previous objects of reason that had emphasised body and sexuality to be a religious matter. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the gathering of knowledge, science, and the natural and secularism pushed religion to the side. As an object of reason, pioneering feminists and reformists saw sexuality education as mien to increase women's knowledge and reproductive power, but others had different reasons for supporting sexuality education. In a state report from 1929, *Betänkande med förslag till lagstiftning om åtgärder mot lösdriveri samt åtgärder mot sedeslöst leverne av samhällsskadlig art* [*Report with proposals for legislation on measures against vagrancy and measures against immoral life of a socially harmful nature*] sexuality education was argued to be a double motion in which teaching youths about ethics and sexual hygiene could serve to protect youths from sexually transmitting diseases, prevent them to engaging with prostitution (either as a client or provider), and serve to erase prostitution all together (see SOU, 1929, pp. 66, 92-93). Furthermore, sexuality education would be especially beneficial for youths in the risk of immoral behaviour, as sexuality education would provide them with good sexual ethics. A sound, civil, and responsible comprehension of sexuality was especially important for these youths, therefore it was

> Essential to as early as possible get boys and girls interested in some activity that draws their minds away from the sexual--- to other areas, especially to a brisk outdoor life. Sensibly led sports and athletics movements will surely do good[5]. (SOU, 1929, p. 129, own translation)

In reasoning for the need for sexuality education in school, there was an emphasis on social strength in body, mind, and spirit. These notions were also enforced by the idea of degeneration in which sexuality education, as well as sterilisation, were methods to exercise the new social and racial hygiene (see Bergendal, 1933). According to Hultén (2008), the focus on human sexuality and health radically changed during the First- and Second-World War (1914-

[5] Mycket viktigt är att så tidigt som möjligt söka få gossar och flickor intresserade av någon rörelse, som drager deras tankar bort från det sexuella — till andra områden, framför allt till ett hurtigt friluftsliv. Förståndigt ledda sport- och idrottsrörelser göra säkert god nytta

1918, 1939-1945). During this period, social engineering and desires to provide good social norms to the new generation was sharpened. As mentioned above, Sweden was the first country in the world to make sexuality education compulsory, but Sweden was also the first country in the world to have a state-funded institute for eugenics. In 1922 *Statens institut för rasbiologi* [*the Government Institute for Race Biology*] opened its doors. According to Björkman and Widmalm (2010), the institute was made possible through a network of political lobbyism and disciplinary collaborations, but also by engaging a general public support to favour a 'national spirit' for the good of society (p. 390). Under the rephrase of Linnaeus's motto for the Homo sapiens, *know thyself*, Herman Lundborg, later director of the institute, initiated an exhibition called *Svenska folktyper* [*Swedish racial types*] in 1919. Under the exhibition's motto 'Know thyself, thy family, and thy people' Lundborg invited the Swedish population to 'reflect on the future of the nation and their own families, their own identity and future opportunities' (p. 385). The exhibition was popular and viewed by approximately 40.000 people in five cities. The "Swedish types" were portrayed through photographs, sculptures, and paintings and arranged to emphasise racial differences and racial hierarchies to underscore the 'a natural aristocracy' and superiority of the higher (purer and whiter) races (p. 388). Images from the exhibition were later put in print and published as a form of eugenic coffee table books to encourage further support for the cause. These books were sent to influential people both within and outside of Sweden. While the primary tool for racial purity was sterilisation, sexuality education could assist in disciplining the body, mind, and soul for the benefit of strengthening the social body of the nation. In 1914, when *Folkundervisningskommittén* [*the Public Education Committee*] investigated whether sexuality education should be provided in schools, most were against it but 'at the same time opened to individual school authorities to introduce "education in sexual hygiene" in primary schools' (Hultén, 2008, p. 137, own translation). In Sweden, the subject of health education concerning heredity, domestic science, and sexual knowledge was a fundamental part of the curriculum in almost all subjects (Hultén, 2008).

Through various objects of reason, Sweden ended up forming a coherent support for sexuality education around the 1930s. In a state investigation in 1936, the Commission recommended children, already before school age, should take part in a 'simple, natural, truthful, objective and unsentimental' teaching about how living beings come into the world (SOU, 1936, p. 125). Textbooks in Natural Science from 1935 explicitly describe how the school's

role is to 'lighten the mystery' and 'participate in the fight against an incorrect and outdated view of sexual life' (Hultén, 2008, p. 136, my translation), and by 1942 all schools were recommended to teach sexuality education. Rather than vaguely considering individual adaptions of sexuality education, the new modern pedagogical stance was that the school should teach sexuality education because it had shown good social effects. According to the Commission, teachers, doctors, and parents noticed how young people raised by more enlightened parents sensibly showed less inappropriate sexual interest with a sounder and correct attitude to sexuality (see SOU, 1936, p. 126). Furthermore, the Commission concluded all students to benefit from sexuality education, reasoning that in similarity to other school subjects, the need for further education remains, regardless of the student's home environment (see SOU, 1936, p. 126). Previous concerns and reasons to protect the innocence of children by preventing knowledge was now pushed aside. Instead, the Commission argued that previous generation's perception of sexual knowledge to prematurely awaken children's sexual drive was outdated and incorrect.

That objects of reason often are shaped around a perceived problem still resides within sexuality education. Studies of the most recent reform (in 2022) show how particular problem representations emerge in policy (Lukkerz, 2023). In these policies, young people's sexuality is imagined between a notion of risks and health [*risk och frisk*], while pleasure is non-existent. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in Lukkerz (2023) work, the unanimous support for sexuality education is visible in the preparatory work as it reveals that there is no opposition from agencies, politicians or other influential actors to having sexuality education in schools. Instead, referral statements from professional actors, such as politicians and experts, concern problems of gender equality, consent, and pornography, as well as honorary violence. In the curricula reform of 2020 (Lgr22), these objects were to be found in the curriculum for compulsory school, preschool classes and school-age educare, stating:

> Schools have a responsibility to ensure that pupils repeatedly discuss issues relating to sexuality, consent and relationships during their schooling. Education shall thus promote the health and well-being of all pupils and empower them to make informed and independent choices. Schools shall help pupils to develop an understanding of both their own rights and the rights of others, and convey the importance of sexuality and relationships being consensual. Education shall critically examine power structures linked to gender and honour-based abuse and oppression. Pupils shall also be given the opportunity to develop a critical approach to how relationships and sexuality are portrayed in various media and

> contexts, including pornography. (Skolverket, 2022a, p. 8, official translation, english version published 2024).

The orientation of Swedish sexuality education leaves a trace of unanimous support behind. However, the objects occupying and unifying sexuality education are not confined within the borders of Sweden. Around the turn of the 20th century up until the second half, issues of society and social reforms towards social liberty, equal rights for women and sexual enlightenment were spread and supported by intellectuals and reformists in the Western world (Carter, 2001; Hustak, 2013; Luker, 2007; Moran, 2010; Zimmerman, 2015). These were the time's modern and progressive ideas (ideal objects). According to Moran (1996), the rationale was that sexual ignorance had led to a weakening of society in which venereal diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhoea were spread to respectable married women and children since married men had sex with prostitutes. Moran describes how the medical profession and the Evangelical Protestant Movements in the early 1900s regarded prostitution to be the source of the problem. Unfortunately, previous attempts to prevent urban decay had been relatively ineffective. Frustrated by the social problems in society, Luker (2007) describes how philanthropist Grace "Dodger" Hoadley Dodge invited a dozen prominent reformers to her red dining room on New York's Fifth Avenue in 1913. During dinner, Dodger urged the group that it was time to act. The group received broad support, but more importantly, it received financial donations from prominent American families such as John D. Rockefeller (Standard Oil), Julius Rosenwald (director of Sears), Edward S. Harkness (Standard Oil), Henry C. Frick (Carnegie Steel), and from influential movements such as the Christian and Jewish community (Luker, 2007, p. 40). One year later, on Valentine's Day, *the American Social Hygiene Association* (ASAH) was born, and their work to promote sexuality education began.

For the group, social hygiene had two meanings. Hygiene referred to physical, social, mental, and spiritual health, while social was a euphemism for sex and sexual education. This meant that sexuality would be related to all forms of hygiene (Luker, 2007). To achieve healthy sexuality, male values of work ethics would be paired up with female values of morality and family. The social hygienists envisioned that the industrialised society would be improved by this new stance (Luker, 2007). Now, reasons for supporting sexuality education were not only informed by health but through a reasoning of productivity. Moreover, apart from securing productivity in a growing economy, sexuality education was also viewed as a form of protection against

enemy nations. In a pamphlet from *the California State Board of Health* (CSBH), it states:

> No army and no nation can attain to its full vigor when its young men are weakened by venereal diseases when its women are barren, and when it´s children are defective (Carter, 2001, p. 224).

Supporting sexuality education was then not only a matter of individual well-being, but of patriotism since sexually transmitted diseases threatened to weaken men, women and children and the strength of the nation.

Looking upon sexuality education through the *objects of reasons*, it is clear that the reasons for providing sexuality education in school are varying, sometimes overlapping, and sometimes even identical across contexts. What this section reveals is that it is essential to recognise how what may have been perceived as unanimous support actually embeds vastly different reasons. Moreover, in a crusade *against* some prevailing problem or *for* something, this section emphasises how the good of society can be many different things depending on *who* has the reach (influence and power) to define it. To take a closer look at how direction is guided through influence and power, the next section focuses on describing the *object of quality* and its authority within sexuality education.

## Objects of quality

After sexuality education found its way into the Swedish curricula, new tensions arose. As discussed above, sexuality education in schooling was secured through the gathering of several objects of reasons (unanimous support) and a linage of history (objects of beginnings). However, about a decade after the compulsory, a series of reviews were initiated to investigate how sexuality education was organised and taught (see SOU, 1969b; SOU, 1969c, 1969d, 1970). This was part of a major survey concerning the sexual life of Swedes. Published in 1969, the report revealed that 86 per cent of the approximately 2,200 interviewees were in favour of sexuality education in schools, while 5 per cent were unsure and 9 per cent were against it (SOU, 1969a, pp. 44-45). As the report also concerned the population's sexual life (experiences), it showed that people in favour of abstinence were more likely to be against sexuality education in schools but also less knowledgeable than the average population on matters of the body and sexuality. Moreover, it showed variations across generations, and therefore, it was deemed necessary

for sexuality education to combat sexual myths and misconceptions spread among youths and between older and younger generations. It was suggested that sexuality education was to include different ways of life and approaches to sexuality but to remain objective by making 'all teachers […] required to teach according to a certain prescribed study plan drawn up by experts' (SOU, 1969a, p. 51, own translation).

In relation to sexuality education, experts were given the role of defining quality by dictating *how* and *what* to teach. Teachers, on the other hand, were to represent the voice of objectivity, while at the same time, solving the actual and practical problems of embodying objectivity in the classroom. Something, Hyldgaard (2024) has pointed out to be a pedagogic impossibility. To inspect the fairly new implementation of sexuality education, questionnaires were distributed to both students and teachers[6]. The ambition to practice objectivity was challenging and the review reported that 9th-grade teachers considered themselves sufficiently equipped to teach sexuality education, but that content outside the fact-based biology was more difficult (SOU, 1969d, p. 75). Sticking with biology and the natural explanations of sexuality seemed to be the teachers' answer to objectivity, but as sexuality education included more than bodily facts, teachers' insecurities grew. According to the report, teachers in primary and middle school did not feel sufficiently equipped at all despite receiving education and further training to teach it (SOU, 1969d). Therefore, professional training for teachers were arranged by the School Agency in the 1970s and 1980s, and a new and updated teacher guidance was produced in 1977 (Skolverket, 1999).

By the 1990s, these quality-assuring programs were cut and replaced by enthusiastic teachers or external experts from youth guidance centres [*Ungdomsmottagningen*] and NGOs such as RFSU [*Swedish Association for Sexuality Education*] and RFSL [*the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Rights*] (Skolverket, 1999). In this time, a new and complex organisational model of sexuality education began to take shape. The new and improved curriculum for the compulsory and voluntary school system, Lpo/Lpf94 emphasised how sexuality education was no longer confined to one subject (Skolverket, 1994). Along with subjects such as the environment, traffic rules, gender equality, consumer issues, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, sexuality education became formally known as an

[6] For more information, see SOU 1969:8 *Sexualkunskapen på skolans högstadium I, Elevenkät*, SOU 1969:44 *Sexualkunskapen på skolans högstadium II, Lärarenkät*, SOU 1969:28 *Sexualkunskapen i gymnasiet, Elevenkät*, SOU 1970:39 *Sexualkunskapen på grundskolans låg-och mellanstadier, Lärarenkät.*

interdisciplinary knowledge area. Moreover, in the curriculum sexuality education became an explicit concern for principals as they were responsible for ensuring sexuality education to be integrated into other subjects (Skolverket, 1994). It should be noted that while the term knowledge-area was a new epithet, previous curricula had described teachers to be able to adapt their teaching to local conditions and form collaborations with other subjects (see Skolöverstyrelsen, 1966, p. 337; 1969, pp. 52, 164) under the principal's supervision (see Regeringen, 1980, pp. 60-62; Skolöverstyrelsen, 1966, pp. 64-65; 1975, p. 40). This oriented sexuality education towards a managerial sphere. In 1999, the government decided to initiate a series of national quality reviews of the subject-integrated knowledge areas. To inspect the quality of sexuality education, 83 schools in 20 municipalities[7] were categorised across a three-grade scale from high to low quality. Most schools (37) were placed on a mid-level because the principal had not subject-integrated and therefore failed to assure all students to be given sexuality education. The second largest category consisting of 33 schools were considered low quality. Similar to the mid-level schools, these lacked managerial support to organise and document sexuality education. Their practice only covered the most basic content of sexuality education, such as the reproductive body, puberty, abortion, contraceptives, and sexually transmitting diseases. Moreover, these schools taught sexuality education by following a textbook and leaving little room for discussions and student's own experiences. The smallest category consisted of 10 schools with a high-quality sexuality education. In these schools, principals fulfilled their responsibility and documented their goals with sexuality education. Rather than simply following the textbook, the teaching was varied and allowed student's needs and interests are included in for example conversations and in choosing the content (Skolverket, 1999).

The quality review from 1999 shows that unlike the recommendations and strict guidance of teachers from the first half of the 20th century, the notion of quality had been redefined. The year after, a new teacher's guidance was released to give state-of-the-art example of sexuality education. The guidance, *Kärlek känns! Förstår du* (Centerwall, 2000), the importance of placing young people's experiences and questions in the centre of sexuality education is emphasised along with an emphasis on how it is necessary for teachers to continuously seek knowledge to ensure high quality in sexuality education. To

[7] There are approximately 290 municipalities in Sweden according to *Sveriges kommuner och Regioner* [*The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions*], see
https://skr.se/skr/tjanster/kommunerochregioner/faktakommunerochregioner.1022.html [accessed 2024-07-15]

ensure the guidance content, experts from various fields were involved in the process, whereas youth interviews were carried out to voice some of the topics raised. In the guidance, high quality was equivalent to the ability to keep a good conversation with students, and the ability to switch between a personal and professional mode of teaching. Moreover, teachers should also show what is right and what is wrong. In the guidance, keeping an open attitude to various forms and expressions of sexuality is right, while moralising judgements and abstinence are wrong. While the review had emphasised the importance of principals for the quality of sexuality education, the new responsibility of the principal was not even mentioned even if the curriculum of 1994 (Lpo 94) and 2011 (Lpo 11, revised 2017) had made it explicit. Despite the principal's responsibility to organise, document, and evaluate how well the school followed the national goals of education (in which sexuality education was one), the guidance focused on the individual teacher's ability to teach.

Quality in the early 2000s revolved around the principal's skill to handle the managerial task of sexuality education as well as the single teacher's ability to facilitate discussions and including students' experiences. The focus on management and teachers' professionalism would increase and expand during the 2020s. In 2018, *the Swedish School Inspectorate* made a new inspection. To achieve good quality in sexuality education, the report underscored the importance of strengthening teacher's competence to teach, creating systematic work, and establishing clear goals (Luthman, 2018). The message was clear: using the curriculum goals was not enough. So, rather than using the goals stated in the curriculum, schools needed to develop their own goals and integrate them into their systematic quality work. Examples of best practice were schools that in some way had made sexuality education part of their systematic quality work and values [värdegrundsarbete] by creating plans and explicit descriptions of how to work with sexuality education, had sent their personnel on education for professional development, and/or made use of teacher guidance in planning for sexuality education (Luthman, 2018). Similar to previous inspections, the report concludes that the quality of sexuality education varies among, and sometimes even within, schools. This is in itself a problem for according to the review:

> That sex education needs to maintain a high quality becomes clear in view of several of society's problems that connect to various issues of sex and relationships. Lack of gender equality in different areas, sexual harassment at school, sexual risk behaviour among young people, unwanted pregnancies, honorary problems, mental illness in young people and especially the higher

> mental illness in young LGBTQ- persons, violence in close relationships as well as discrimination and violations are just a few examples (Luthman, 2018, p. 40, own translation.).

Through sexuality education, and especially a high-quality sexuality education, new and various problems of society are imagined to be defeated. Hill (2021) describes how policy envision norm-critical approaches to be a "vaccine" against discrimination and harassments, while simultaneously promoting equity. The importance of systematic work and rigour to assure a high-quality sexuality education is also emphasised the most recent quality review conducted by the Swedish School Inspectorate in 2024. The new review connects with the findings of the review conducted in 2018 but has its main focus on the school's implementation of 2022s curriculum. Due to the revised curriculum in 2022, the review focuses on the school's work of prevent intolerance, oppression and violence of, for example racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, as well as honour-related violence and oppression. The scope of the review focus on the relational and social aspects of sexuality education that is provided within each subject, although sexuality education is also provided beyond subject lessons in school. The review describes the importance of achieving coordination between subjects to avoid overlaps and promote width and depth in the contents, as well as assuring sexuality education to be prioritised and reoccurring throughout the school year. Unlike previous reviews, 2025s review describe areas in need of improvement by providing examples of situations that can be of low, and of high-quality. Such example can be to avoid saving sexuality education to the end of the semester after gradings are completed to instead make use of sexuality education's relational aspects during the beginning of the school year (SSI, 2025).

Describing the objects of quality through curricula and reviews of sexuality education shows how the definition of what is to be regarded as high-quality sexuality education has changed over the years. The orientation of sexuality education through the object of quality has moved from cherishing the rigour of following to a more reflexive practice of curiosity and reflection, as well as emphasising an administrative practice of documenting, planning, systematising, and evaluating. Together, *objects of beginnings*, *objects of reason* and *objects of quality* has paved the way for an orientation in sexuality education.

# 4 THE LANDSCAPE OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous research can be described as a compilation of distinctions. By drawing lines around and between research topics, methods, theoretical perspectives and results, these lines will show what belongs together and how. Together, these lines and gatherings sketch up the landscape of previous research and reveal how the thesis is oriented.

As a phenomenon, sexuality education, is not only confined within educational studies. Rather, the object of study in which disciplinary lines are crossed, knotted or tangled together. It is a topic of interest in other disciplines, such as medicine, public health, sexology, gender studies, and educational studies (Allen & Rasmussen, 2016; Roien et al., 2018). This makes the research field of sexuality education comprehensive.

In an attempt to describe the comprehensiveness and its consequences, this chapter begins with a general overview of research on sexuality education. This is then followed by four thematic discussions that cross-disciplinary fields (such as the history of ideas, zoology/ evolutionary biology, gender studies, ethnology, sociology, and science education), to show how the thesis relates to the research field of sexuality education aimed towards exploring norms and privileges of gender, age, race, and sexuality.

The first thematic discussion addresses how the knowledge of sexuality is framed by highlighting how bias as social norms and values have influenced natural science and the presumed objective descriptions of body and sexuality. The second discussion compiles research describing how these biases trickle into the science classroom via objective descriptions of the natural in sex and sexual behaviour. As most of the research found in this thematic discussion points towards a need for sexuality education to address norms, the third thematic discussion describes research on (especially) norm-critical pedagogy

and the critique of its blindness towards race and religion as part of the diversity spectrum. Because of this, the fourth and final thematic discussion focuses on research on race and whiteness in schooling and in sexuality education.

## Research on sexuality education

Even if sexuality education has been part of the Swedish school since the 1950s (and a to some extent also before that), not all studies are published within educational journals focused on particular subjects or aspects of schooling. Instead, as mentioned above, the research field of sexuality education is comprehensive and studies can occur in journals with a primary focus on social and historical studies of sexuality and/perhaps education (i.e *Sexualities*, *Gender and Education, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, Journal of the history of sexuality,*) whereas others are more concerned with the clinical and therapeutic approaches (i.e *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, *International Journal of Sexual Health*). It can also appear in journals exploring religious or cultural aspects of sexuality (i.e *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *Theology & Sexuality: The Journal of the Institute for the Study of Christianity & Sexuality*). However, among the many journals there are two specifically dedicated to sexuality education: the international journal *Sex Education* and the more practice oriented *American Journal of Sexuality Education* (formerly known as *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*).

In a systematic mapping of research published between 2000-2016, Roien et al. (2018) found that the vast majority of research represented English-speaking countries despite including all of the Scandinavian languages in the search. Systemic literature reviews such as these shows that the field of sexuality education is vibrant, but that scholarly work written in smaller languages and diverse contexts are at risk of disappearing in the masses. Moreover, as sexuality education crosses disciplinary traditions, important scholarly work can be overlooked due to its publication strategies. For example, out of 576 articles, only 6 represented the Nordic countries.

Since Roien et al. (2018) scoping review, there has been more efforts to compile research from diverse contexts and on diverse issues over the last decade. In 2024, the journal *Utbildning & demokrati* released a special issue on sexuality education (Gunnarsson et al., 2024). The contributions reflect

how Swedish sexuality education appears within and across subjects and ages, and how teachers collaborate or intake different roles and subject positions. When it comes to studies of sexuality education in Sweden and the Nordic countries, there are also few theses and anthologies. For example, Ceder et al. (2021) describe practices of sexuality education in lower secondary and upper secondary schooling, whereas Bengtsson and Bolander (2024) has collected contributions to highlight issues in preschool and up to grade six. In another anthology, Martinsson and Reimers (2008) highlighted aspects of sexuality education by collecting research and giving examples of how norms concerning gender and sexuality are producing a doing of school and how the school in turn produces a doing of norms. This is something Røthing and Bang Svendsen (2009) addresses. In their textbook, they exemplify and problematise how Norwegian and Swedish sexuality education departs and reinforces an assumed position of heterosexuality and national ethnic belonging. It is unclear if there are similar compilations of Icelandic and Finish sexuality education, but the context and aspects of sexuality education is studied and communicated to a wider international audience (see i.e Kjaran & Lehtonen, 2018). Research explicitly targeting Greenland and Faroe Islands is scarce (see i.e Nørtoft & Rubin, 2024).

As mentioned before, the research landscape of sexuality education is comprehensive. In the Swedish and Nordic research on sexuality education, some studies have focused on the historical development of obligatory sexuality education (Lindgren & Backman Prytz, 2021; Lindgren & Backman Prytz, 2022) and the role of reformatory activists and public debate to emphasise the diversity and enjoyment of sexuality (Lennerhed, 1994, 2002). Whereas others has made discourse and text analysis of policies, such as curriculum and guidance' to see what has been put in focus and made ideal as well as deviant (Hulth et al., 2024; Lukkerz, 2023; Nordmark & Bolander, 2024; Roien et al., 2022; Svendsen, 2017). In relation to the political power, culture and morality, others have emphasised how sexuality education stir emotions and actualise issues of what is appropriate and necessary to learn become entangled with discussions concerning the age and maturity of children and adolescents (Ferfolja et al., 2024; Hulth, 2024; Robinson & Davies, 2017; Van Wichelen et al., 2024). For some, the mere words of sex and sexuality is provoking in child-centred environments (such as schools and early childhood education) (Cacciatore et al., 2020). At the same time, gender and sexuality frequently appears in educational contexts due to children's interactions and queries,

which then make sexuality education part of teacher's daily practice – even in early childhood education (Hulth, 2024).

When focusing on students engaging with sexuality education, some research focus on how students can gain insights and learn about sexuality through history (Fisher et al., 2017; Haltorp et al., 2024), or through objects like condoms and dental dams (Bolander, 2015; Planting-Bergloo & Orlander, 2024b), tampons (Planting-Bergloo et al., 2022), or visual objects like pornography (Litsou et al., 2021; Maas et al., 2022; Planting-Bergloo & Orlander, 2024a). As sexuality education is conveyed in many ways, others focus on the sexuality education happening on social media (Porter et al., 2024) or in informative TV-programs (Bolander, 2009) that can be showed in schools (Cardell & Lindgren, 2024). Others focus on collaborating with children and adolescents to understand and develop sexuality education (Bragg et al., 2018; Lehtonen et al., 2024; Renold & Timperley, 2023) by highlighting what students want to learn about body, sexuality, and sex-related issues (Allsop et al., 2024; Cense et al., 2020).

When it comes to research concerning teachers Cummings et al. (2021) found that teachers beliefs and attitudes towards mattered for how teachers engage with sexuality education in K-12. For the most teachers in the survey, sexuality education seemed to be motivated by the necessity of prevention and access to accurate information, whereas issues such as inclusiveness, healthy sexual development, and gender identity were not identified. This result overlap to some extent with Goldschmidt-Gjerløw (2022) study of science teachers, whom found teacher gender and age to affect what aspects of sexuality education are introduced to students. Goldschmidt-Gjerløw (2022) reasons that topics such as sexual assault and harassment are connected with the teacher's life experiences to navigate what they find important since younger female teacher were quick to include issues of sexual harassment and assault by connecting with 2017's me too movement. Teachers gender, age, life experiences, and so on, should perhaps not affect what is taught in school. But as Hyldgaard (2024) point out. It does. For in school, and especially in sexuality education, teachers' professionalism is at stake, since it is putting the teacher, as a subject, to sexuality. Therefore, limiting sexuality education to the basics, like reproduction and prevention, and not include more uplifting aspects such as pleasure, can according to Hyldgaard (2024) be seen as one of the most common forms of resistance.

Against the opacity of heterosexual culture of schooling (Davis & Hay, 2018; Martinsson & Reimers, 2008; Reimers, 2017), providing a diverse and

inclusive sexuality education is not given despite having policies promoting it in place, as teachable moments are lost due to insecurities of feeling unknowledgeable on certain topics, such as LGBTQ (Fox & Riley, 2025). To understand sexuality education, Lundin (2024) explore LGBTQ teachers experiences of belonging. From their experiences of working in school, teachers describe the internal silences that can come from navigating in a rather heterosexual space. Based on his findings, Lundin (2024) argues for the importance of schooling, in which sexuality education is part, to build institutional alliance and create institutional support for inclusion and awareness to offer a sense of belonging to both teachers and students. While schooling aims to foster a tolerance for diverse sexualities, it must be added that through Puar's (2007) concept of *homonationalism*, Reimers (2017) found Swedish teacher training programmes to craft a form of nationalism in which subjectivities of tolerable queers are produced along with subjectivities of the intolerant migrants. Departing from interviews with teachers working with trans students, Meyer and Leonardi (2018) reach similar conclusions as Lundin (2024) and emphasise professional development to be crucial for maintaining an education that affirm gender diversity. In school, pedagogies of exposure can be a starting point, but as a pedagogic intervention, it is only actualised when someone in school "comes out". Instead, Meyer and Leonardi (2018) argues for a culture of conversation for teachers and students to critically reflect upon themselves and engage in a productive dissent.

This section has given a brief overview of the rich scholarly work on sexuality education and some of the directions that studies of teachers' experiences reveal. In the following sections, there will be more studies related to the content conveyed in sexuality education, as well as, practices and experiences of working with it.

## Gendered and racial biases - the facts of body, reproduction and sexuality

Sexuality education, as a school subject, sometimes orients towards differentiating between biological facts and social norms. Therefore, this section begins with an overview of research showing how social norms in the shape of biases on gender and race have infiltrated natural science and their claim to objectivity when it comes to knowledge about body, reproduction and sexuality.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the issue of bias was informed by feminist scholarship's analysis of power to understand how, especially gender bias, could and had affected the natural sciences. Keller and Longino (1996) stressed natural science to 'have assumed a position of unparalleled authority in twentieth-century Western intellectual life' (p. 1), hence masking the natural sciences intimate connections to social and cultural contexts. Haraway (1988) points out that as the voice of knowledge and reason, scientists have all too often worked from a 'gaze from nowhere' claiming 'the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation' (p. 581). As feminist philosophy and feminist theory have debunked the myth and shown objectivity to signify 'the unmarked positions of Man and White', Haraway (1988) suggests re-defining objectivity to 'situated knowledges' (1988, p. 581). By situating knowledge, there is room for disturbance as it shows dominance and subordinations to be less of a natural order and more of a means to control what is in place and how. To exemplify, Haraway uses the distinction of sex/gender to propose how a division of nature/culture turns the biological concept of sex into a resource to control the socially imagined gender. Others like Butler (2006, 2014) have continued developing these ideas, proposing how gender, as a powerful performance, constitute the body and sexuality to be divided into two natural sexes, - male and female -, signifying two natural ways of being in which masculinity and femininity are complementary in a natural love of heterosexuality.

Little is natural with a performance. Historical research on gender and human sexuality has shown there to be different ways of imagining the body and sex. For example, in medical texts, Laqueur (1994) found there to be two systems of imagining and defining sex. Until the 1800s, men and women were not seen as distinctively separated sexes; instead, women were considered underdeveloped men as they did not possess enough heat to develop into full men. Instead of having their genitals on the outside of the body, theirs were hidden inside. Because of their obvious underdevelopment, subordination of women was natural, for they, like any child, needed male authority to be cared for. The one-sex model was not replaced overnight but existed in parallel with the two-sex model that instead imagined the two sexes to be fundamentally different (Laqueur, 2003). Martin (1992) explains that while the one-sex model secured women's subordination as a matter of natural development, the new two sex-model found arguments in the politics of Hobbes, Locke and the French revolution, as men emerged in the public sphere and 'women (except for the lower classes) as wives and mothers in the private, domestic sphere of

kinship and morality inside the home' (p. 32). The fundamental division of men and women as distinct genders was secured by biology. Other sciences, like 'zoology, embryology, physiology, heredity, anthropology, and psychology' came to the rescue and claimed 'pattern of male female relations that characterized the English middle classes was natural, inevitable, and progressive' (Martin, 1992, p. 32).

The move to secure fundamental difference did not only concern gender but race and racial difference. Imagining and securing racial difference was first through religious doctrine on the origin of man and his relation to God (Braude, 1997; Kidd, 2006a, 2006b; Robert, 2007). This would justify enslavement and exploitation, but, with the rise of the enlightenment, scripture was replaced by science. Early scientists (naturalists) like François Bernier (1620–1688), George-Louis Leclerc, Comte du Buffon (1707–1788) and Carl von Linné (Linnaeus) (1707–1778) benefited from the transatlantic slave trade to catalogue more than the objects (plants and species) in their immediate surrounding. Through stories, literature, observations, dissections, and exhibitions new exotic and foreign climates, plants, animals, and *peoples*[8] became in (at least mental) reach. This reach set in a sense of orientation as it installed an imagined "here" and an "over there, far away". But more importantly, when global history expanded, it questioned the uniqueness and superiority of man as the divide between man and ape narrowed (Sebastiani, 2019). Through scientific methods and theorisation, scientists and philosophers made sense of the world by giving it order through concepts and categories. In compiling the works of famous philosophers, Eze (1997) shows how the notion of race and racial hierarchy was embedded, defended, and justified during the period we now refer to as the enlightenment. Sebastiani (2019) describes how the notion of savage was constructed around comparative anatomy of orangutangs and humans made in the second half of the 17th century. This category in turn was mainly applied to Africans and Amerindians but it was also in use to categories the poor in Europe or wild boys and girls in the forest. Schiebinger (1990) describes how naturalists placed white women and Africans as inferior to white men and argue for their difference and shortcomings by referring to their anatomical and physical structures. Later, the orientation toward biology to justify racial hierarchies intensified with the search for racial purity and eugenics in the 1910-1940s and the rise of a state-funded institute

[8] This refers to distinction and the process of turning people into peoples, see Fredrickson, G. M. (2015). *Racism : a short history*. Princeton University Press.

on race biology, *Statens institut för rasbiologi* [*the Government Institute for Race Biology*] (Björkman & Widmalm, 2010). However, the glory did not last long, with the beginning of UN and its sub-institution Unesco in the 1950s, the biological notion of race and scepticism of inter-racial relations was first condemned, and in 1996, Sweden would become the first country in the world to abolish the word race on a constitutional level (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022, pp. 44-47, 56). From the 1960s and onwards, the former racial categorisation were replaced with the concept of ethnicity (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022).

Abolishing words, will however, not rid racial bias and inequality, as racism and racial prejudice was existing long before the actual word race was invented (Fredrickson, 2015). To understand the intimate relation between science and social bias, Longino and Doell (1983) suggest scientific interpretations of data to be unreliable because of the distance between the data and the descriptive language communicating the findings. Because of this, scientific explanations of the human evolution, hormones, and animal studies are not neutral but understood and conveyed through notions of for example gender or race. It is well-known that early scientists and naturalists reproduced their worldview through their science. Linnaeus, for example, referenced the human world behaviours to describe the sexual system of plants (Broberg, 2023; George, 2014). But, more than that, biases are also grounded in the way science is carried out. Studies of early naturalist reproduced Europe and the white man as the natural focal point, the most advanced, and purest people of the world, while others were lower standing, savage, more animal like.

Science is always at risk of re-producing norms of gender, race, and class. Therefore, feminist approaches to science have made a point of showing how women and other marginalized groups are systematically excluded. According to Harding (1986) 'discourse of value-neutrality, objectivity, and socially impartial' has set up a 'powerful rhetorical device for legitimating its own biases and their adoption to equally biased law and public policy' (p. 67). As a power of social control, claiming to be unbiased while explaining the World, is a determination of *what* and *who* is supposed to be existing and not. When inquiring the language used in scientific explanations of human reproduction Martin (1991) found that the sperm was given masculine attributes of activity and autonomy, whereas the female egg was described as a passive mass. Martin writes:

> The egg is seen as large and passive. It does not move or journey, but passively "is transported," "is swept,"'or even "drifts"' along the fallopian tube. In utter contrast, sperm are small, "streamlined," and invariably active. They "deliver" their genes to the egg, "activate the developmental program of the egg," and have a "velocity" that is often remarked upon. Their tails are "strong" and efficiently powered. Together with the forces of ejaculation, they can "propel the semen into the deepest recesses of the vagina." For this they need "energy," "fuel," so that with a "whiplashlike motion and strong lurches" they can "burrow through the egg coat" and "penetrate" it (Martin, 1991, p. 489).

The egg and the sperm appear in, what Martin (1991) refers to as a scientific fairytale that is imagined through westerns ideals of heterosexuality and romance. Biases infiltrate science and without a conscious act to bring gender into account, science and scientist keep focus on the male body and use male authority a representative for the universal and objective results (Schiebinger, 2014). So, despite proving of the "strength" and importance of the single sperm wrong, scientist continues to produce biased explanations in favour of masculine attributes, hence reinforcing the importance of maleness in reproduction (Martin, 1991). Social conceptions of human gender and sexuality also trickles into explanations of the animal world. Ah-King and Ahnesjo (2013) addresses how the common concept of "sex roles" in animal studies has overlooked sex-typical traits in individuals and focused on male-male competition and female mating selection. Although data has shown variation in mating behaviours, these has been sorted out as exceptional rather than typical, hence overlooked a greater variation for all sexes in competition, mating, and in sexual- and parental behaviours. Ah-King and Ahnesjo (2013) point out that 'the history of sexual selection research has shown how theory shapes what we perceive and do not perceive in nature' (p. 463). Bias in focus, interpretation, and explanations is also evident elsewhere. Research on female-male distinctions shows there to be some troubles of finding a unanimous and universal definition of male and female dichotomy as nature shows variation in defining characteristics such as genitals, chromosomes, reproductive abilities and patterns, and so on (Ah-King, 2013a). Despite troubles of definition, research on sexual selection, has mainly focused on males, but more importantly, has gender biases and stereotyping of females as passive delayed scientific progresses in the field of reproduction and evolution (Ah-King, 2022).

The previous research in this section has mainly focused on gender bias and only briefly mentioned how accounts of race are embedded in history. Together, these examples show how social conceptions, like gender and race, are functional in society for they hold distinctions in place. However, as

functional items in the social life of humans, they have repeatedly been at risk for affecting scientific knowledge to re-produce a particular order as natural, that in turn, has, for the most part reinforced a white and male gaze as superior and objective. In the next section I will turn more explicitly to school science and sexuality education.

## Sexuality education in the science classroom

Regardless of how sexuality education is practiced, it will most likely be covered in biology education, due to tradition (Ceder et al., 2021) because reproduction is one of the core knowledges in biology (Reiss, 2018). The section above described how social biases have affected scientific explanations and how this has been known since at least Martin's study from the 1980s, it would be likely that textbooks or teachers since then addresses these issues and corrects it. However, this is not always the case. Recent research on representations of animal's sexual behaviour in Swedish secondary school biology textbooks conclude that descriptions and explanations are insufficient as they tend to reproduce gender biases (Ah-King, 2013b). Why this still occurs within contemporary science education is unclear, but the fact that it does has consequences for the quality and purpose of education.

Ah-King (2013b) stress that nature is more varied and complex than what some school science makes it out to be. Instead there is an 'excessive simplification' that 'gives the impression that there is a lawfulness to how females and males behave' (p. 65). According to Danielsson, Avraamidou & Gonsalves (2023) this type of 'conventional teaching about sex and sexuality in biology tend to represent poor science' (pp. 280-281) for it become too reductionist to actually be able to say something about sexuality as a natural part of life. Ah-King (2013b) underscores the power of inclusion and exclusion in education and emphases that the content can become more accurate by being more inclusive and open about how the findings represent an average in data rather than what is normal. Discussions such as these are important because they increase a wider understanding of scientific findings. Moreover, Gandolfi (2024) stress that teaching school science within a naïve positivist perspective on neutrality and objectivity detaches it from critical engagements with the world, thus fostering a harmful ignorance of inequality and exclusion across time, spaces, communities and species. Reiss (2018) claims that when biology teachers and textbooks describe 'differences between females and males/../ as

clear-cut and inevitable' they reproduce sexist views as well as 'ignore lesbian and gay issues' (p. 93). This notion aligns with Bazzul and Sykes (2011) conclusion that biology textbooks' representation of sexuality and human reproduction underscores heterosexuality and uplift heterosexual fertility. Changes in the practice, such as adopting a gender-neutral language, will help students understand the complexities of nature as care and sexual behaviours are diverse (Ah-King, 2013b). Moreover, gender neutrality and diverse sexual languages also help students access more accurate knowledge since it has been found that some animals change sex depending on environmental or social circumstances and have a high flexibility in mating strategies. In animal studies, social bonding and mutuality (consent) also play a significant part in natural sexual behaviours and reproduction.

In contemporary studies of sexuality education in science education classrooms, and Swedish biology textbooks in lower secondary school, biological sex is still constructed to be fixed, dichotomised and hierarchised, (Bistrom, 2021; Junkala et al., 2021; Lundin, 2014). In the act of reproduction, textbooks reproduce male genitals to be active, efficient, sperm-producing factories operating in binary opposition to a passive penetrable vagina and a submissive receiving egg (Junkala et al., 2021). Bistrom (2021) proposes sexuality to be key to promote action competence for a sustainable sexuality, the textbook's reproduction of phallocentric and ethnocentric approaches to sex as something mainly directed towards reproduction limits discussion on the moral, ethical and normative aspects of sexuality. The idea of gender, heterosexuality, and vaginal intercourse is also reinforced through a widespread idea on safe sex in which the condom has been given a pivotal role of protecting from sexually transmitted diseases and work in all sexual situations (Bolander, 2015). Similar to the TV shows in Bolander's (2015) study, textbooks reduce sex with intercourse (Bistrom, 2021; Junkala et al., 2021). Moreover, Junkala et al. (2021) found the textbooks not condemning masturbation as a sexual activity, but silencing and downplaying it as an important part of human sexual life. These textbooks commonly emphasise action in males and passiveness and caring among females, which reproduce both human and animal gender roles as natural (Ah-King, 2013b).

With this said, it is also worth acknowledging that compared with past textbooks, current textbooks are on a path of improvement (Junkala et al., 2021). Junkala et al. (2021) stress that while there still are silences on topics like intersex and asexuality and poor variety in representations of ableness, contemporary textbooks in Sweden do include content on same-sex

relationships, bisexuality, trans people, and dispute myths on female virginity and hymen replacing it with teaching the term vaginal corona. Some textbooks also provide questions rather than ready-made answers and show diversity in sex and sexuality. Similarly, textbooks in teacher training have and continue to acknowledge the importance of having diverse perspectives on sexuality (see e.g Bengtsson & Bolander, 2024; Ceder et al., 2021; Martinsson & Reimers, 2008; Strømme et al., 2023)

Having space to address variety and norms in sexuality education is important, as Orlander (2014) found that plain facts rather than more complex aspects of science were given priority in student conversations about body and sexuality. As '[b]iology is all too often presumed to be a neutral subject' (Reiss, 2018, p. 93), and the subject only gives the facts, it is essential to involve the students in the science and widen perspectives on sexuality. This is, however, easier said than done. In a study, Orlander (2014) found that 'the "factual-based"' discourse narrows down the preferred and valued direction while excluding and silencing others (p. 428). Orlander (2014) stresses that while the biological properties of men and women can be biologically different, human sex is more than reproduction. Similar to Orlander (2014), Danielsson, Avraamidou & Gonsalves (2023) propose that attempts of queering the subject's approach can '/…/ allow for a richer understanding of (human) sexuality and what it is to be a sexual person' (pp. 280-281). At the same time, Cofré et al. (2023) warn that a comprehensive understanding of the human body, reproduction, and sexuality to address important aspects such as sexual diversity, sexual pleasure, abortion, and sexual violence requires a high level of 'biological literacy' (p. 586) as the teachers has to make relevant connections between internal processes and systems in the body and external events. In countries where sexual information is restricted, Gill (2016) stresses that science teachers' role is important as they can make use of the science curricula to connect with student's authentic questions to address their concerns regarding a range of topics like sexuality, identity, pregnancy, STIs[9], values and norms.

[9] STI's is an acronym for sexually transmitted infections. Since around 2013 has STIs replaced the former acronym STDs since not all sexually transmitted infections develop into full diseases. World leading organisations such as the Guttmacher–Lancet Commission and WHO, see Roa, M., Ashford, L. S., Starrs, A. M., Singh, S., Biddlecom, A., Popinchalk, A., Summers, C., Grover, A., Laski, L., Sathar, Z. A., Say, L., Stenberg, K., Serour, G. I., Temmerman, M., Ezeh, A. C., Barker, G., Basu, A., Bertrand, J. T., Blum, R., & Coll-Seck, A. M. (2018). Accelerate progress—sexual and reproductive health and rights for all: report of the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission. *Lancet*, *391*(10140), 2642-2692. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)30293-9 and https://www.who.int/teams/global-hiv-hepatitis-and-stis-programmes/stis/overview

That students want a stronger connection between subject matter and real-life matters of sexuality is also evident in Cense et al. (2020) study that presents views from 300 12-18-year-old students in the Netherlands. According to the study, students want more than just the biological aspects or focus on reproduction or sexually transmitted infections. In a safe and respectful environment, they want sexuality education to include topics like diversity, pleasure, dating, consent and sexual coercion. However, in classroom studies, Orlander and Wickman (2011) found that teaching that approaches humans as biological beings tends to put a focus on the structures and functions of different body parts and on the biological mechanisms involved in a sexual act. This in turn reduces sexuality education to a transactional learning where students get familiarised with the body and sexuality as a set of body parts and biological mechanisms. By failing to connect sexuality education with students' everyday experiences, this type of teaching will not lead to in-depth learning. However, if teachers emphasise ethical responsibility and include students' everyday experiences and observations in science education, sexuality education can assist in addressing questions and learning about love, sexuality, and inter-personal relationships. More recent studies confirm these results, but also add that apart from textbooks, policy and social debate, as well as unexpected statements and reactions from students and teachers, contribute to widening sexuality education. Junkala (2023) found that while topics like consent and pornography were missing in the textbooks, these were part of the practice in the classroom. As the curricula on sexuality education are generous and non-specific, others like Planting-Bergloo and Orlander (2024a) found the phenomenon of pornography to be made into one of the topics within a thematic week of sexuality education despite not yet being a part of the curricula. Through the analysis, Planting-Bergloo and Orlander (2024a) show how pornography was made into content by teachers as they connected it with other issues, like consent and gender, language use and communication, student engagement and acknowledgement of adolescents' pornography literacy, and norm-critical pedagogy. These findings point toward how there are topics in sexuality education that sometimes take up space as an invisible "elephant in the room" and how these "creatures" come to materialise in sexuality education.

Returning to Junkala (2023), while the textbooks included discussion to challenge binary thinking and norms, this did not guarantee the classroom to be in a similar course as she observed statements expressing gender norms and transphobia among students. In her observations of four science education

classrooms, Junkala (2023) saw how teachers actively oriented the classroom to challenge and discuss norms and make students become aware of their own biases and social conduct by involving students and arranging different activities involving images, introducing dilemmas, value-exercises, drama, and communication. With a focus on entanglements and becomings, Planting-Bergloo (2023) stresses sexuality education to include a variety of knowledge, materialities, times, spatiality, and intra-actives in which students learn and explore the content. Gunnarsson and Ceder (2023) stress that the entanglement of facts and values can become transformative for learning in sexuality education as facts can be learned and contextualised through values, and values can be enacted to disrupt facts too narrow for student's experiences of the world.

In sexuality education, engagement from both teachers and students is important. Planting-Bergloo and Orlander (2024b) stress that while students can drive discussions, students leading the conversation are also at risk of reproducing inequalities. Therefore, teacher's engagement in the practice is crucial as they have the authority to broaden narrow conceptions of sexuality. After observing and working together with teachers and students in sexuality education, Planting-Bergloo (2023) concludes sexuality education to be 'capable of transforming from more traditional ways of teaching into a more attentive, explorative, and inclusive practice' (p. 61). Similar to Junkala et al. (2021), Planting-Bergloo (2023) express hope for sexuality education and puts her faith in forms of interconnectedness between people, subjects and perspectives, localities, times and materialities.

The research concerning sexuality in science education has been highly influenced by the feminist and critical scholarly work that takes sexuality into serious consideration. It shows how there is a tendency to re-produce bias and overlook the myths of neutrality and objectivity in school science despite having previous research showing its inaccuracy. In practicing school science, using a gender-neutral language or showing flexibility and fluidity when it comes to sexuality is important since it can help teacher and students to gain a more accurate knowledge on sexuality. Moreover, widening perspectives and debunking myths of neutrality and objectivity in science education will also help to understand and connect scientific knowledges with the real-world's past and present inequalities and challenges. So, rather than staying ignorant, a high-quality science education needs to teach sexuality through its natural varieties and connect with the histories of epistemic violences to understand how worldly limitations (biases) can leak into objectivity.

## Critical perspectives and norm critical pedagogy

The research above has shown feminist and critical perspectives to widening the perspectives on body and sexuality in science and in science education. By using critical forms of pedagogy students and teachers can be pushed towards a cycle of learning rather than arriving at a designated conclusion (Sanjakdar et al., 2015). This, however, requires teachers to have a willingness to be challenged and engage with content in unexpected ways (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2019; Junkala, 2023; Planting-Bergloo, 2023).

One of the major approaches to achieve this type of learning has been through the practice of norm-critical pedagogy (Bolander, 2024). According to Bredström et al. (2018) the term was coined in 2007 and based on Kumashiro's (2002) anti-oppressive pedagogy. In 2011s curriculum, norm-critical pedagogy was launched tool to operationalise its emphasis on norms and values (Bredström et al., 2018). More recent research on Swedish sexuality education shows that the curriculum has taken a stronger focus on values and norms relating to sexuality and gender by adding pornography and honorary violence into the writings of compulsory school (Lukkerz, 2023). The focus on values is not new, rather it has been part of Swedish schooling since the 1990s due to the School's foundation of values [värdegrund] (Qvarsebo, 2021). The shift towards a stronger emphasis on values is clearly reflected in teacher guidance from 1995 and onwards. Nordmark and Bolander (2024) shows that the growing focus on values happened in parallel with discourse on individualism. Self-reflection and discussions became the main tools to teach and learn "the value of values" but also to understand how social norms and conceptions impacts individual lives.

By studying policy documents, interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork Löf (2009) showed that Life Competence Education [livskunskap] was launched by the end of the 1990s as a solution to deal with multiculturalism, presumed cultural clashes, and overarching knowledge areas like sexuality education. Through the subject, values could be turned into practice, but as Löf (2009) stressed, the subject became a foundation to deal with local issues in the classroom rather than build a common ground of values following the policy. According to Alnebratt and Rönnblom (2016), gender and sexuality became especially highlighted in Swedish politics around 2006 and 2015 due to declarations of gender equality. However, the recognition of gender equality as a core value in Swedish politics also made the concept hollow as it underwent a process of depoliticization. This made the concept less of a political tool for

change and more of an administrative task. In the realm of schooling and policies in 2009-2014, Hill (2021) suggest that norm-critical pedagogy has undergone a similar process as it has begun to function as a solution to the problem of discrimination and harassment without addressing the underlying problems of inequalities. While norm-critical pedagogy focuses on increasing awareness of privileges and sometimes embarking on a 'learning through crisis' (Bredström et al., 2018, p. 545), Hill (2021) found that the policies assumed reflection and awareness to appeal to the students and teachers' willingness to change. Understood through a Foucauldian lens, the practice of self-reflection and self-awareness can be considered a form of moral enlightenment in which individual subjects monitor themselves (Qvarsebo, 2021). Qvarsebo (2021) suggest norm-critical pedagogy lacking 'a fundamental curiosity about or sufficient knowledge of those texts, traditions, and peoples that it sees as "traditional"' as this is not a part of the 'bright and shiny future' of emancipation prescribed by guidance materials (p. 179).

Research shows there to be difficulties in turning policy into practice, but there also are challenges within sexuality education in itself. By studying an ideal sexuality education during the second half of the 1990s, Bäckman (2003) found gender to be negotiated in the classroom and concluded that despite efforts to queer and increase acceptance, subject positions like heterosexuality remained stable and dominant in both explicit and implicit ways both among students and teachers. Among the critical studies of gender in school environments, Ambjörnsson (2019) showed how gender is not a standalone category but rather a subject position that (in this case) women constantly negotiate together with class, sexuality, and ethnicity. Ambjörnsson (2019) stress that there is a need to develop pedagogic strategies to widen perspectives. In more recent studies, Planting-Bergloo et al. (2022) focused on student conversations regarding virginity while experimenting with tampons. In the teaching activity (the tampon experiment), the students learned about the anatomy of the vagina in a more in-depth way, but it also made students more aware of sexual norms. However, in the student conversation, they also found co-existing notions on sexuality based on tradition, culture, and religion also become visible when students engaged with the experiment. The tampon was not a neutral material but had different connotations for the students. Planting-Bergloo et al. (2022) conclude that the secular and liberal approach to Swedish sexuality education can clash with students' conceptions. Instead of shying away from the tension, responsive teachers can offer ways of addressing conflicting norms and offer opportunities for students to encounter, change,

and challenge norms. This can be easier said than done, as research has shown awareness does not always lead to change (Bäckman, 2003; Hill, 2021). Instead, there is a risk of assuming students and teachers to be 'naturally' inclusive and non-discriminatory (Hill, 2021, p. 54), and teaching to construct past problems as belongs in the past, whereas the present is imagined as 'a place and time for acknowledging equality and a site where we are free to do whatever we choose' (Axinder & Larsen, 2024, p. 122). By inquiring about subject positions and norms, there can be a tendency to imagine teachers to be placed somewhere outside the norm (Martinsson & Reimers, 2008). However, keeping a neutral ground as a teacher is impossible since teachers too are subjected to norms (Hyldgaard, 2024, p. 83; Martinsson & Reimers, 2008).

Bredström et al. (2018) point out norm-critical pedagogy in sexuality education risks of practising a form of blindness as it departs from an assumed privileged position. Materials and guidance on norm-critical practices tend to silence potential conflict and neglect students' various positions in society. By doing so, norm-critical exercises can become a violent practice as underprivileged students learn there to be 'no chance of hope or change' for them and their life situation (Bredström et al., 2018, p. 547). As an orientation, this means that hope and change are out of reach for the students, whereas structural rigour of inequality appears as a given. Bredström et al. (2018) stress that even if norm-critical pedagogy strives to uncover structures and norms of privilege, it can reinforce norms it strives to challenge. Kumashiro (2002) point out that that there are many ways of keeping a Status quo. For example, a willingness to learn about minorities will not necessarily lead to exposing, learning about, or disrupting one's privileges. Similarly, attempts to critically analyse norms will not be free from values or norms. After studying in-service teacher training and interviews with educators, Bengtsson and Bolander (2019) concluded that norm-critical pedagogy aligns with Swedish policy on sexuality education and that a careful use of language is the primary tool for achieving social change. Adopting an inclusive language and refusing to address some people and practices as a deviant push against learning through a notion of "us and them", however, taking part in this type of sexuality education requires a high level of language skills and, therefore, risks of reproducing social hierarchies and nativeness. Moreover, Bengtsson and Bolander (2019) suggest that the norm-critical terminology mainly concerns sex and gender, hence making it a comfort zone, whereas working on racialisation and ableness is less developed and therefore, difficult and uncomfortable for educators to address. Once again, due to the asymmetries in language and skill, as well as tensions,

practising norm-critical pedagogy risks delivering results rather than allowing students to engage. Moreover, in antiracist and anti-discriminatory sexuality education, Bredström and Bolander (2018) show there is a tendency to shy away from 'the heat of the moment' by not going in-depth on how teachers can deal with tensions or conflicting values (p. 82). Instead of letting 'a thousand conflicts of interpretation bloom' (Rasmussen, 2010, p. 710), Rasmussen (2010) proposes that a strictly secular position risks overlooking 'diversity within groups and the permeable borders between groups' (p. 710). The inability to deal with issues of diversity based on, for example, religion has to do with the entanglement of progressive sexuality education and narratives of Enlightenment in which religious freedom was a way for human liberation (Rasmussen, 2010). This construction of Western sexual freedom promotes a universalistic notion of white and Western sexuality where sexual desire becomes a defining attribute of the human as it becomes a 'fulfilling of natural inclinations of all women' (Scott, 2018, p. 157). Scott (2018) argues that this notion of sexuality has become a 'natural law outside of history' (p. 157), making anything but sex-liberal approaches threatening and unnatural. Svendsen (2017) argues that research in Europe tends to overlook the way the secular logic put religion as 'the antithesis of reason and good-quality' of sexuality education, hence overlooking how sexuality education involves a 'politics of race' (p. 149).

In sum, the previous research on teaching sexuality education shows that despite ambitions of disrupting norms on gender, sexuality, and race, it also tends to reproduce normative notions as they permeate the content and teaching activities in which tensions are left unresolved or silenced out. In the next section I will describe research with a particular focus on racial relations in sexuality education.

## Race(ism) and whiteness

Research on racial relations in sexuality education operates in a wider field of postcolonial studies and critical race theory that, according to Hübinette (2017) developed in the English-speaking world during the 1990's. To describe how race shaped white women's lives, feminist scholar Frankenberg (1993) launched the concept of whiteness. Through it, Frankenberg (1993) describes the dynamic of racial relations that are being reproduced through everyday live, hence assigning everyone to a position in relation to race and whiteness.

Theoretically, race is not something a person is or has. Instead, whiteness is something produced. The concept of whiteness points to a position of power and privilege that is 'a location of structural advantage', a point from which "white" people understand themselves, others and society, and 'a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed' (p. 1). This notion could easily translate into a politics of identity between white, black, and brown bodies, however, as Frankenberg (1993) points out, race is about belonging. Others, like Ahmed (2011) have followed this notion but add that it is about "passing" as something familiar (white, that is) or as a stranger (not white) in society. This continuation of whiteness accounts for it as something more fluid and temporary than skin and colour. As a concept, whiteness also refers to a position of blindness. Bonilla-Silva (2022) proposes notions of society as developed *beyond* race, is a symptom of a new colour-blind racism in America. Through the concept of systemic racism, Fält Bonilla-Silva (2022) develops the concept of whiteness and points towards a false notion of racism that requires single racists (individuals) to maintain it. Bonilla-Silva (2022) proposes there to be a 'race-based organizational component of society' and therefore, neutrality, or statements of being beyond race, or practising a position of colour-blindness all work to maintain inequality and (white) privileges (p. 19).

In this field of research, race and whiteness (just like sex/gender, age, ableness, sexuality and so on) are analytical concepts that operate on a structural level to explain the social and individual lived experiences. Similar to Kumashiro (2002), addressing and deconstructing privilege can spark unease, Bonilla-Silva (2022) point out, that it also can spark feelings of shame, guilt, aggression, or resentment. This can explain why teaching materials in sexuality education focus on inclusive language use (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2019) or avoid going into the conflicts that can arise (Bredström & Bolander, 2018; Bredström et al., 2018; Rasmussen, 2010). But, from a critical race perspective, Lundström and Hübinette (2022) propose there to be different fractions of whiteness where one of them is the "good" white antiracist subject. The "good" antiracism distances itself from contemporary "bad" racists, but it also distances itself from a dark past of, for example, imperialism and race biology. Rather than dealing with the shame, the "good" white antiracism is shaped around an idea of a moral high ground "to do right". This aligns Hill (2021) findings of how norm-critical pedagogy assumes discrimination and racism to be unnatural. By being naturally inclusive, "bad" racists go against nature (like a faux pas in social evolution). The notion of being "the good ones"

is embedded in an idea of Nordic exceptionalism (Alm et al., 2021; Hervik, 2019; Svendsen, 2017). Hervik (2019) explains:

> 'the "Nordic Race" has again and again been constructed at the top of the evolutionary hierarchy, first as a "race" and later through "culture", "welfare state", "equality", "gender equality", "tolerance", "generosity", and "happiness" (Hervik, 2019, p. 17).

In constructing the "good" Nordic whiteness, Lundström and Hübinette (2022) point out that colour blindness in schooling assists in displacing shame by avoiding addressing the matter of race altogether. Similar results are found among undergraduate students in equality groups trying to make STEM education fields more inclusive (Mendick et al., 2024). In studies of everyday nationalism in preschool Reimers and Puskás (2023) show how children in Sweden receive a pedagogy of nation that can be informed by religious holidays (advent, Sankt Lucia, Christmas and Eastern), or by cultural traditions (Midsummer), or newer imported consumeristic traditions (Halloween and Alla hjärtans dag [Valentines day]), or diversity in physical and intellectual functionality (Rock Your Socks). Moreover, the results indicate that religious diversity is only acknowledged if the parents are recognized as non-Swedish. However, in contrast to children and their parents, Bolander and Bredström (2021) found that in introduction programs for immigrants in Swedish upper secondary schools, values embedded in Nordic exceptionalism concerning gender and sexuality were assumed to be "foreign" to "foreigners". Rather than beginning in plurality in experiences, the teaching produced two major categories between Swedes and Non-Swedes. As mentioned before, *homonationalism* crafts a form of banal nationalism made up of liberal values and meritocratic discourses embedded in Nordic exceptionalism that constructs LGBTQ to as a tolerable subject in society, whereas migrants remain intolerable. Similar results have been found in Norway (Røthing & Svendsen, 2010).

As gender, gender equality, and sexuality and contents appear in sexuality education, it is crucial to study how content in sexuality education can work to produce categorical differences and social hierarchies. According to Sältenberg et al. (2024), topics like gender quality have been adopted by nationalist discourse to promote hegemonic forms of "Swedishness" to naturalise difference between "us" and "them". In reflecting upon a three-level sociological analysis of cultural diversity and sexuality education in a Finnish context, Honkasalo (2014) proposes textbooks to reproduce an idea of

nationhood and a particular sexual citizenship that emphasises a middle-class life course of sex, marriage, and reproduction. Yet, in another study of textbooks concerning sexuality education and cultural diversity, Honkasalo (2018) stress that despite depicting stereotypes, 'it do not automatically mean that the method of teaching duplicates these stereotypes' as it is more dynamic and sometimes more inclusive in practice (p. 251). However, the moral understanding of this type of sexuality is also reflected in interviews with professionals. Both textbooks and professionals rely on a narrative of sexual health and underscore the West as progressive and secular. In contrast, interviews with youths (age 13-18) provide a counter-discourse of becoming sexual subjects that goes beyond formal sexuality education. Because of this, Honkasalo (2014) stress the need for paying more attention to how sexuality education reproduce religious, cultural and ideological assumptions of sexuality by either addressing issues of diversity in separate chapters or silencing sexual oppression and sexual violence outside of Finnis society, or displacing it in places elsewhere. Similar tendencies were found by Löf (2009) as issues of honour, genital mutilation, and arranged marriages were only raised in school with a majority of students with a migrant background. In a more recent study of professionals' approach to girls and women with experience of female genital mutilation (or female genital cutting), Palm et al. (2019) reveal how, for example, school nurses neglect exploring females' own experiences and perceptions of the situation. According to Palm et al. (2019) this opens up space for professionals to project their perceptions (often stemming from a Western perspective) on sexuality and body in ways that can contribute to shame and stigmatisation rather than support. Reimers (2017) stresses that 'the task for the teacher is to be aware of how banal nationalism together with norms about gender and sexuality produce some bodies as more vulnerable than others – and to do something about it' (p. 103).

To sum up, previous research describes race to be silenced through blindness making it almost unspeakable, while it also is producing vulnerabilities by emphasising and hierarchising difference.

# 5 A METHODOLOGY OF (UN)FAMILIARITY

To explore the orientation in Swedish sexuality education, this thesis has adopted a methodology of unfamiliarity to approach the familiarity of ordinary of sexuality education in school. This chapter begins with introducing how methodology of unfamiliarity is informed, and then what consequences it has for approaching empirical reality. After describing how to access to sexuality education, the third section describes the procedure for recruiting participants, the fourth described the participants. To give insight to what materials this thesis analyses, the fifth section begins by providing an overview of the empirical materials to then describe the procedure of making interviews and making observations. As this is a compilation thesis, the sixth section provides an overview of the materials and analyses in each of the four articles. The seventh section describes the process and method of analysing the materials in the four articles. Ethics were an integrated part of the research process at every stage, and therefore, methodological and ethical reflections are discussed throughout each section. However, since the thesis underwent an ethics review, the final part outlines the regulatory framework and standards for managing sensitive personal information. The final section of this chapter provides a reflection on the thesis methodology.

## Approaching

In this thesis, approaching the familiar of sexuality education has gone through an approach of making it unfamiliar. This approach is informed by phenomenology as it has embedded a quest to make the familiar, unfamiliar to 'learn to see what stands before our eyes' (Husserl, 1931/2012, p. 3). In this

approach, experience is key because it allows to *see* 'more than the profile that is available in any moment' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 36). In other words, experience is given a particular status within phenomenology because it is through experience that each side of an object can be comprehended as experience binds each side together by recollecting past and present perceptions. In this thesis, experience b become a source of information to gain access to the everyday experience of the social and material world in which sexuality education happens.

However, experience is more than subjective accounts. When experience is considered to have the potential to bind the past and present together and give more sides to what is available to perception in a particular moment, it also acknowledging the limitations of memories. In building an experience, memories are pieces of perceptions that are 'fractured, contradictory and often selective' (Berg et al., 2021, p. 274). Instead of viewing memories as a true account of what really happened, phenomenology makes use of their ontological fluidity. In other words, experience is a re-construction of the fractured perceptions of the subject. As experience does not 'exist as an authentic representation of reality' it has to come into being through discourse (Smith, 2005, p. 126). This means that experience connects the subjective and partial view of perception together with a social order. Therefore, while individuals express experience, these have taken shape in dialogue with the discourses embedding the individual.

In translating this premiss, Ahmed connects with feminist philosophy in which experience has served as a methodological strategy to understand how the social is organised and how social structures and positionalities of individuals are reproduced. In other words, experience becomes a source of information to '/…/ retrace the patterns where by individuals have worked their way in to the social world /.../' (Haug, 1999, p. 57). Approaching experience from this methodological perspective, the individual experience of everyday life is unfamiliarised by focusing upon what the motility of individuals reveals about the social landscape in which both the social and material world come to make sense.

To gain access to an empirical reality in which sexuality education happens, this thesis departs from the phenomenological premiss of experience in which it is a reconstruction of the past in relation to the present.

## The practicalities of unfamiliarising

As explained above, experience is a rich source of information that can reflect a social landscape. However, empirical reality is more than experience. To consider the empirical reality in which sexuality education happens, this thesis's methodological approach can be defined as a form of *institutional ethnography* (Smith, 2005).

Institutional ethnography begins in viewing the research site as something unfamiliar. Therefore, it begins by inquiring the objects and relations that constitute the institution, rather than departing from the take-for granted organisation. Instead of accepting the way an institution is organised into departments, units, and functions oriented towards actions, institutional ethnography begins in seeing how an institution is made up by clusters of relations and text organised around particular ruling functions (Smith, 2005). In this thesis, this approach to institutions is especially beneficial since sexuality education exists everywhere and nowhere as it can happen both in-and out of routines and schedules (Gunnarson, 2024), in multiple sites and in multiple ways due to its placement as an overarching and subject integrated knowledge area (Gunnarsson et al., 2024; Skolverket, 2018, 2022a, 2022b).

Using institutional ethnography in the thesis allow going beyond pre-defined boundaries, such as subjects, teachers, grades, planned lectures, school types, assignments etc. This meant that it also became possible to begin in the participants self-defined experiences of sexuality education, as well as collecting various materials used or intended for use.

All in all, the empirical materials in this thesis consist of experiences from interviews conducted with teachers and others working with sexuality education. It also consists of observations and a manuscript claimed to be an early example of sexuality education. In the following sections, I will describe the materials in detail by first giving a more detailed account of the participants, how the materials were collected and later on analysed.

## Recruitment

The recruitment of participants was driven by one criterion. Namely, if the potential participant considered themselves working with school-based sexuality education. Through this criterion, the recruitment was spread mouth-to-mouth and by e-mails through referrals from acquaintances, interviewees or

potential interviewees. In this phase, the information and consent form (see appendix 1) were also sent to the participants.

The methodological choice of using a snowball method (Kvale, 2007) was grounded upon an ethical consideration. The participants in the study were to be interviewed about their subjective experiences and memories or observed in their daily work with sexuality education, from a point in which nothing is seen as ordinary. At the time of the recruitment, sexuality education has been under public debate since the release of The Swedish Schools Inspectorate's review of sexuality education (see Luthman, 2018), and then followed by a debate on rough sex and pornography in which the government launched a reform of the teacher education and the school curricula to increase the quality of sexuality education (see Utbildningsdepartementet, 2020). Due to the pressure and interest in finding ways to increase the quality of sexuality education, the snowball method became a recruitment strategy to protect the participants' integrity as it allowed finding and ensuring voluntariness in participation without control or enforcement of participation from school leaders (Israel, 2015). Moreover, the snowball method made it more difficult to identify the participants as they were recruited throughout Sweden, and through several different networks

As institutional ethnography departs from the relationships, rather than the given organisation, the participants motivated their involvement in the research project in different ways. Some teachers considered that their involvement obvious due to their subject (for example biology education or science education) and motivated their participation through the course plan. Others drew upon the curricula and/or local policies. However, not all participants found it easy to motivate their participation. Some of the participants considered themselves to have little or limited experiences of working with sexuality education. However, regardless of how they valued or belittled their experiences, all of the participants had experiences of working with sexuality education.

## The participants

The participants represent a wide range of educators involved in school-based sexuality education. In this thesis, based upon their descriptions, sexuality education stretches from the classroom to the unplanned activities and interactions happening in school (such as leisure time and in the schoolyard)

and all the way to the municipal sphere of in-service teachers' professional development. Most of the participants have a formal teacher's degree, but some of them have other types of professional backgrounds, such as sexologists, social workers, or public health experts. Some participants have or still work as subject teachers without a formal teacher's degree. Some of them have worked for a few years, whereas others have over 20 years of experience. Almost all of them have worked in different schools, with different age groups and have had different roles (school leaders, subject teachers, substitute teachers, and so on) and taught different subjects. Some of them have had experiences working in different types of education and schools, such as special schools, students with intellectual disabilities, and newly arrived migrant students in separate educational programs. However, despite the variety of roles, student groups, and educational programs, they all have experience of working with sexuality education.

Since the participants reflect experiences from several roles and work multiple tasks, they are represented based on what situation they refer to. This means that in the empirical material, one participant can sometimes represent as a teacher and at other times as working with in-service teachers' professional development. Instead of focusing on their formal role (an institutional given that is), this thesis emphasises what *doing* an experience is taking place.

An additional reason for obscuring the participants' formal role is to provide anonymity and ensure integrity for the participants and for the people mentioned in their descriptions of their experiences. All participants, places and people mentioned in this thesis have been anonymised and given fictitious names. Moreover, similar to Orlander (2011), participants have been given new pseudonyms in each article to avoid identification via traceability. This has consequences as the anonymity of subjects and locations makes it 'difficult – if not impossible – for other social scientists to validate the research' (Israel, 2015, p. 3). However, since this thesis is not focusing on finding out how something really happened but on how and what experiences can reflect about the orientation in sexuality education, the risk of identification through explicit accounts outweighed the necessity of validating the data collected.

Among the thesis participants, 21 appear as interviewees, whereas some appear as a group working on in-service teachers' professional development. To assure anonymity, the details of participants included in the observation will not be disclosed. The observed participants will henceforth be referred to as "the group" (this is also the case in Article IV). In Sweden, there are a few groups specialised in in-service teachers' professional development. These

groups are often placed upon an overarching organisational level within municipalities. As municipalities are governed through politics. Their work with sexuality education is decided by politicians.

Among the interviewees, 16 participants were employed as teachers, one as a school counsellor, and four sometimes/or fully worked with in-service teachers' professional development. Seven of the interviewees seemed to identify as male, and 14 of them as female. All participants worked in different parts of Sweden. Among the interviewees, eleven currently worked in major cities, four worked in mid-large cities, and seven worked in smaller cities[10]. However, as this thesis collects experiences throughout the interviewees' careers, their experiences can reflect more sites than these since most of the interviewees (all except two) have worked in different schools.

Together, the participants represented a variety of roles and experiences from working with sexuality education within the formal K-12 educational institution.

## The empirical materials

The empirical material in the thesis consists of interviews, observations and a Linnaean lecture called *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*].

The interviews were carried out individually, mainly over video call or telephone; one was done in person between November 2020 and December 2022 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The material from interviews amounts to 26 hours and 22 minutes of audio recordings. The analysed material was transcribed verbatim and then translated from Swedish to English and carefully edited to clarify statements when presented in the articles.

Observations of the group were carried out over the course of almost a year between October 2020 to June 2021. The observations happened on-site or through video calls due to the pandemic. The observations were carried out on eleven separate occasions, amounting to 42,5 hours of fieldwork that was hand recorded by fieldnotes.

The Linnaean lecture is a re-printed, deciphered calligraphic manuscript that is now a book of 54 pages. The lecture consists of 15 sections covering various aspects of the body, sexuality, and reproduction. To introduce the topic of sex,

[10] Size of the city is determined by the Swedish regional categorization system, see Kommungruppsindelning 2023, SKR

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the lecture begins with (1) positioning the human body, sex, and social behaviour in relation to nature. Then, (2) discussing the most basic properties called De Semine Hominum, which are the most essential vital fluids. Thereafter, (3) it accounts for sex by describing the signs of women enjoying coitus, (4) and signs of those who do not. Next, (5) the lecture describes the physicality of the body, sex and reproduction by accounting for: (6) menstruation, (7) the limbs involved in the sexual act (including describing the pleasures they cause), (8) the time before and during coitus, (9) the sexual curiosity of women and men, (10) descriptions of the physical and emotional sexual rise in men and women's limbs and the (hetero)sexual act, (11) descriptions of signs of those who have had coitus. On reproduction, the lecture accounts (12, 13) on the necessities involved in sex and the conceiving of a child and (14) how the foetus grows in the womb and miscarriage. The final section (15) describes signs of female virginity and violation.

### *Making interviews*

In this thesis, the pandemic of Covid-19 affected the conditions of how to conduct the interviews. Therefore, all interviews, except for one, were made over video call or telephone. The interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 44 minutes and almost 2 hours. Two of the interviews had to be divided into two sessions since the interviewee ran out of time.

The pandemic restricted physical meetings, but in hindsight, it may have encouraged the interviewee to dictate some conditions of the interview to suit their preferences. In other words, they took some control over the interview situation. To conduct the interview, the participants were given the option of having it over a regular phone call or via video call, and they could choose the platform as well. They were also allowed to decide when the interview should take place. This meant that some interviews occurred during regular working hours, while others were held later in the evening or on holidays. Occasionally, interviewees found time for the interview in between lectures; others did so before heading home, and some preferred to conduct the interview from home. At times, the interviews were interrupted by colleagues, unstable Wi-Fi connections, or computer sounds. At other moments, distractions arose from children, birds singing, or partners.

Despite these minor distractions, the interviews were conducted under conditions that the participants preferred to reflect upon their experiences. This can, as mentioned above, give a sense of control. At the same time, creating a

setting that the participants feel secure in can function as a 'Trojan horse' to get behind the interviewee's defence walls (Kvale, 2006, p. 482). Kvale (2006) stresses that there is a risk that the interviewee discloses information that they might regret later as they have shared personal details with a stranger. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the asymmetrical relationship between the participant and the researcher when asking interviewees to entrust researchers with information.

Each interview began with an unrecorded small talk to gain trust and diminish the asymmetrical relationship. This moment was of ethical importance for it gave the interviewees an opportunity to talk about their current mode, asking questions or sharing thoughts, but it was also an opportunity to remind the participants about the setting and for what purpose the interview was happening. It was also a moment to once again inform about the project, how their stories would be anonymised, and remind the participants about the possibility of withdrawing consent or just not answering some of the questions. After the small talk, I asked permission to begin the audio recording and, when possible, showed how I turned on the recording and also how I turned off the recording after the interview.

Even if the participants had signed a consent form (see appendix 1), some of the grounds for consent were repeated. Asking permission at the moment of the interview was an important ethical aspect of the interview for it reminded the interviewee that it was possible to withdraw consent, as well as reminding them not to feel pressured to disclose everything and that it was acceptable to stay silent, talk about something else or abrupt the interview. This step may seem formal, but it was important to remind the participant about the situation. It was also a moment to get an updated documented version of their consent.

The interview technique is somewhere between semi-structured and open-ended. It is semi-structured, for it departed from two questions: *can you tell me about your professional background? Do you have any memory or experience of working with sexuality education?*

These questions were broad and allowed the interviewees to talk about any kind of memory or experience of working with sexuality education. The interview technique was open-ended in the sense that the interviewees' descriptions developed from the initial questions and took new directions. Hence giving depth and sometimes new perspectives to sexuality education. Regardless if the interview technique is semi-structured or open-ended, Smith (2005) stresses that 'experience is, in a sense, being made *for* the interviewer; ongoing dialogue generates the story' (p. 128). In other words, experience is

not an authentic reflection but a product that is constructed through inner and outer dialogue.

The two questions provided structure to the interview. Asking the participants to describe their professional background gave shape to a concrete context in which the interviewees' experiences took place. It also grounded the empirical material in a reality of teachers' mobility throughout a working life that sometimes can become obscured in the titles of formal roles and policy documents. From the backstory, it was also possible to move around the experience of working with sexuality education. It allowed the interviewee to shift between timelines, settings, and situations to make comparisons between situations or return and revise the shared experiences. In other words, the first question provided motility in the interviewee's storytelling.

The second question aimed to get into sexuality education by asking if the interviewee could share a memory or experience. In this moment, the interviewees were reminded that a memory does not have to be a whole story but just a glimpse of something. At this moment, I also emphasised that I was interested in their subjective views and personal experiences, even if others might have described the situation differently. In this way, it was once again clarified that the thesis was not aiming towards finding out "what really happened" but how their memories and experiences could reveal something about sexuality education.

The participants spoke freely during the interview, and I made notes throughout. The purpose of the notes was to avoid disturbing the interviewees when sharing their memories or experiences but also to develop questions for gaining detailed information, returning to a particular description, or to check if I had understood the interviewee correctly. During the interview, I mainly listened, nodded or hummed. These small modes of communication were used to assure the interviewee that I was listening but also a technique to encourage the interviewee to continue with their story even if I thought it was drifting.

Allowing the interviewees to drift is part of the methodology of unfamiliarity because it seeks to find new connections and ways to describe something familiar in a social order (Haug, 1999; Smith, 2005). In the moment of conducting the interview, this means that the researcher has to accept a loss of control and trust the interviewee that their stories relate to the topic. In practice, this meant being patient until the participant's description of their experience revealed connections to the overall topic of the thesis. At times, some of the interviews felt useless. However, after revisiting them, it was often that the interviewee had put words on something in sexuality education that

would have been difficult to ask or perhaps tell in more direct ways. Often because it would have required a specific use of terminology or reflection or because the familiar sometimes needed unfamiliar connections to make sense.

For example, one interviewee began talking about sports and locker room cultures. Initially, this felt out of place. But later on in the interview, the interviewee returned to the situation and made connections on how norms and racism are institutionalised and supported in everyday interactions and cultures, even in school and the professional practice of teachers. This experience guided me towards looking for other experiences of how race, whiteness, and colour-blindness operate in sexuality education (for example, Article I, Happy stories). Another example of drifting was when one interviewee began to describe a session on death. While the story was moving, it all felt misplaced. Later in the interview, the interviewee connected with the story and sexuality education to address the importance of bringing sensitive and emotional topics into the conversation in school to allow students to have a first-hand experience of respectful conversations by connecting content with being with each other.

At times, drifting felt like allowing the interview to turn gossipy as the participants shared details about their colleagues' flaws, peculiar behaviour from parents, or moments when students did or said something cute or amusing. Occasionally, the stories became personal, while at other times, it was merely an all too polished policy-like discussion.

In the interview, drifting became an exercise of trust. Both in the participants' ability to make connections and in the method of choice. Working with memories and experiences in research is a practice of trust. As a researcher, it was an experience of how it feels when interviewees' stories are not served on point, when they are not *in line* or even *aligned* as pieces of a fuller story. Working with this methodology makes one feel how words can sometimes be inadequate to explain an experience. At the same time, working with this methodology is experiencing how someone can put together more or less tacit ways of *being* and *doing* in the everyday world to something concrete to learn from. Therefore, while this qualitative approach can be a trojan horse exploiting trust, generating insights on 'knowing how things work, how they're put together' can also be 'invaluable for those who often have to struggle in the dark' (Smith, 2005, p. 32). In other words, working with experience from a methodology of unfamiliarising is using the ability to drift in a productive way.

### *Making observations*

Like interviews, making observations involves trust (O'Reilly, 2009). However, the research practice of gaining trust slightly differs. In the interviews, trust was accomplished by informing and allowing the dialogue to expand in a familiar environment of the interviewee's choice. In the observations, trust was closely connected to getting access to the field.

In ethnographic fieldwork, people able to 'smooth access the to the group' either by formal or informal positions or 'able to persuade others' is referred to as gatekeepers (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 32). In my case, I had gotten referrals to the group's work and who to contact from people that the group already knew. Therefore, the group already knew a little about me and my thesis project. After a few e-mails back and forth, I was permitted access to come and visit the group and present my work. I was well-received during the meeting, but the group did not have a unanimous voice. I will not go into details, but making that first appearance was crucial, as it allowed me to answer the group's questions and manage the expectations of the potential participants. During that first meeting, I was able to present myself, from what ethical and theoretical perspectives I approached sexuality education, as well as my unfamiliarity with the field of education and sexuality education. Since I at the time had not yet gained ethical approval, I was also able to inform on the regulatory framework that I had to install before starting the actual fieldwork.

About six months after the first meeting, permission was received from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority[11]. After permission, I contacted the initial Gatekeeper but was referred to another Gatekeeper as the former had other obligations. The new Gatekeeper had been part of the former meeting and, therefore, had an idea of the thesis project and who I was. A new meeting was set up, and a few emails were exchanged to make plans for the observations. To accommodate the group's work and cause as little disturbance as possible, I was asked to present three scenarios for collecting data. The first scenario was a form of memory work (Haug, 1999) that required a high involvement of the group in the thesis project (see Berg et al., 2021; Livholts, 2004; Nilsson Mohammadi, 2018; Onyx & Small, 2001; Widerberg, 2013). The second scenario leaned more toward professional development and aligned with the group's work, but it would still require the group to devote time to cyclic reflection and learning practices (see Elm & Nordqvist, 2019; Löfqvist et al., 2019; Persson, 2009). The third scenario was more of a classic study in which

[11] Approval of Ethics Application, Dnr: FO 2023/729

observations were made of the group's work without 'disturbing *the natural habitat*' (Denscombe, 2000, p. 166, own translation). After discussing with the group, the Gatekeeper informed me that the third option was most manageable as they were busy and already had made plans for the upcoming semester. Under the guidance of the Gatekeeper, we planned for my first observation on-site. The Gatekeeper also helped me in distributing and reminding the group to read the information on the consent sheet, which was later signed before the first session of observation.

Like the interviews, the observations were carried out during the pandemic of Covid-19 and were therefore adjusted along the way. In practice, this meant that the site for observations transformed gradually during the project. Some observations were made on site. Others happened in rooms reeking of disinfectant and a two-meter spacing between our seats. Some meetings were partially or strictly remote as the group's meetings gradually moved online. During the observations, I would sit with the participants, listen to their talk and watch them work. At times, I would not see what they did, so I would only watch them write, think, take a sip of water, and sigh.

The observations were documented with anonymised fieldnotes. No audio or video recordings were made even if it would be easily done in the video call. Taking an audio recording or video recording would provide efficiency and clarity to the fieldnotes. However, I believe that this efficiency would add an extra layer of stress to the group, and the data would be more vulnerable than necessary. To protect the group's integrity, the focus was placed on capturing the ambience and ambitions of the meetings, what caught their attention, when they got stuck and how they tried to get somewhere.

In the observations, the participants were viewed as a group rather than single individuals. While each member is unique, they strived to have similar views on what was going on and what they wanted sexuality education to be. Hence, they oriented themselves in the same direction in most of their meetings.

During the observations, I noted comments or conversations related to how their work was carried out, what challenges they faced, or when they expressed positive reactions. Occasionally, the group asked for my input or participation. However, some of these moments were personal or delicate and therefore, they would ask me not to document it. At times, I would also be asked to remove notes or simply not document what was said or done. As a researcher, I was sometimes frustrated by these moments, which would contain important aspects or experiences of the practice; however, similar to the interviewees drifting, these were moments of trust in which I, as a researcher, could rely on

the participant's ability to exercise consent. Similar to the interviews, these moments would also provide insights that later guided my analysis in finding other excerpts better representing the orientation of sexuality education.

## Overview of materials in the thesis and analysis

The empirical material consists of interviews and observations of professionals working within the institutional body of formal education, such as teachers and municipal actors working with teachers' professional development, as well as a historical material of the Linnaean lecture *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*]. These materials are analysed in four stand-alone articles. The table below shows the article's aim, research questions, materials, theories and data analysis methods to provide an overview.

Table 1. Overview of the four articles

| Article | Aims and research questions | Material | Theory | Method |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **I: Happy stories** | Aim: explore how Swedishness appears as specific forms of whiteness in sexuality education.<br><br>RQ: how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced in sexuality education? | Interviews with teachers and school personell. Primary focus on eight interviewees and five textbooks from Junkala's dissertation project, see (Junkala, 2023) | Ahmed (2007) phenomenology of whiteness | Crystallization (Ellingson, 2009) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis included iterative readings to select content relating to race, whiteness, and Swedishness. Coding the content, reviewing the codes and developing categories to explain in what ways the data reflected expressions of Swedishness. Recontextualising data to re-explore it in relation to theory. |
| **II: Beauty, pleasure and vital fluids** | Aim: contemplate how ideas about race and gender are interwoven in scholastic notions of the body and sexuality<br><br>RQ: how is the body envisioned in relation to gender, race, sexuality and reproduction? | The Linnaean lecture *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*] | Müller-Wille (2014) and Butler (2014), race and gender as functional objects | Hermeneutic reading with a focus on race and gender, presenting three kaleidoscopic images of how the body was envisioned in relation to race, gender, sexuality and reproduction |
| **III: Talking "the Talk"** | Aim: explore talking as a cultural performance within sexuality education<br><br>RQ: how is talking produced, what is talking supposed to achieve, and what are performances of not talking disturbing? | 42,5 h of observations and 4 interviews municipal actors working with in-service teachers' professional development | Ahmed's (2006) concepts of orientation and orientation device | Thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis included iterative readings to select content relating to ideals, practices and experiences of talking or not talking (e.g. silence, avoidance, disruption). Recontextualising data to identify themes and then re-explore the themes to theory. |
| **IV: The teaching body** | Aim: to study the pedagogic backdrop to the provision of sexuality education<br><br>RQ: how age, gender and sexuality affect practices in the classroom and in schools? | Interviews with teachers. Primary focus on six out of 21 interviewees. | Joan Acker's (1990, 2006, 2012) *doing* gender, and inequality regimes<br><br>Krekula's (2021; 2005) doing age | Descriptive report on explicit memories and experiences of age, gender and sexuality in sexuality education. The coding and categorisation were guided by Widerberg (2002) and Braun and Clarke (2022). The accounts are thematised and interpreted as doings to show how teachers' are conditioned. |

## The process of analysing the materials

The table above shows four stand-alone contributions that have adopted their own theoretical lenses, materials and methods for analysis. While the four articles differ, they all relate to an ambition of looking upon aspects taken for granted within sexuality education and interrogating how that could be. In other words, to approach the familiar as something unfamiliar by moving around in the materials and moving between sites and times to comprehend the orientation in sexuality education.

The way the analysis was carried out can roughly be divided between two approaches. In Article I and Article II, the approach was more deductive, for it was informed by theory to then identify resonance in the empirical material, whereas in Article III and Article IV, the approach was more inductive as it began in the empirical material to then connect with theory for explanation.

Regardless of approach, this process detached the participant from their experience or their setting (as in the case of observations) and relocated to a wider social landscape of sexuality education.

### *Analysing Article I and Article II*

Article I and Article II can be considered to be mainly guided by theory.

In Article I, the phenomenon of race is explored through textbooks and teachers' experiences of teaching sexuality education. The perspective of critical race theory informed the approach to the material as it guided us (Junkala and I) to consider how everyone is assigned a position in relation to whiteness. The difficulty of working with something intangible and, at the same time, very real experience found support in crystallization (Ellingson, 2009). From this methodological approach it became possible to combine multiple data and theories to open up the phenomenon to show its complexities as well as the limitations of representation. The analysis of the materials was inspired by Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis. The analysis began with an iterative reading to select content relating to race, whiteness, and Swedishness. By doing so, the coding was made by acknowledging what was said or showed, euphemised, hinted, or left unsaid in the interviews or textbooks. After coding the content, the codes were reviewed and then developed into categories to explain in what ways the data reflected expressions of whiteness. After that, the data was recontextualised to re-explore it in relation to theory. In the process of re-contextualising, Ahmed's (2007) conceptualisation of whiteness,

added location, motility, and proximity to understand the interviewees' experiences and textbooks in relation to Swedishness. The coding and analysis process resulted in an article that could provide insight into a racial landscape in seemingly neutral educational practices. It showed how race and racial hierarchies are constructed and reproduced through a sense of belonging located in within a relative distance between a here and an over there.

In Article II, the analysis was made through a hermeneutical reading departing from a theoretical conception of race and gender as functional objects (Butler, 2014; Müller-Wille, 2014). From an ethical standpoint, this conceptualisation acknowledges racial and gendered realities as material and social consequences of ideas that have had a real effect on people's lives without claiming race and gender to be objectively real. To work with the material, the content was coded in appraisal to notions of race and gender by targeting divisions, differences, and similarities by marking out bodily constitutions (such as age, size, and skin colour), bodily sensations (such as joy and lust), functions (such as menstruation, lubrication and erections), and purposes (such as sexual pleasure, reproduction, ageing). The codes were then arranged into themes to allow for re-imagining and discovering how properties of the body were envisioned without considering how the lecture was organised. After arranging the codes into overarching themes, the material was re-read through an oscillation between the previous literature on Linnaeus's work, the lecture's content, and scholarly work on body, sexuality, race, and gender. By conceptualising race and gender as functional objects, Article II shows three kaleidoscopic accounts of the functional objects of race and gender within sexuality education.

### *Analysing Article III and Article IV*

Articles III and IV exemplify how the material revealed something interesting to explore further. This can be thought of as beginning the analysis in a glowing or glimmering detail in the material (MacLure, 2010), to then expanding the analysis by finding other fragments.

Within sexuality education, discussing or reflecting upon issues related to sex and sexuality (Fisher et al., 2017; Orlander, 2014; Planting-Bergloo et al., 2022), or encouraging students to pose questions (Allsop et al., 2024; Gill, 2016) are common methods. Article III can be seen as connecting with this work. Similarly to this work, much of the empirical material described similar events. However, somewhere along the way in this thesis, this focus on talking

became a glimmering sense that it was something unarticulated around the expectations of talking. When revisiting the empirical materials, it became clear that talking was recurring and glimmering in all materials, even in the Linnaean lecture, as it argues that one should not be modest in talking about certain parts of our body (Linnaeus, 1975). To follow up on this phenomenon, Article III focuses on the culture of talking within Swedish sexuality education to understand how talking is produced, what talking is supposed to achieve, and what performances of not talking disturb. Article III analyses materials from observations and interviews with municipal actors working with in-service teachers' professional development. The observations and interviews describe how much of the work revolves around interpreting and sorting through an abundance of pedagogic objects, such as curricula, evaluation, teaching guidance or teaching manuals, and activities, to create new pedagogic objects, such as lectures, workshops, evaluations, find suitable collaborator and outreach. To navigate the empirical material, the material was read several times to find examples of talking (e.g., how to talk or not), expectations on talking (e.g., ideals, reasons, or arguments), or how the development of practices relating to talking works (e.g., organisational procedures, collaborations). The examples reflected codes and categories of aspects related to talking. The categories were rearranged into themes to show how the material was understood through Ahmed's (2006) theoretical framework to bring order to the material.

Unlike the prevalence in examples leading to Article III, Article IV emerged from a single comment made by one of the interviewees. During the interview, one of the participants began to refer to herself as a "tant" [auntie]. The comment was intriguing as it opened up questions of who the teacher is (as a representational figure, or cultural embodiment) and what teachers bring into sexuality education in the shape of lived experiences. As the "tant"-comment awoke gender, age and sexuality, the analysis began by revisiting the interview material to find out if other participants' experiences related to their own bodies.

Among the teachers, six out of 21 spoke explicitly about their own experiences as aged, gendered, and sexual beings, but also about their colleagues. These accounts were coded and arranged into categories to reflect what was described or how the teacher's age, gender or sexuality was reflected or exposed. The material was interpreted through the work of Acker (1990, 2006, 2012), Krekula (2021) and Krekula et al. (2005), which conceptualise age, gender and sexuality to be *doings*. By viewing the participants' experiences

as different kinds of doings, a normative teaching body in sexuality education appeared. This finding explains how different bodies become conditioned due to their age, gender and sexuality.

## Ethics - the regulatory framework

Although ethics has been part of the research process, this section will describe the regulatory frameworks concerning sensitive personal data. Unlike the professional ethics of reasoning various ethical questions regarding integrity and researchers' responsibility throughout the research project as part of the professional practice of research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024), the regulatory framework concern policies and laws protecting the individual person and ensure respect for human dignity in research (Vetenskapsrådet, 2024).

In the thesis, sensitive personal data is a side effect of the method of asking for memories and experiences of the practice. During the interviews and observations, the participants memories and experiences from sexuality education often included personal information about their (or others) bodies, sexual orientation/ preferences/ experiences or sexual identity, religious beliefs, political opinions, and of their (or others) race, ethnicity. Excluding these stories would be misleading. Therefore, the thesis project underwent an ethics review by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority prior to the interviews and observations. The ethics application was approved in June 2020[12]. An amendment application was filed and approved in 2024 to prolong the research project and fully use the data gathered after the dissertation.

This type of regulatory process is necessary for according to *Good Research Practice*, 'all research dealing with sensitive personal data shall be ethically reviewed, regardless of how the data has been collected and whether or not the researcher has obtained the participants consent' (Council, 2017, p. 31; Vetenskapsrådet, 2024, p. 67). Ethics approval for sensitive personal data falls under *the General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) article 9.1. and it states:

> Processing of personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

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According to GDPR (clause 32), informed consent shall be collected before obtaining the data and needs to be documented by a written or oral statement. This was achieved before the interviews or observations began. Before agreeing to participate, all participants received information about the research project and their participation. The consent form describes how the personal data was about to be processed and stored. This procedure includes a description of how personal information, like the consent forms and recordings of the interviews, are stored and protected in the University's server and how the recordings are being transcribed offline by the researcher and anonymised in the process of transcription. It also describes for how long the research data (such as consent forms, recordings and transcriptions) will be stored, as well as contact information for responsible parties at the university. Moreover, it emphasised withdrawal to be optional at any time without given cause (for regulation, see GDPR, article 7, clause 1, 2 & 3).

The process of obtaining consent began during the first contact with a potential participant. The contact was made either by e-mail or face to face and informed about the project and if they would agree to be interviewed and/or observed. Participants who expressed interest received a consent form (see appendix 1). This gave the participants time to read and think about their participation. After deciding whether to participate or not, we would plan for an interview and/or observation. At this time, the participants were also asked to sign the consent form.

To ensure the voluntariness of the project, each interview began with an unrecorded conversation to ensure that the research participants understood what the thesis project was about and how they could withdraw consent partially or completely at any given time. To remind the participants of their integrity, the unrecorded conversation also emphasised that their stories would become anonymised through the process of transcription, while personal information such as the audio recording and consent form would be stored at the university. During the unrecorded conversation, the participants were asked if they had any questions or aspects they would like to discuss before recording. Permission to record their oral consent was asked before recording and then asked again during recording or fieldnotes. Since some time had passed since the participants had signed the consent forms, recoding their consent orally was a way to complement the written documentation. Moreover, some of the participants had difficulties filling out the electronic forms or had been delayed in postal mail, some forms had not been received upon recording. To ensure the signature identity, copies of the e-mail were saved as additional

documentation according to the university regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic[13].

## Methodological reflection

To gain knowledge on how sexuality education is organised, stabilised and able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation while it also seeks to disrupt and emancipate, the process of analysing the materials departed from the phenomenological notion of approaching something familiar as if it were unfamiliar.

This way of working with the material can be justified through ethnographic methodologies in which the research and analysis method develops through an 'iterative-inductive research' design (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 3). This means that the analysis did not depart from a fixed coding schema or through particular steps. As a consequence, the coding and thematization might have had 'poorly named themes', or not drawn on 'existing concepts', or had 'too many' or 'too few themes', or likely 'too much overlap between themes' to reach the standards in for example a strict thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 264-265). Instead, similar to others adjusting the framework, the thesis exercised a high degree of reflexivity in the analysis (Remmen, 2024). For, when working from an ambition of making something familiar unfamiliar, the fixed coding schema or following pre-defined steps seemed difficult, if not impossible to adopt since the methodology of unfamiliarity is just that, exploring something as if it were unfamiliar. Therefore, working from a more reflexive approach, to stay open and moving around (Ehn & Löfgren, 1982), to become surprised by the aha-moments (Willis & Trondman, 2000), and connecting them with a larger context in time and place through theory seemed more suitable. In hindsight, being guided by theory or something glimmering made it possible to detect how, for example, whiteness takes place in sexuality education even if words like race have been abolished and racial accounts made implicit (see Article I). The Linnaean lecture in Article II could have been more strictly organised as a text or discourse analysis. However, as the Linnaean lecture's past is unclear, a hermeneutic reading seemed more suitable to invite other interpretations and not exaggerate the claims of the lecture as if it were to be proof of Linnaeus. In the case of talking (Article III), the analysis could have incorporated more

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materials than simply reflecting what was generated from municipal actors working with in-service teachers' professional development since talking is a widespread notion. However, the detailed account of how talking is produced and oriented in sexuality education can hopefully bring insights to further studies of the phenomenon. The teachers' body has been analysed before, but by following the explicit statement of one participant, it became possible to sort out and analyse how the experiences of sexuality education reveal a connection to both past pedagogic ideals and to current negotiations of norms between teachers and students.

By gathering a collection of methods, such as interviews, observations and source materials, the empirical material in the thesis consists of a rich account of human experience. Within ethnography, this is sometimes referred to as thick descriptions (O'Reilly, 2009; Willis & Trondman, 2000). However, despite the thickness, ethnography also acknowledges 'the irreducibility of human experience' (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 3). Hence, grounding the methodological approach in a universal respect for the richness of human lives.

Despite the impossibility of fully grasping human experiences, ethnography claims to generalise the findings. In ethnographic methodologies, to which this thesis belongs, generalisation of individual accounts happens through theory (O'Reilly, 2009). By beginning in an abstract concept (such as whiteness, but also gender) to then retrace it to empirical reality (see Article I and II) or identifying and following up a sense (see Article III), or a statement (Article IV) to then connect it with theory make it possible to reveal patterns or tendencies that can be applicable to understand other contexts. In the thesis, the generalisation claim is limited to be intentionally modest (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 85). This is to claim that while the materials in the thesis reflect particular empirical realities, the thesis findings are not limited to the context it was gathered, but partially transferable to other settings of sexuality education as a result of the theoretical generalisation in which theory is used to connect disparate materials and explain a phenomenon (O'Reilly, 2009).

Having findings that can be generalised, relate to what Tracy (2010) describe as *resonance*, which is one out of eight criteria for quality in qualitative research. Among the other criteria is also having thick descriptions as it provides *credibility* to the findings. Within Tracy's model, having worked with different theoretical frameworks can be justified as having *rich rigour* in the four articles as it has allowed using an appropriate theory to study the phenomena in a complex way. This connects with *sincerity* as to be upfront and self-reflexive about what has been done and why. In the thesis, self-

reflexivity was practised in different ways, for example, when recruiting and having unrecorded small talk with the participants or in relation to the analysis in which the concept and the theoretical gaze upon the material were contemplated in relation to the researchers' (e.g. mine) own biases. In Tracy's model, *ethics* refer to both the importance of procedural ethics, like the regulatory framework in the section above and the universal goal of ethics to 'consider the rightness or wrongness' of actions made as researchers in relation to participants, colleagues and the research community (Tracy, 2010, p. 846). This has thus been criticized by Gordon and Patterson (2013) as they propose that ethics should be an overarching framework instead of a standalone category. In the thesis, ethics has guided the research practice throughout the process, as it was impossible even to begin conducting the research without a formal approval. It also guided in the sense that it provided structure to the situation, to what the participants consented, and how they felt comfortable sharing as they knew that despite whatever they said, it would be almost impossible to find out their identity and others. Conducting qualitative research on a *worthy topic* has to do with the relevance. While the thesis has taken on a perhaps unconventional approach through queer phenomenology and institutional ethnography, its aim can provide interesting insights to understand the tensions within Swedish sexuality education but also to understand tensions in other settings as it is a topic that has, and probably will, continue to be debated. However, whether the thesis brings a *significant contribution* can only be revealed by time, but hopefully the four articles *meaningful coherence* of interconnecting theory and previous research with each of the studies' focus, materials and interpretations with each other.

# 6 SUMMARY OF ARTICLES

In this thesis, the four articles can, and perhaps should, be read as four stand-alone contributions. However, to consider the thesis aim and the theoretical framework, the summary of the four articles are paired up to show orientation.

## PART ONE

The two articles in this part explore the phenomenon of race in sexuality education by connecting race with notions of gender and sexuality to understand how privilege and marginalisation are being reproduced. **Article I** departs from teachers' experiences and textbooks in more or less contemporary classrooms to discuss how a particular type of Swedish whiteness is reproduced in sexuality education. To get more insight into the phenomenon of race in sexuality education, **Article II** explores a lecture allegedly given by Carl Linnaeus sometime in the 1700s. Together, the two articles show how race, gender and sexuality are unstable categories with shifting meanings over time. As *objects of knowledge* and ways of *being*, they become stabilised as neutral/natural objects reproducing privilege and marginalisation.

### *Article I: "Happy stories" of Swedish Exceptionalism*

Fingalsson, R., Junkala, H. (2023). 'Happy Stories' of Swedish Exceptionalism. *Science & Education*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11191-023-00454-3

"Happy stories" of Swedish Exceptionalism exemplify how positions of privilege and marginalisation appear and are maintained in sexuality education.

In this article, we asked how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced in sexuality education? By analysing material from eight interviews and five biology textbooks through Ahmed's (2007) phenomenology of whiteness, our analysis showed that there tend to be an orientation towards a particular notion of Swedish whiteness in the teaching and textbooks concerning sexuality education. This whiteness is being reproduced by focusing on particular social values, historical events, subject knowledge, policies, and legislation. Together, these objects construct a sense of familiarity and belonging, but more importantly, they come to materialise a relative distance of what is supposed to be "here" and what is "over there". In "Happy stories", we show how this "here" constructs and defines Sweden and Swedishness as a place and people of progression, open-mindedness, and possibilities for a happy future sexual life. In contrast to this exceptional promise of happiness, other objects (such as knowledge, cultures or practices), peoples, and matters come to stand out as hyper-visible examples of the less happy and deviant to the Swedish exception. The unhappy objects, people and matters "over there" represent something unfamiliar and distant from the happiness of people, objects, and matters gathered over "here".

Through this article, it is shown that the relative distance-making between a "here" and "over there" feeds into a logic of "us" and "them" in which a position of privileges of the "us" are reproduced through the promise of a happy future whereas anyone (student, parents, teachers) representing something other than us, becomes a non-belonging stranger with an unhappy and miserable life in sight.

### *Article II. Beauty, pleasure and vital fluids*

Fingalsson, R. (n.d). Beauty, Pleasure and Vital Fluids in the Linnaean lecture *About the way to become together* – race, gender and sexuality education in the 1700s. (re-submitted after major revision)

To follow the phenomenon of race (and gender) in sexuality education, the article *Beauty, pleasure and vital fluids* explores the Linnean lecture *Om sättet att tillhopa gå* [*About the way to become together*].

Before continuing, it must be noted that the lecture's origin is dubious as it is claimed to be copied notes from a student (Linnaeus, 1975). The lecture has been contemplated by Linnaean scholar Gunnar Broberg (see Broberg, 1975,

2023), and later judgements suggest that the lecture is at least Linnaean in its content (Broberg, 2023). Regardless of the lecture's origin, since it is imagined to be one of the oldest historical objects in Swedish sexuality education (Bolander, 2009; Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013), and Linnaeus to be one of the founders of scientific racism (Hoquet, 2014), the lecture provided an interesting site to contemplate the relationship between race and sexuality education.

By inviting the reader to think about what a lecture gilded with Linnaeus's name can bring to contemporary science education classes on sexuality education, the aim of the article was to contemplate how ideas about race and gender are interwoven in scholastic notions of the body and sexuality. The article asks: *how is the body envisioned in relation to gender, race, sexuality and reproduction?*

Due to the uncertainties of the lecture's origin, and, at the same time, intriguing connections to Linnaeus, the article offers a hermeneutic reading of the lecture. The hermeneutic reading is guided by conceptualising race and gender as functional objects (Butler, 2014; Müller-Wille, 2014). In this way, it became possible to explore how the lecture envisioned the body and its properties throughout time and place. The lecture and its accounts are discussed through an oscillation between the lecture, scholarly work on Linnaeus, and on the body, race, gender, and sexuality.

The article offers one of many possible interpretations. In three accounts, it discusses how the body was envisioned as a holistic vessel. First, it discusses how the lecture dissolved bodily borders between the inner and outer properties of the body, in which the exterior surface of the body reveals the nature within and vice versa. Second, it discusses the transformative properties of vital fluids. In this vision, the holistic body is transformable as it is an expression of balance, in which, for example, gender is an expression of transitioning from an ungendered child to a gendered adult. Third, the article discusses how the lecture positioned sexual pleasure as key in human reproduction. Through the hermeneutic reading, the paper discusses how historical objects, such as the lecture, can help facilitate sexuality education in science education.

# PART TWO

Part two also contributes to understanding how privilege and marginalisation become reproduced in sexuality education but is now arranged to emphasise the double motion of sexuality education, which seeks to emancipate and disrupt norms while at the same time reproducing normative ideals. **Article III** follows the object of talking through the work of municipal actors supporting in-service teachers' professional development. It discusses how there is a pedagogic tradition and culture around talking in Swedish sexuality education that is upheld by a process of recycling pedagogic objects. By performing ideals of talking, professionalism can be embodied. **Article IV** connects with the idea of embodiment and discusses how the body teaching in sexuality education is heavily coded and conditioned in relation to age, gender and sexuality.

## *Article III. Talking "the talk"*

Fingalsson, R. (n.d). Talking "the talk" in sexuality education. (manuscript, resubmitted)

The thesis background has described how Swedish sexuality education has been closely connected with the idea of talking. To get more insight into these ideas about talking, Article III, *Talking "the talk"*, explores talking as a cultural performance within sexuality education. It asks how talking is produced, what talking is supposed to achieve, and what performances of not talking are disturbing. The empirical material consists of field notes from observations and transcripts from four interviewees with municipal actors all assigned to work with in-service teachers' professional development. The participants are located in different parts of Sweden and represent a meso-level that is mediating sexuality education somewhere between the national curricula and single schools and individual teachers. To analyse the material, the article works with Sara Ahmed's (2006) theoretical concept of orientation and, especially, orientation device.

Article III shows how municipal actors dedicate both time and effort to produce new pedagogic objects by sorting through what objects are already available and re-adjusting them to become suitable. This process can be thought of as a form of recycling. The article stresses that talking in sexuality education is neither natural nor neutral but rather a cultural performance that connects tradition and ideals of education with professionalism.

### *Article IV. The Teaching Body*

Fingalsson, R. (2023). The teaching body in sexuality education – intersections of age, gender, and sexuality. *Sex Education*, 24(5), 737–750. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2023.2254710.

To connect with the idea of embodying ideals and professionalism in sexuality education, Article IV, *The Teaching Body*, aims to study the pedagogic backdrop to the provision of sexuality education by asking how age, gender and sexuality affect practices in the classroom and in schools. The article analyses six interviewees' explicit accounts of their experiences of gender, sexuality and age in their teaching sexuality education. To analyse their descriptions, the theoretical framework was informed by feminist theories that emphasise *doing* as a materialisation of the body. Doing gender or doing sexuality refers to bodily actions and performances that are repeated and expected (Acker, 1990, 2006, 2012). Another bodily doing is the doing of age (Krekula, 2021; Krekula et al., 2005). Instead of conceptualising age as an expression of a standardised timeline, doing age is relational and contextual. So, instead of being an expression of a particular age in relation to time, categorisations like "young" and "old" are expressions of experiences and expectations within a given context. Within institutions like the school, these doings can uphold gender, sexuality and age through the expectations and practices of working; hence, gendered, sexualised and aged inequality regimes are reproduced by simply doing the job right.

By targeting the relationship between practice and embodiment and focusing upon how gender, age, and (hetero)sexuality conditioned men and women, it was possible to get more insight into sexuality education. The article showed a paradox of how normative notions of heterosexual women become reproduced and made successful in teachers' practices, hence reproducing the exact issues sexuality education is designed to work against. In sexuality education, the normative ideals of femininity allow "older" female teachers and heterosexual female teachers to make use of their personal life experiences to exercise professional authority, while male teachers, due to their age, gender and sexuality, are restricted to performing a safe form of masculinity. To put it plainly, stereotypes of men as stronger, less relational/emotional and more sexual become a disadvantage in a sexuality education, emphasising talking to children and adolescents about body, sexuality, and relationships. Heterosexual women's vantage point is, on the other hand, given by

stereotypical characteristics as caregivers and being less sexual than men. Within this stereotype, "older" women exceed "younger" as they are not only less sexual, but fully de-sexualized. Yet, while women reach a state of de-sexualization, their age and normative life course of heterosexual milestones (like going on a date, becoming a mother, and marriage) are testimonies of a sexual past which give them authority in sexuality education. The article highlights how particular forms of normative femininity and practicing a safe form of masculinities allow for disrupting and/or challenging norms in sexuality education while simultaneously reproducing school to remain a heteronormative space.

In the article, the cultural figuration of older femininity expressed as "tant" plays a major role in contemplating the findings as it brings forth the relationship between practice and embodiment and how objects, like hegemonic ideals, silently yet efficiently affect relationships in the classroom. The article proposes that there is a more or less implicit *who* in *how* to teach sexuality education Swedish schools that has been shaped around the "tant" which conditions the teaching body differently in relation to sexuality education.

# 7 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This thesis aims to gain knowledge on how sexuality education is organised, stabilised, and able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation while, at the same time, seeking to disrupt and emancipate. This chapter discusses the contribution of four stand-alone articles within the overarching concept of orientation and how it relates to the thesis's research questions.

## How is body, gender, race, and sexuality (re)produced in sexuality education?

Unlike the overarching concept of orientation, reproduction refers to the 'well trodden paths' of society marking out social spaces not inhabited (Ahmed, 2006, p. 19). While many spaces are not inhabited, the Linnaean lecture analysed in Article II, *Beauty, pleasure, and vital fluids*, and Article I, *Happy Stories of Swedish Exceptionalism* describes direction of a well-trodden path within sexuality education.

From a hermeneutic reading of a Linnaean lecture (claimed to have been given sometime in the 1700s), Article II suggests that this sexuality education portrayed the body as a holistic vessel incapsulating vital fluids. Due to the properties of these vital fluids, the body took shape. As a sexuality education, the lecture conceptualised sexual pleasure and racial differences to be natural and inevitable properties of the human body, whereas other aspects were impressionable and sensitive to outer and inner manipulation. As a sexuality education, it informed that children were loosely gendered, but with the rise of vital fluids, they turned into distinct men and women. The specific balance between the vital fluids gave humans different gendered properties. Therefore, some men and some women turned out to be more beautiful, sexual, sane, and

so on, than others. In the lecture, the balance of the vital fluids was not constant. This puts focus on the body as having a temporal state, in which a human's beauty could fade, and their eyesight and vitality be lost. This divided the body into several gendered, racialised (and aged) subcategories reflecting different ways of life, needs and preferences in relation to sexuality.

Through the concept of *orientation*, it becomes possible to see how the lecture, as a sexuality education, directed its audience towards distinguishing between an abundance of diversities in *beings* and connecting it with *doings*. These *doings* aimed to care for a body that is naturally racialised and sexually pleasurable yet diverse and transformable in its gendered and sexualised bodily constitution.

For how long this perspective on body, gender, race and sexuality lasted within sexuality education cannot be answered in this thesis. However, by tracing sexuality education back to the Linnaean lecture, the results from this thesis project serves as a reminder that there was a time when swallows hibernated underwater, satyrs roamed the earth, and mermaids swam in the sea, all considered equally scientifically real as human races, in order to describe the natural physical properties and conditions of Nature. As Article II shows, the 1700s was a groundbreaking time for science, reflecting a transitioning and stabilisation of how to conceptualise Nature and what is believed to be natural. For example, during this time, the conceptualisation of gender was slowly changing from a one-sex model (women as underdeveloped men with inverted penises) to a two-sex model (women as structurally and naturally different) (see Laqueur, 1994; Laqueur, 2003; Martin, 1992). In contemporary sexuality education and society, the two-sex model is challenged, debated and perhaps under transition since the two genders, female and male, can be defined in different ways depending on in what bodies, where in the body and when in a bodily development gender is claimed to be occurring (Strømme et al., 2023). Article II emphasises how Linnaeus experimented with categorisations and drew inspiration from the culture and the people surrounding him. Therefore, I find it crucial to also remember that Linnaeus's taxonomy was not fully stabilised, but that the internal relationships and properties it was supposed to describe became stabilised by reproducing them as an object of knowledge to inform different ways of *being*.

To give insight into what and how sexuality education reproduces *objects of knowledge*, I would like to focus on the object of race. When it comes to race, it is known that Linnaeus's racial taxonomy introduced race as a scientific *object of knowledge* (Hoquet, 2014; Müller-Wille, 2014). However, to

understand how knowledge impacts individual lives, it is necessary to look elsewhere.

In Sweden, between 1922-1935 the State founded and officially supported a Government Institute for Race Biology. Under the direction of Herman Lundborg, the institute crafted a eugenic vision of a genetically superior elite designated to guide society (Björkman & Widmalm, 2010). The institute connected scientists from various disciplines but mainly from medicine and biology. Among these people were German scientists that later shaped Nazi biopolitics (ibid). After Lundborg's resignation, the new director, Gunnar Dahlberg, decided to put an end to the fantasies of a superior white and Nordic race and published a book called *Race, Reason, and Rubbish. A Primer of Race Biology for the Plain Man* (Dahlberg, 1942). In it, Dahlberg drew boundaries of the scientific concept of race to merely refer to plants and animals. Dahlberg argued for the undisputable value of all humans and the consequences of sorting some humans to be inferior and others to be superior, stating:

> self-esteem is advantageous and desirable for groups and peoples as for individauls; but self-esteem can be dangerous when it is excessive and overrides the sentiment that we are all human beings who might be helping to shape a better future (Dahlberg, 1942, p. 216).

Despite this strong statement against race biology as a scientific knowledge, race continued to exist. In the early 1900s, when sexuality education began to take shape as an instrument for the State's interest, eugenics and racial hygiene connected with the social reforms that introduced sexuality education (then called social hygine), sterilisation laws, and State-sanctioned sterilization programs. For some women, sexuality education and sterilisation meant that the feminist vision for reproductive rights and control was now a reality. At the same time, public records show that between 1935-1975, 63,000 men and women were sterilised by force or had given consent to sterilisation under more or less voluntary circumstances as sterilisation allowed the state to control and weed out particular peoples based upon 'eugenics and/or concerns about "anti-social behavior"' or "feebelmindness" (Tydén, 2010, p. 372). What the concept of *orientation* acknowledges is that sexuality education reproduces knowledge that can inform actions. The particular example of Linnaeus's racial taxonomy and race, biology and sterilisation highlight that when something is envisioned to deal with and solve the social problems of society like sexuality education often is, it is also at risk of failing to recognize how a universal good is grounded upon the specific locations of *beings*.

Due to the particular history of race biology and abuses, such as forced sterilisations, race have become especially tricky to approach in Sweden. On a social level of every day and in the public vocabulary, the word race has slowly been replaced with ethnicity since the 1960s to finally be formally abolished in 1996 (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022). Yet, despite not officially having or using the word, race is still tangible for many people in Sweden (Adolfsson, 2024; Mendick et al., 2024). To address the phenomenon of race in sexuality education, Article I captures it via an analytical conceptualisation of whiteness. In Article I, teachers' experience of working with sexuality education is analysed together with excerpts from biology textbooks. By tracing racial formations in the empirical material, Article I describes how race appears within sexuality education in the shape of *objects of legislation* and *objects of knowledge* and ways of *being* and *doing*. Through the concept of whiteness, that is related to the thesis's overarching concept of *orientation*, Article I provides insight into how these *objects* and ways of *being* and *doing* appear within sexuality education in relation to what is understood to be near and familiar and what is perceived to be unfamiliar and far away. *Legislative objects* can, for example, be legislation concerning homosexuality, marriage, adoption and assisted reproduction that, on the one hand, inform students on how sexuality has developed over time as well as inform students what is legally correct in Sweden. While, on the other, simultaneously establishing a boundary between Swedish laws and other undefined places. Similar processes happen with *objects of knowledge* and *objects of values* in which, for example, anatomy and processes of body and organs concerning sex and reproduction or lust and the chemistry of love are gathered in ways to dismantle myths and describe how, for example, genital mutilations are anatomically invasive, illegal and culturally wrong.

Through the concept of *orientation*, this can be understood as drawing up a line between what is understood to be ways to be *in line* and ways to be *out of line*. If and how students receive this subtle yet clearly racialised message of a uniquely progressive, open, and superior Swedish whiteness remains unknown from Article I. But through Bolander and Bredström's (2021) study in the school's upper secondary introductory programmes work with values and norms, it is shown how gender and sexuality are used as an ethnic marker between Swedishness and non-Swedishness. According to Sältenberg et al. (2024), topics like gender equality, which is a crucial part of Swedish sexuality education, is so heavily coded as a core value of Swedishness to the point that far-right and conservative political parties have absorbed gender and gender

equality in nationalist discourse and agendas. Sältenberg et al. (2024) argues that this incorporation of gender equality re-constructs the meaning of equality to promote hegemonic forms of "Swedishness" and naturalise the difference between an imagined "us" and the "Others".

Returning to the topic of race and the difficulties of, on the one hand, having experiences of being racialised (and even subjected to racism) like the students in Bolander and Bredström's (2021) study, and on the other, being in a context that makes race rather unspeakable, the thesis shows how orientation matters for what comes to be understood as *being in line*, and what remains invisible (*out of sight*) or understood as *being out of line*. Similar to Martinsson and Reimers (2008) pointing out that the school both produce and reproduce norms, this thesis claims sexuality education to do the very same. However, in addition to the previous research, combating the mythical side of sexuality education within science education by providing a higher accuracy in the knowledge concerning sexuality and sexual/gendered behaviour (Ah-King, 2013a; Ah-King, 2022), or inquiring bias in scientific results and conclusions (Ah-King, 2013b; Danielsson et al., 2023), and exploring divisions between facts and values to get a more complex understanding of sexuality and of science (Gunnarsson & Ceder, 2023), this thesis contributes with an empirical description and an argument for why it is necessary to not just conveying the proper "facts" in school and in sexuality education, but to use the common space in schooling to inquire and connect "the facts" and conceptualisations of body, gender, race and sexuality with the experiences of past and current lives lived to understand how orientations in the social landscape matter.

Through following the objects of body, gender, race and sexuality around across time and space, Article I and Article II provide knowledge on how sexuality education is able to reproduce positions of privilege and marginalisation by stabilising *objects of knowledge*, as a point of departure to inform actions that have real-life consequences for different ways of *being*.

## How is sexuality education conditioned?

The section above discusses how race, as a biological and determining conceptualisation, first appeared as a scientific object of knowledge, to then take on new shapes and direction in sexuality education by gathering with other objects to inform *doings* and ways of *being*. This shift describes a form of re-orientation of the direction of sexuality education that, on the one hand, pushes

some *objects of knowledge* to the side (race biology as a historical object, rather than a reality) while it continues to reproduce a way of *being in line* by *doing* racial difference. However, unlike the orientation of race, the Linnaean view (see Article II) on the body, gender and sexuality as naturally varied resonance to some extent with contemporary practices of norm-critical approaches in sexuality education. Article III and Article IV describe how teachers and municipal actors working with in-service teachers' professional development try to orient sexuality education towards diversity by having students and teachers explore norms and raise awareness on matters concerning the body, gender roles, gender identity and sexuality.

In contrast to previous research, which describes a tendency to blindly reproduce binary norms of heterosexuality and gender identity (Ah-King, 2013b; Danielsson et al., 2023; Reiss, 2018), the participants in this thesis seem to reflect a sexuality education that is oriented towards in inquiring norms. This tendency can be a consequence of the thesis's recruitment strategy since it is likely that participants' interest in this thesis project and in sexuality education as such has adopted the latest teaching ideals, which at the time was norm-critical approaches (Nordmark & Bolander, 2024). However, it can also be viewed as a consequence of an orientation toward values in the 1990s curricula reform (Löf, 2009; Qvarsebo, 2021). To transform the idea of values into education, norm-critical pedagogy became a tool for working with values of gender equality, equity and anti-racism (Bolander, 2024; Bredström et al., 2018; Löf, 2009). In Article III, *Talking 'the talk'*, approaching body, gender and sexuality as possibilities rather than solid entities can be traced to the production of pedagogic objects within sexuality education. Article III analyses interviews and observations of municipal actors working with in-service teachers' pedagogic development to improve sexuality education in schools. Through the concept of *orientation devices*, Article III describes how pedagogic objects, such as teaching models, activities, presentations, etc., are being recycled or perhaps re-didacticized by connecting them to new and relevant issues arising in, for example, the public debate, politics, policy changes, and so on to make sexuality education, or particular issues of sexuality relevant.

Making sexuality education connect with public opinion and discourses on social problems is a well-established notion (Iyer & Aggleton, 2015; Lennerhed, 2002; Lukkerz, 2023; Roien et al., 2022). However, after tracing sexuality education back to the early 1900s and to specific locations, such as Dodger's dinner party in the red dining room on New York's Fifth Avenue, it is clear how sexuality education is oriented and connects with particular

conditions. For sexuality education to arise as an instrument of public interest in the early 1900s, was by allocating support from influential actors (Luker, 2007). By grounding an idea of a common cause, vastly different religious and political interests of different groups and individuals were united (Hustak, 2013; Lennerhed, 2002; Luker, 2007). When Article III shows how vastly different topics become connected through a production of pedagogic objects, it reflects this underlying condition for sexuality education to exist in the first place. Moreover, as these pedagogic objects are *orientation devices*, they also move the direction of sexuality education. Article III shows how Swedish sexuality education fosters a particular culture of talking that is directed to expanding the meaning of sexuality to adhere to diversities in perceptions of body and sexuality in terms of gender and sexual diversity. At the same time, diversity in racial experiences, faith, and class remains rather unspeakable within sexuality education. After analysing norm-critical informed educational materials directed towards newly arrived immigrants, Bredström and Bolander (2018) stress that in the norm-critical approach, there is a tendency to disentangle norms from a particular culture and instead highlight universal reproductive rights as a strategy to avoid essentialising or othering students to a Swedish majority. However, in doing so, these binary positions are reinforcing as they simultaneously make the specificity of cultural context and backgrounds unarticulated. Events like this can be referred to as colour-blindness, in which race, racial differences and particularities are ignored (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022). Or, as I would put it, experiences of racism are suffocated under a blissful ignorance of the majority's good intentions.

Similar to the discussion above on race, having students and teachers reflect and communicate well-reasoned thoughts and queries concerning bodily and sexual norms and diversities in sexuality education becomes a particular practice of talking. Through the concept of *being* and *doing*, it is possible to see how talking can reinforce particular subjectivity of Swedishness as someone who is exceptionally open and progressive as well as highly analytical and self-reflexive. This notion is also evident among teachers. In materials such as teacher guidance on sexuality education, teachers' practices on talking are not only guided by ideals for how to teach, but teachers are embodying these ideals by who they are (Nordmark & Bolander, 2024). Previous research has described how the school is a heterosexual space that conditions anything but heterosexuality to be sexual (Davis & Hay, 2018). Nordmark and Bolander's (2024) analysis of teacher guidance materials from the 1950s to 2014 shows that while teachers cannot escape embodying ideal teaching practices, the ideals

of who the teacher is and what the teacher is supposed to do have at least shifted throughout time. At the same time, while ideals are changing, Article III, stresses how change is happening by recycling old ideas into new ones which then can make past ideals restrict present perceptions. As talking become a cultural performance of professionalism, Article IV, *the Teaching Body*, explores how experiences working with sexuality education connect with notions of gender, age and sexuality. In Article IV, it seems as if normative notions of heterosexuality condition teachers' practices within sexuality education. For example, women, and especially older women, describe themselves as able to make use of their gender and sexuality in relation to a heterosexual life course in which embodied experiences of, for example, menstruating, falling in love, and being pregnant become a pedagogic advantage as these experiences give authority and legitimacy to their teaching. Moreover, ageing becomes an additional pedagogic advantage, as older women embody a particular form of de-sexualised femininity. Within this normative notion of a heterosexual life course, men are conditioned to potentially be too sexual. This means that teachers are conditioned by the ways they are being perceived to be gendered, aged and sexualised, which in turn affects how they can engage with sexuality education. While sexuality education has been oriented towards disrupting norms and emancipating students through norm-critical pedagogies (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2019; Bredström et al., 2018; Nordmark & Bolander, 2024), Article IV shows how teachers teaching sexuality education embody normative ideals of a gender binary heterosexuality. The concept of *being* and *doing* highlights how teachers' embodiments in doing the job well are reproducing positions of privilege and marginalisation due to the conditions of school as a place of heterosexuality. Therefore, to challenge and expand norms in sexuality education, it seems as if teachers are conditioned to perform safe forms of heterosexuality as sexually experienced, but not sexual women or as analytical men in control of their sexuality.

In relation to the concept of *orientation*, the conditions of sexuality education show that there are more *lines* directing how sexuality education orients. Sometimes, these lines align after knotting together financial, religious, and political interests to conform to a shared agenda for the public good, like the outcome of Dodger's dinner party or the program for sterilisation. To be *in line* can then be to follow a direction given by those with enough power and influence to transform their vision of the world into future realities. At the same time, since not everyone is positioned alike, there are multiple orientations *out*

*of line*. This means that while the orientation within sexuality education is not free-floating, it is not a given as it departs from particular conditions.

## How can educators navigate to "do right" in sexuality education?

Apart from solving social problems of society, sexuality education has been motivated by "doing right" by the next generation.

However, as this thesis has shown, the orientation in sexuality education provides different answers to what this right is. For example, through quality reviews, sexuality education became oriented towards a loose and shifting definition of quality within a managerial sphere. In this orientation, ways of *doing* sexuality education right were sometimes envisioned as teaching subject content, including students in the conversation, subject-integrating, delivering systematic work, or just continuously improving it. In other words, based on the quality reviews from 1969/1970, 1999 and 2018, it is clear that sexuality education has not been "doing right" because simply following the textbook is not enough. At the same time, analysis of teacher guidance shows that what is considered to be "doing right" has changed throughout the years (Hulth et al., 2024; Nordmark & Bolander, 2024; Roien et al., 2022). However, for those, simply following the *lines* of the organisation will be a form of "doing right", I will argue that since Swedish sexuality education has been on a path of revision and improvement, educators following this line are likely to find new ways to improve the sexuality education given and that it is probably providing a comprehensive content which in some shape or form include students perspectives. Moreover, for educators working in schools or municipalities with support for in-service development, "doing right" is to make use of the resources provided and follow the directions given by those working to improve sexuality education. Article III describes how such direction is most likely designed to make teachers and other educators become more self-reflexive and open to a variety of bodies, relationships and sexualities. In these strives, Article II contributes with examples of how historical objects, such as the Linnaean lecture, can assist in facilitating an orientation towards critical discussion in science education.

At the same time, simply following the lines and allowing *orientation devices* to orient sexuality education towards some direction will not guarantee that the good intentions are good for all. After all, as this thesis has contemplated

the orientation in sexuality education in relation to Article I and Article II, it is clear that good intentions of "doing right" can lead to abuse and marginalisation. Moreover, as Article I shows, happy stories of progression and openness towards gender and sexual diversity are at great risk of reproducing exclusions and marginalisations among students. Therefore, doing right in sexuality education is something more than simply following the lines. "Doing right" depends on orientation. Article III and Article IV show how orientation can be directed towards exploring the tension between what is perceived to be *in- and out of line* and to find solidarity for those perceived to be *out of line*. Hence changing the conditions for what is *in line* and what is not.

To sum up, asking how to "do right" is perhaps an orientation of a question in need of a new direction. Instead of asking for a general answer on how to "do right", the question should perhaps be re-directed to asking how to do right for those who are more vulnerable than others in school (see Reimers, 2017, p. 103). For Meyer and Leonardi (2018), trans children are some of the most vulnerable bodies, for they are the 'canaries in the coal mine /…/sounding the alarm about toxic elements' in school (p. 460). However, as this thesis argues, the question of doing right is a matter of orientation, asking *how educators can navigate sexuality education to "do right"?* is a plea for anyone interested in sexuality education to think about what other canaries there can be and how orientations in sexuality education can produce, reinforce, as well as shield vulnerabilities. Therefore, the only way to be "doing right" is perhaps to continuously provide a sexuality education interested in moving on and being dedicated to exploring and understanding the shifting nature of vulnerabilities. In other words, to keep engaging in the care for oneself and others despite differences.

# 8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

## Implications

This thesis has shown sexuality education to be highly complex, challenging, and unfulfilling in its efforts to disrupt and emancipate as it simultaneously reproduces positions of privilege and marginalisation.

However, replacing the long history of at least trying to *do something* and include various perspectives on sexuality with pedagogies of silence is not an option. For, what will be the consequences if children and young people's concerns about body, sexuality and relationships are ignored? What will happen if an adult world silences children and young people's realities by restricting or limiting sexuality education to a bare minimum that only focuses on an ideal and the risks?

Comprehensive approaches to sexuality education, such as the Swedish sexuality education, has developed to provide children and young people opportunities to address contemporary social issues of sexuality and make relevant connections to understand what is happening around them (Goldschmidt-Gjerløw, 2022; Kehily, 2002). According to Weaver et al. (2005), young people's reproductive and sexual health is best served when sex between young people is acknowledged, accepted and regulated rather than prohibited in all contexts outside of marriage. After comparing approaches, there is no evidence supporting abstinence-based educational policies or providing no sexuality education at all to improve the sexual health of young people (Weaver et al., 2005). Nor have these approaches achieved a lower rate of teen pregnancies (Bordogna et al., 2023). Instead, reviews of research over the last 30 years provide evidence in support of providing comprehensive forms

of sexuality education (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). Studies on sexual health programs show positive, lasting and statistically significant effects beyond the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases or unplanned pregnancies, as equality, respect, and communication skills strengthen people's resources for sexual health (Abrams et al., 2023). According to Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021), sexuality education 'is most effective when begun early and before sexual activity begins' and when it 'builds on previous lessons and/or grades and for programs of longer duration' (p. 22). This is because comprehensive forms of sexuality education have shown the effects of creating a safer environment that is more encouraging of learning as it allows children and adolescents to talk and learn about bodies, relationships and sexuality, as well as exploring norms, values and rights. By having comprehensive knowledge and skills increases self-esteem and decreases homophobic attitudes and harassment based on gender and sexuality decrease, as well as prevents dating- and intimate partner violence. It builds the capacity to recognize healthy relationships, resist sexual coercion, and improve bystander interventions. For young children in kindergarten and elementary school, learning about body ownership and getting skills to distinguish between good and bad secrets or appropriate touches can help detect child abuse, but also teach children and young people that it is okay to tell and talk about what is happening.

Through comprehensive approaches to sexuality education, students learn to communicate with others, such as peers, but also parents and medical providers, about various topics. These are a few reasons why comprehensive approaches are considered to be 'one of the most important tools to ensure that young people have the information they need to make healthy and informed choices' (Parker et al., 2009, p. 227). In light of this, recent studies suggest that since sexuality education operationalises democratic values in schooling through the curriculum concretising of 'key issues related to feminist and LGBTQI+ struggles for equality, diversity, human rights, citizenship and, in short, democracy' (Venegas, 2022, p. 482), it has become a target for movements aiming to disturb and reduce multiple perspectives on body and sexuality (Giudici et al., 2025; Van Wichelen et al., 2024; Venegas, 2022). This tendency is also recognized among students in peer-to peer interactions to which some feel unease and distrust both to others and adults for not preventing ridiculing and intolerant behaviour toward others (SSI, 2025).

So, if the policies, practices and contents of Swedish sexuality education begin to orient towards silencing a multitude of voices and perspectives on body, sexuality and relationships that, up until this time in history, has shown

the strongest evidence for providing children and young people with knowledge and skills to have a safe and fulfilling life, then, it is necessary to ask how an orientation towards pedagogies of silence imagine itself caring for the well-being of children and young people?

This thesis has shown how sexuality education can orient toward different directions, but perhaps more importantly, it shows that these orientations matter for what comes into sight – in other words, what becomes available as knowledge and ways of *being* and *doing*. Therefore, when schools provide sexuality education and listening to students as well as introduce new perspectives and ways to engage with sexuality-related matters, teachers (and other adults in school, such as councillors and school nurses) can make a real difference for the well-being of children and young people in their immediate surrounding. After all, a recent survey of 9 444 participants aged 16–29 years old reveals school-based sexuality education to be their main source of information concerning sexuality and relationships (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2025). Social media and other sources of information (for example, youth clinics), along with friends and siblings, are also significant. But, while these sources are important communities to find help and support, school-based sexuality education can reach all children and young people and ensure that there is a place and space to more broadly and nuanced inquire how bodies are bound together in the social and material worlds.

As this thesis has also shown, there is no such thing as simply "just giving the facts" or staying neutral without also providing orientation science teachers can make a real difference by, first of all, finding ways to provide sexuality education at all. Hence, providing a space and a place for children and young people to raise issues and queries concerning body, sexuality and relationships without taboo by having the content communicating what we see and what we know about the body, sexuality, and relationships is theoretically and socially expansive rather inevitable and never changing. As Gandolfi (2024) argues, by going beyond the "happy stories" to learn about science's socio-political entanglement, teachers and students are able to recognize both past and current exclusions and exploitations and engage in solidarity with those impacted by challenges and injustices. Moreover, if sexuality education is reoccurring, as well as discussed and a shared duty among several teachers, children and young people can get a wider and hopefully more complex understanding of themselves and their relationship with others, as well as more adults to turn to if necessary.

So, while this thesis takes on a critical approach to sexuality education, it is not aiming to annihilate the subject of body, sexuality, and relationships in school. Rather, this thesis is written in a tradition of critical scholarly that strives to reflect, take accountability, reconsider, and re-imagine how the social can be lived and experienced with dignity and in plurality. In this regard, previous research, as well as this thesis, shows comprehensive sexuality education to, at least for now, provide the most efficient and significant way to care for children and young people.

## Moving on

To move on from what this thesis has shown, I would like to return to the pre-service teacher and Hanna. There can be many ways to answer why it is necessary for the pre-service teacher (science teachers and adults in general) to also discuss norms and values concerning bodies, relationships, and sexuality when educating children and young people to understand themselves and engage with others in society. However, through Hanna's experience, a simple answer is given.

After the call ended, Hanna was shocked over the parent's reactions to support their son's homophobic expressions, but when reflecting upon it, she describes it to be an important "wake-up moment". From the call, she learned that the student's homophobia was grounded in his home environment. But, instead of taking the opposite side to the parents' views, Hanna contemplated her role as a teacher. Instead of continuing to discipline the student, she takes a moment to sit down with him and says, *if you are worried that you yourself [might be homosexual and] will not be accepted at home, you are always welcome to talk to us in school.*

Even to this day, Hanna is unsure whether the student was being silly or if he was masking a real fear of being rejected by his family. Like many others working in the school and providing sexuality education, Hanna shares experiences of not knowing what to do and second-guessing if what has been done was right or enough. Unlike an approach of strictly and simply providing the facts, Hanna and others' lingering doubts are experiences of queer moments of disorder.

Having these moments is crucial. For, as this thesis has shown, orientation is not predictable. In sexuality education, every moment of queer disorder brings a new possibility of envisioning the way we are and can be together. So, instead

of following a given, Hanna reveals that sexuality education in school can, and perhaps should be, a practice of 'besideness' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 169). However, to be beside each other is a shared effort that requires everyone to keep up and pay attention. Therefore, engaging with norms and values concerning bodies, relationships, and sexuality is also crucial for science teachers. For it allows us to see beyond and re-imagine the dividing lines of orientation that can tear us apart.

Having besideness in sexuality education is not a given, but an orientation towards moving on, opening up new sights on *who* we are and *what* we know and finding out *how* to be uniquely diverse in a shared reproductive future.

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# APPENDIX

# Appendix I

## Information om forskningsstudien
## ”Erfarenheter och minnen av sexualundervisning i skolan”

**Vad är det för projekt och varför vill ni att jag ska delta?**
Studien är en del av ett avhandlingsarbete som syftar till att förstå vilket utrymme som kunskap om sexualitet och relationer befäster i skolan och vad det innebär det att utbilda om detta. Med andra ord eftersträvar studien att försöka förstå hur samhället föreställer sig att ungas sexualitet och relationer ska hanteras genom utbildning samt hur verksamma utbildare hanterar uppdraget och vad de upplever som utmanande och varför.

Du tillfrågas om deltagande i studien på grund av dina erfarenheter av att arbeta med sexualundervisning i skolmiljö. Kontaktuppgifter till dig har framkommit genom din arbetsplats eller genom ditt personliga nätverk.

Forskningshuvudman för projektet är Malmö universitet. Med forskningshuvudman menas den organisation som är ansvarig för studien.

**Vad innebär deltagande i studien?**
Deltagandet innebär att du vid ett eller flera tillfällen blir intervjuad om dina erfarenheter och minnen av att arbeta med sexualundervisning i skolan. Intervjufrågorna är av öppen karaktär vilket innebär att frågorna utarbetas gemensamt av oss allteftersom intervjun fortskrider. Intervjutiden kan variera men ett riktmärke är att en intervju tar ca 1 eller 2 timmar. Varje intervjutillfälle bokas enligt överenskommelse och med din tillåtelse spelas intervjun in med ljud.

Deltagande i studien är frivilligt och sker utan ersättning. Du har rätt att när som helst avbryta deltagandet utan att förklara varför. Det går också bra att avstå från att besvara specifika frågor som ställs. Om du vill avbryta ditt deltagande ska du kontakta den ansvariga för studien (se nedan).

Om så är möjligt kan observationer göras av din arbetsplats eller av möten och aktiviteter. Syftet med observation är att få en bättre förståelse för arbetet med sexualundervisning. Under denna tid kommer mer informella samtal att föras och dessa kan komma att användas som underlag i forskningsstudien om de har relevans för studien syfte. Observationerna dokumenteras genom fältanteckningar och inga personuppgifter förekommer i dessa.

Filmning kommer inte att ske. Fotografering av föremål och miljöer kan förekomma enligt överenskommelse. Fotografering av människor eller sådant som är tydligt förknippat med en specifik person sker bara med särskilt godkännande som dokumenteras och förvaras i likhet med övriga personuppgifter.

Forskningsgruppen kan även besluta att avbryta ditt deltagande i studien om det bedöms som nödvändigt för dig eller om deltagandet inte uppfyller syftet med studien. Om det under studiens gång kommer fram ny information som kan påverka studien kommer du att informeras.

**Vad händer med dina uppgifter?**
Projektet kommer att samla in och registrera information om dig. Dina svar kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av det. Malmö universitet ansvarar för att insamlat material hanteras i enlighet med EU:s dataskyddsförordning (GDPR). Personuppgifter behandlas med ditt samtycke. Du kan när som helst ta tillbaka samtycket och uppgifterna får då inte bevaras eller behandlas vidare utan annan laglig grund.

De inspelade intervjuerna kommer att transkriberas (skrivas ner ordagrant) och analyseras tillsammans med fältanteckningar av observationerna. I samband med transkriberingen kommer materialen att avidentifieras, dvs alla namn byts ut mot fiktiva namn, platser och sammanhang. Ljudfilerna och övriga personliga handlingar sparas i 10 år och förstörs därefter. Avidentifierade transkriberingar av intervjumaterial och fältanteckningar kommer att förvaras i ett låst säkerhetsutrymme under tiden de bearbetas och placeras sedan i arkiv.

Resultaten av analysen kommer att presenteras i vetenskapliga texter så som monografi och vetenskapliga artiklar samt på vetenskapliga konferenser. Resultaten kan också förmedlas genom populärvetenskapliga artiklar och föredrag för intressenter. Inga personuppgifter förekommer i samband med presentationen.

Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har du rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dig som hanteras i studien, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade. Du kan också begära att uppgifter om dig raderas samt att behandlingen av dina personuppgifter begränsas.

Om du vill ta del av dina uppgifter eller forskningsresultaten, vänligen kontakta Rebecka Fingalsson rebecka.fingalsson@mau.se, 040–6657080 eller lärosätets dataskyddsombud som nås på dataskyddsombud@mau.se.

Klagomål som inte kan lösas med Malmö universitet kan lämnas till Datainspektionen. Om du är missnöjd med hur dina personuppgifter behandlas har du rätt att ge in klagomål till Datainspektionen, som är tillsynsmyndighet.

**Ansvariga för studien är:**
Ansvarig organisation för studien är Malmö universitet (forskningshuvudman).

**Kontaktuppgifter till ansvariga forskare**
Rebecka Fingalsson, doktorand vid institutionen för Naturvetenskap, matematik och samhälle, Malmö universitet.
E-post: rebecka.fingalsson@mau.se Telefon: 040-6657080

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**Hör gärna av dig om du har några frågor!**

**Samtycke till att delta i studien**

Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig informationen om studien och har haft möjlighet att ställa frågor. Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.

☐ Jag samtycker till att delta i studien *Erfarenheter och minnen av sexualundervisning i skolan*

☐ Jag samtycker till att uppgifter om mig behandlas på det sätt som beskrivs i forskningspersonsinformationen.

| Plats och datum | Underskrift |
|---|---|
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# ARTICLES

# I

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ARTICLE

# ‘Happy Stories’ of Swedish Exceptionalism

## Reproducing Whiteness in Teaching and Biology Textbooks in Sexuality Education

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**Abstract**
Sexuality education (SE) takes place in fields of tension where biology, legislation, norms, and values intersect. Drawing on Ahmed’s phenomenological account of whiteness, this article examines how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced within SE. In Sweden, SE is formalised as an overarching, subject-integrated knowledge area where the biology subject plays a crucial role in its delivery. To include a wide spectrum of SE, where both planned and unplanned aspects of teaching are considered, as well as tensions in the content, we have analysed eight semi-structured teacher interviews and five biology textbooks. Our analysis shows how Swedish whiteness is reproduced as a form of institutionalised orientation constructed by norms, social values, people, subject knowledge, policies, and legislation, all intertwined in a complex web. This web places SE, teachers, and pupils in a racial landscape that constructs and reproduces specific forms of Swedish whiteness by assigning each a position in relation to familiarity. This familiarity provides a taken-for-granted starting point in SE, where ‘here’ is constructed as a place of progression, openness, and possibilities for happy future sexual lives, while other places come to stand out as hyper-visible examples of the less familiar, less happy, and ‘far away’. From this outpost, teachers and biology textbooks construct and reproduce Swedish whiteness through ‘happy stories’ of Swedish exceptionalism. Although these positive messages in SE may stem from good intentions, our findings show that a colourblind view of racial hierarchies in the rendering of ‘happy stories, about, for example, gay rights, free abortion, and equality also contributes to reproducing whiteness and reinforcing ideas about race and Swedish exceptionalism in SE.

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## 1 Introduction

Sexuality education (SE) takes place in fields of tension. Different values and interests meet, intersect, influence, and sometimes clash in SE content. Pupils in Swedish schools are expected to gain knowledge about the body and health by learning about the biological and social aspects of sexuality and relationships. Ever since SE became a compulsory part of Swedish schools in 1955 (SOU, 1974:59), the curriculum has evolved from focusing on biological facts and morals to having a stronger emphasis on social value. As an effect of these changes, the national curriculum emphasises how SE must 'develop pupils' critical approach to representations of relationships and sexuality in various media and contexts, including in pornography', and knowledge of 'power structures linked to gender and honour-related violence and oppression' (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2022, p. 8). In the SE classroom, norm-critical pedagogy, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism are exercised to address and problematise various aspects of sexuality, values, and society (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2020). However, as Bengtsson and Bolander (2020) show, while norm-critical pedagogy, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism can help pupils explore norms and sexuality, there is also a tendency among teachers to deliver the analysis rather than engaging students to analyse and reach their own conclusions.

When it comes to SE, Sweden has come to represent a progressive, sex-positive, rights-based, and secular approach, along with Canada, the Netherlands, the UK, and the Nordic countries (Jones et al., 2019; Nordberg, 2020; Roodsaz, 2018; Zimmerman, 2015). Liberal sexual politics and gender equality have become a vital part of the Nordic region's nationalism and a form of 'trademark that set[s] them apart from the rest of the world' (Svendsen, 2017, p. 137). Despite these democratic intentions, Swedish education is characterised by racial colour blindness, according to Lundström and Hübinette (2022). Although there are efforts to broaden Swedish SE, certain values appear to be universal and create notions of Swedishness and 'otherness' (Bredström et al., 2018, p. 538). The 'scientifically sound and sex-positive approach' within European SE is, according to Svendsen (2017, p. 137), also a place for unreflective imperial sexual racism.

Race as a concept was abolished in Sweden at the end of the twentieth century (Hübinette & Lundström, 2015, p. 431) and has been replaced by concepts such as 'ethnicity' and 'diversity', which can be seen, for example, in the Swedish curriculum's section on the school's core values (see Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2011, 2019, 2022). 'Culture', 'religion', and 'Swedish' are also common euphemisms used to avoid direct references to race or whiteness (Lundberg, 2021; Wahlström Smith, 2020). In Swedish society, people 'distance themselves from the discourse of race as something that takes place not within its borders but somewhere else', according to Törngren (2022, p. 51), thus allowing for subtle forms of racism to appear as so-called polite exclusions that appear in everyday interactions. Since race is considered to belong to history, it is no longer perceived as relevant in Sweden, for example, in statistical measurements, which is an obstacle to dealing with racism (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022). The UN Human Rights Council has criticised Sweden's reluctance to use race data, despite calls to 'collect and use this data to fight systemic racism' (UN News, 2022). Thus, the Swedish habitual colour blindness continues, a colour blindness that is embraced in a quest for a post-racial society by the Nordics and other western countries as well (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017, p. 153).

Swedish whiteness is characterised, according to Hübinette and Lundström (2011), by the fact that, on the one hand, Sweden has perceived itself as 'the most racially

homogeneous and pure population of all white ethnicities', and, on the other hand, as 'at the top of the world as the most progressive and left-liberal country', which constitutes a 'double-binding power' that makes it almost impossible for people of colour to be accepted as Swedes (p. 50). The same applies to Nordic whiteness in the Nordic countries, where non-white residents 'experience themselves as perpetual outsiders' (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017, p. 151). Furthermore, Hübinette and Lundström (2011) argue that 'the presence of non-white, non-Christian, and non-Western migrants' is perceived as a threat to the Swedish self-image as the most 'humanitarian, and anti-racist country in the world', as well as to the image of being 'the whitest of all white countries', to the point where Swedishness has become trapped in 'white melancholia' (p. 50).

To move on from a mourning of a 'glorious past', this article aims to explore how Swedishness appears as specific forms of whiteness in SE. We ask, how is Swedish whiteness constructed and reproduced in SE? To answer the research question, we analysed teacher interviews and biology textbooks. Through a focus on Swedish whiteness within the school's sexuality education, this study contributes to an understanding of how racial relations are reproduced within educational practises. In doing so, we offer perspectives for moving forward from the past without turning a blind eye to racial hierarchies and inequalities in education.

## 2 Background and Previous Research

### 2.1 The Scope of Swedish Sexuality Education

Internationally, Sweden and other northern European countries were the first to make SE part of mandatory schooling (UNESCO, 2018; Zimmerman, 2015). The comprehensive, rights-based approach to SE has been spread internationally (Berglas et al., 2014) and gained strong political support in the region (Sherlock, 2012; Svendsen, 2017). The wide scope of today's Swedish SE can be explained by developments in both practise and policy. A new model was adopted in the Swedish curriculum in 1994, where SE became a subject-integrated knowledge area (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2006). Since then, schools and teachers have been expected to integrate several subjects into SE (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2019).

An overarching goal in Swedish SE is that every pupil, after finishing the 9th grade of primary school, has knowledge of various issues about sex, sexuality, consent, relationships, and gender equality, as well as honour-related violence and oppression (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2022). According to Bengtsson and Bolander (2020), SE has taken 'a significant turn towards inclusion – in the sense of social justice and rights for individuals and groups – and anti-discrimination' (p. 154). They highlight that the turn towards social justice and rights is linked to the legal protection against discrimination on grounds of gender, transgender identity or its expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, functional variation, sexual orientation, and age, which are also linked to children's rights from 2006 (SFS, 2010:800). In the curriculum, policies such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and active measures to counteract discrimination (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2019) impact practise and push towards widening the scope of SE. Apart from teaching the biological facts, SE shall also contribute to pupils 'feeling safe in their own bodies and identities' (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2013, p. 68).

In the past, the Swedish population has been perceived as homogeneous and 'white' according to Lundström and Hübinette (2022). However, this has changed. After labour immigration from Nordic and European countries between 1945 and 1970, international adoptions from the 1960s, and refugee immigration from the 1970s on, Sweden has become one of the most heterogeneous countries in terms of language, religion, and race (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022, p. 12). Despite the apparently heterogeneous population, Sweden and other countries in the region are united under a shared characteristics of 'the Nordic' which is branded as something unique when it comes to gender equality, internationalist solidarity, social democracy, and egalitarianism (Sawyer & Habel, 2014, p. 1). In this construction, the Nordic region is perceived as a 'queer utopia' (Kjaran, 2017, p. 178), where SE becomes synonymous with gender equality, sex-positive attitudes, and norm-critical awareness (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2020; Svendsen, 2017; Zimmerman, 2015). Røthing and Svendsen (2011) argue that gender equality and gay rights are mobilised as markers of a 'national belonging' to the dominant society. Therefore, tolerance towards homosexuality and support for gender equality become political positions. According to Sawyer and Habel (2014), these images support strategic moves to erase and smooth over internal differences and fractions from past power relations of domination and colonisation. Instead of emphasising the past, they shape an understanding of an 'imagined, universalistic, neo-colonial future in which some nations lead others' (Martinsson, 2021, p. 84). Martinsson further argues that this fantasy is ingrained in a notion of Swedish exceptionalism 'built on an understanding of time as linear, making the world's most modern, developed, gender-equal, secular nation a role model for other countries to follow, the one that has found the way to the future' (Martinsson, 2021, p. 84).

## 2.2 Underlying Assumptions in Sexuality Education

Notions of exceptionalism and the progress of the West are also reproduced in schools. According to Quinlivan (2017, p. 392), Western discourses of scientific rationality characterise SE. There is also a paradoxical ideal of cultural sensitivity and diversity within SE in Western European countries (Roodsaz, 2018, p. 108). This ideal of being both sensitive and diverse at the same time creates tensions between secular rationality, science, health, and human rights on the one hand, and morality, religious rights, and faith on the other (Rasmussen, 2010, 2015). In an analysis of Swedish science education textbooks, Ideland highlights that these are characterised by 'a hegemonic discourse about progress, development, and the great rationality gap., which drowns out 'the story about the darker sides of science' (2018, p. 799) and thus reproduces coloniality in the content. In line with this, Svendsen (2017) points out how Norwegian SE constructs a secular native and a religious 'Other', and that there is thus a need for an 'anti-racist critique of sex education' (p. 151). In Finnish SE also, the 'Other' and sexual norms of 'other cultures' appear in contrast to imagined Western forms of liberal and progressive sexuality (Honkasalo, 2018). Furthermore, Krebbekx (2018) has shown that SE in the Netherlands risks producing 'some of the tensions between sexuality and ethnicity that it seeks to reduce' (p. 1336) and thereby '(re) produces ethnic characterizations of sexuality' (p. 1325). To reduce inequalities, there is a need for critical awareness by addressing different norms within SE and being 'open to a diversity of sexual cultures' (Cense, 2019, p. 272).

In Sweden, SE has mainly been taught by biology teachers, and due to SE's roots in science and biology (Ceder et al., 2021), it is intertwined with scientific ideals of objectivity and neutrality (Svendsen, 2017). However, feminist critique argues that in seemingly

neutral scientific approaches in SE, there are underlying normative assumptions based on secularity (Allen et al., 2014; Svendsen, 2017) and individualism (Lamb & Randazzo, 2016). In other words, this criticism means that an education that should enable diversity through multiple voices can instead exclude certain views by, for example, separating religion from other aspects of life. Or, in short, according to Rasmussen (2015) and Lamb (1997), there is no neutral position with regard to sexuality education. Efforts are currently being made in education 'to reveal and dismantle structures of domination by working to reform and reimagine their curricula, and the ethics and values that underpin classroom settings' (Bratman & DeLince, 2022, p. 193). Different interest groups influence SE content and also research to widen its scope. In previous research, SE content has been scrutinised and challenged regarding gender norms (Cense, 2019) and diverse sexualities regarding LGBTQ (Clonan-Roy et al., 2020; Naser et al., 2022; Roien et al., 2022; Røthing, 2017), and heteronormative and stereotypical assumptions of reproduction have been challenged (Martin, 1991). Critical aspects of variations in functionality through crip perspectives (Johnson & McRuer, 2014; McRuer, 2010) have contributed to research, with the potential to broaden norms of sexual possibilities in SE for all (Bahner, 2018; Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2013). Also, intersex and asexuality have been presented as important perspectives in research for expanded views on gender and sexuality and for social justice (Brömdal et al., 2017; Pasley, 2020). In this endeavour, education is also at the epicentre of guarding and upholding racial relations (Castagno, 2014; Frankenberg, 1993; Garner, 2007). Therefore, it is important to do research also on whiteness and SE education.

Much of the literature on race and whiteness originates in settings where the colonial past and the postcolonial present have some recognition in the social reality of school and education. However, our research is carried out in the colourblind 'non-racist utopia' of Sweden, where race as a concept on a governmental and official level, as well as in academia, is 'considered to be completely irrelevant and obsolete in the contemporary Swedish context since human rights, democracy, social justice, gender equality, and antiracism seem[s] to be already achieved' (Hübinette & Lundström, 2015, p. 431). It is a myth, though, that race is no longer relevant, according to international scholars such as Bonilla-Silva, and this 'seemingly naive colour blindness' (Bonilla-Silva, 2015a, p. 78) legitimises contemporary racial inequalities. This 'new racism', or racial structure (Bonilla-Silva, 2015b, p. 1362), involves, for example, the avoidance of racial terminology and instead concepts such as ethnicity, culture, and diversity are used. Furthermore, people in Swedish society 'distance themselves from the discourse of race as something that takes place not within its borders but somewhere else' according to Törngren (2022, p. 51). This allows subtle forms of racism to appear, such as 'polite exclusions' (Wiltgren, 2022), which appear in everyday interactions in school.

At the same time, organisations that work to promote diversity also harness 'a desire to hear "happy stories of diversity" rather than unhappy stories of racism' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 164). Instead of addressing race explicitly, euphemisms for 'race' are in use, in which undefined groups of pupils come to be compared to 'other Swedish pupils' or through references to 'culture and language' (Lundberg, 2021). Thus, Lundberg (2021) claims that these types of euphemisms mark 'race' and show a difference between Swedishness and non-Swedishness. According to Habel (2012), the ascendancy of neo-liberal cultural racism, or 'racism without races', has entailed the use of ubiquitous, more subtle code language, in which the naturalised use of 'ethnicity' and 'culture' or 'multiculture' signals various shades of non-whiteness (pp. 101–102). Nordic whiteness is, according to Lundström and Teitelbaum, 'a fluid and contested but also an enduring and powerful phenomenon' (2017, p. 151). Or, to borrow Bonilla-Silva's words, race 'is in constant flux', and thus, 'we must examine its remaking in societies' (2015a, p. 77).

Operating in a setting that is characterised by racial amnesia calls for inquiry, since 'the success of whiteness is found precisely in its ability to rewrite the contract according to the specific and historical needs of whiteness' (Leonardo, 2013, p. 606). Using whiteness as a theoretical lens enables examination of how SE knowledge intersects with aspects of white supremacy and systems of domination in education (Gillborn, 2013). To conclude the work of critical race scholars, what we need is research on 'how and why race will be organised and lived in various contexts' (Bonilla-Silva, 2015a, p. 82).

## 3 Theories of Race and Whiteness

To explore how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced in SE, we turn to scholarly work within critical race theory and to the concept of whiteness. Using a concept such as whiteness is delicate since it can be misunderstood, misused, and developed into studies that essentialise and stabilise race as an ontological given (Ahmed, 2007, p. 149). According to Bonilla-Silva (2015b), race can be misconceived as a given, although race is an invented social category that becomes '*socially real* and reenacted in the everyday life' (p. 1360). Racial categories, such as whiteness, express a system of dominance and power rather than a skin colour or ethnicity (Frankenberg, 1993). According to Frankenberg, '[w]hiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination' and '[n]aming "whiteness" displaces it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance' (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6). In addition to race being an invented social category, Ahmed elaborates on the concept of whiteness as being an unstable category created through "an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up space' and what they 'can do'" (2007, p. 149).

In this article, we draw on Ahmed's phenomenological understanding of whiteness to explore Swedish whiteness in sexuality education. According to Ahmed, historical dominance and privilege have positioned whiteness to operate in the background and appear as a 'shared attribute' (p. 154) that is reproduced through repetition and by attaching familiarity and positive values to it. This creates a sense of belonging and allegiance to what is already in place, and when bodies reach out into the world, they expand spatially towards what is already there. Ahmed argues:

> We do not face whiteness; it 'trails behind' bodies, as what is assumed to be given. The effect of this 'around whiteness' is the institutionalization of a certain 'likeness', which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up this space. (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157)

The concept of the body should be understood here from a phenomenological view as something that is experienced from within oneself rather than from an outsider's perspective. To describe how whiteness is constructed as a given that positions bodies in terms of familiarity, Ahmed (2007) uses the metaphor of peas in a pod. Through this metaphor, she describes how bodies take shape in a system of whiteness. According to Ahmed (2007), whiteness is not inscribed in the similarity between the peas, but in the pod itself as a common, shared space where familiarity and division occur. In the phenomenological tradition, the philosopher "asks us to be aware of the 'what' that is 'around'" to acknowledge how '[t]he world that is 'around' has already taken certain shapes, as the very form of what is 'more and less' familiar" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 151). For the peas, the pod is a world that is

already in place and that conditions their shape and constitutes the familiar. According to Ahmed, "[t]he familial is in a way like the 'pod', as a shared space of dwelling, in which things are shaped by their proximity to other things" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 155). Through the metaphor of the pea pod, Ahmed claims that '[o]bjects, as well as spaces, are made for some kinds of bodies more than others' (2006, p. 51) to point out how whiteness appears beneath the surface of the body as an 'invisible and unmarked, as the absent centre against which others appear only as deviants' (2007, p. 157). She further explains that the institutionalisation of whiteness provides a white backdrop that allows some bodies to expand into that familiar space and sink into the background as an unnamed body, while others become extremely visible and come to 'stand out' as 'hypervisible' representations of the less familiar and far away (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159). Ahmed explains that institutions are meeting points 'where different lines intersect, where lines cross with other lines, to create and divide spaces' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159), and hence, institutions consist of more or less accessible lines. Hypervisibility occurs when someone crosses lines and appears to deviate, be "out of line", whereas following the lines 'allows bodies to move with comfort through space, and to inhabit the world as if it were home' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 159). Drawing upon Ahmed's conceptualisation of whiteness allows us to follow the motility of Swedish whiteness in SE.

## 4 Methodology

To explore and analyse how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced in SE, we have combined empirical material from two dissertation projects, one focusing on experiences of teaching and the other on the content of biology textbooks. To account for our data, we first describe how our empirical materials were selected and collected. We then provide reasons for combining our data. Finally, we describe how the data was analysed in relation to the theoretical framework.

### 4.1 The Teacher Interviews

Inspired by Haug's (1999) methodology of collecting experiences of work through memory work, Author 1 used an open approach to interview eight educators, all having experiences of working with SE to understand the practice. Similar to ethnographic interviews, memory work seeks to understand participants' point of view (see Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). In memory work, the interviewee is asked to freely share a memory to describe their practise, and based on that, the interview expands and develops in relation to memories of, for example, SE, as in our article. According to Haug (1999, 2008), memory work derives from the Marxist tradition of consciousness-raising and Foucauldian discourse analysis, whereby individual memories are considered to describe how experiences are filtered through social structures of, for example, sexuality, gender, or, in this case, whiteness. Through memory work, the experience is brought into focus to investigate how social structures condition the body socially. During the interviews, none of the interviewees was specifically asked about their own or others' race or experiences of racism; however, despite their ethnic background, all of them had racialised experiences from work with SE. As our theoretical framework indicates, race and ethnicity are slippery concepts as they are social constructs rather than ontologically given (see Ahmed, 2007). Following Bonilla-Silva (2015b) line of thought, race is acted out in real life. Hence, when interviewing

teachers about their professional experiences, they act out their institutional identity as Swedish teachers in Sweden. Regardless of whether our interviewees have an immigrant background or not, almost all of them have Swedish sounding names, speak Swedish fluently with a more or less distinct Swedish dialect, and have a Swedish style of appearance. Our guess is that in school, our interviewees do not 'stand out' as 'hypervisible' but pass as Swedish teachers. As you will see in our findings, one of our interviewees, called Karim, addresses how institutional whiteness operates and positions teachers regardless of their ethnic background within the institutional lines of whiteness, hence requiring an active move to cross the institutional lines and make use of one's 'hypervisible' background.

The eight interviewees were selected through snowball sampling (Bryman, 2016). They work in different schools across Sweden, on different levels ranging from kindergarten to upper secondary school. Due to COVID-19 restrictions regarding physical meetings at the time, the interviews were conducted individually via video meeting or telephone, depending on the interviewee's preference. Two of the interviews were divided into two sessions due to the interviewees' time schedules. Each interview lasted between one and three hours, was audio recorded, and transcribed. To ensure anonymity, all names and geographical locations are given pseudonyms in the transcripts. The study has obtained ethics approval from the Swedish Ethics Review Authority[1] since the interviews contain sensitive personal data. In accordance with *Good Research Practice* (Vetenskapsrådet [Swedish Research Council], 2017), each interviewee prior to the interview was informed about the study and gave informed consent to participate.

### 4.2 The Biology Textbooks

When it comes to textbooks in Sweden, there are no institutions that print, evaluate, or approve the content of textbooks. However, the major publishing houses in this sector are organised within an association[2] that provides policies to ensure the quality standards of the content in terms of curriculum and facts. The selection of five textbooks is representative of contemporary Swedish SE. The textbooks are the latest published editions and printings of Swedish biology textbooks (for grades 7–9) that were available in libraries and online stores before the reform of Swedish SE in 2022: *Biologi Direkt* (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012), *Puls Biologi* (Andréasson, 2011), *Makro Biologi* (Henriksson, 2010), *Spektrum Biologi* (Fabricius et al., 2013), and *Capensis Biologi Del 2* (Martens, 2018). All five textbooks have been analysed in a previous study by Author 2 (2021), but whiteness was not part of that study.

### 4.3 Combining and Analysing the Data

Combining two sets of data is motivated by the social constructivist and feminist methodological approach of *crystallisation*. Instead of finding one representation of SE, crystallisation allows for crossing traditional boundaries of representations to create new coherence in texts by 'building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematises its own construction' (Ellingson, 2009, p. 4). Together, these data enable us to reflect both the planned and the unplanned practises of SE. The textbooks here represent the planned,

[1] Approval number 2020-1873.

[2] The name of the association is *Läromedelsföretagen*. https://www.laromedelsforetagen.se/

reviewed, and edited side of SE that is supposed to communicate clear, nuanced, and accurate information to pupils, while the interviews shed light on some of the more unexpected ad hoc moments in teaching and on how teachers navigate these moments, where different tensions may arise.

Our data is from Sweden, where the educational setting, according to Lundström and Hübinette (2022), is colourblind. They have pointed out that people avoid talking about racial issues, emphasising that 'the silence is simply compact' (p. 184). So, Swedish whiteness is communicated in our data more or less implicitly. To explore how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced in teaching practises and biology textbooks within SE, we divided the analysis into five steps. First, we explored our data through iterative readings inspired by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Terry et al., 2017). Second, from these readings, we selected content on stories, statements, explanations, associations, quotes, and illustrations that related to race, whiteness, and Swedishness. The first readings and selections we made separately to protect the anonymity of the interviewees since not only what is being said but also how someone expresses themselves can reveal identities even if the names have been removed (see Israel, 2015). Third, we coded our quotes that related to race, such as 'culture', 'tradition', 'ethnicity', 'neutrality', 'religion', and 'legislation'. Fourth, we reviewed our codes and developed categories to explain in what ways the data reflected expressions of Swedishness. Fifth, we recontextualised our data to re-explore the content in relation to Ahmed's (2007) conceptualisation of whiteness and began to see how Swedish whiteness was constructed and reproduced as something familiar or something seemingly far away.

### 4.4 Our Positioning in Relation to Whiteness and Swedishness

In the analytic process, we also used our own experiences of Swedishness and whiteness to locate and discuss silences and euphemisms and how they inform us about how the familiar and unfamiliar, the near and the far, are organised. Critical race scholar Bonilla-Silva (2015a) argues that all social locations of identity, including race, affect researchers in 'what they see and study and poses general limits on their ability to understand the world' (p. 76). For clarity, we explain our own positionings in this article and how these can influence and contribute to our interpretations. As researchers and individuals, we consider ourselves to be at the margins of Swedishness, our paraphrase of Garner's (2007) at the margins of whiteness. 'Whiteness at the margins', explains Garner (2007, p. 99), means having an intermediate position between belonging to and not belonging to a white collective. This in-between position becomes noticeable during the interviews, as we will see later in our findings, as the interviewees place the interviewer, Author 1, in different positions. From our experience, Swedishness or whiteness is a never-ending negotiation in a complex web of the socio-political, cultural, economic, and historical landscapes of society that cuts across individual and collective experiences of reality. Our own positions at the margins of whiteness or Swedishness are related to specific demographic phases in Swedish history, namely the eras of international adoptions and labour immigration (Lundström & Hübinette, 2022, p. 11).

Author 1 was adopted from South Korea in the 1980s and grew up in a small and predominantly white community in Sweden where the family had lived for at least three generations. For Author 1, Swedishness was within reach through the family's pedigree, their Swedish-sounding name, and language. Yet, because of the instability of race (see Ahmed, 2007; Bonilla-Silva, 2022), her position in relation to whiteness is not stable. Instead,

whether Author 1 is perceived to be Swedish is conditioned by context and people's perceptions of her. Author 2 was born in Sweden in the 1960s, just after her Finnish parents immigrated to a Swedish mining district. Despite learning to speak Swedish, she is, because of her non-Swedish names, perceived as foreign. As the immigration patterns have changed over time, she and other Finnish people have become considered more Swedish in other people's eyes.

By not seeing whiteness or Swedishness as self-evident but as a negotiation, our experiences of navigating the social geography of race in Sweden have helped us to notice how belonging and not belonging, inclusion and exclusion, are communicated, both explicitly and implicitly through euphemisms, silences, pauses, avoidances, and politeness. The purpose of positioning ourselves is not to centre ourselves or our experiences. Instead, in line with how Childers (2013) describes methodology in feminist research, we do this to allow a 'slip and slide against personal histories, ways of knowing, and the lived experiences' (p. 600) in our analysis of Swedish whiteness in SE.

## 5 Findings

In the following sections, we present our findings from the analysis of Swedish SE from the interviews and the biology textbooks thematically.

### 5.1 Here-ness, Openness, and the Familiar

If whiteness is a form of repetition and a style of embodiment, we find it crucial to locate the starting points from which 'the world unfolds' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 151). To do so, we identify remarks about familiarity in the textbooks and interviews. Nina has worked as a lower secondary biology teacher in different schools for the past six years. According to her, there are tensions between the values that Swedish schools teach in SE and other religious views and cultures. In her frustration over how to handle it, Nina describes how she at one point turned to the school's principal to get support. Rather than helping her to engage with the tension, as we have already mentioned in the introduction, the principal provided her with a clear message: 'You should just say that this is what Swedish schools teach, this is what you [the pupil] need to know.' Nina reflects on the response and explains that it is more complicated than the principal's simple answer. She says:

> It is hard to have a conversation about it, or it can be hard to talk about, or yes, you know what I mean?! In Sweden, we are supposed to be so politically correct…. What do we do when it is like this? We should not put any value in why they have different views, but more on how we do and what we can demand from them. What can we demand?! Now we are practical, and that is what is written in the curriculum. (Nina, teacher)

In the excerpt, Nina pinpoints the starting point from where the world unfolds for her. The tension between values and expectations also reveals that there is a distance between what seems to be familiar and what seems far away. In relation to her view, there is the undefined 'them' with different views that mark out the unfamiliar and far away. The familiar, on the other hand, is harder to talk about. To explain the familiar, she mentions a certain kind of political correctness. This statement can be connected to a particular form of colour blindness where racial and ethnic differences and inequalities are downplayed (Lundström

& Hübinette, 2022). Although we cannot know for sure exactly what Nina means by her statement, it provides an interesting insight into how familiarity is expressed. When Nina briefly turns to Author 1 (the interviewer) and says: 'You know what I mean', she assigns the interviewer, Author 1, to a position that is close to her own perception of the world. Together, they share an unmarked and unnamed status (see Frankenberg, 1993, p. 6) of the familiar, of here-ness, while the unfamiliar, from this point of view, appears as 'them', far away, who do not know how things work 'here' and have different values and views.

In the interviews, familiarity appears as glimpses of what is taken for granted. When Lena, a lower secondary biology teacher, reflects on whether there are ethical difficulties in teaching SE, she explains that there are no difficulties 'because we (she and her pupils) live in Sweden and are quite open'. For Lena, openness in SE smooths out differences. This is also mentioned in the other interviews. In these interviews, openness appears as a desirable condition where teachers and pupils have opportunities to address a vast range of topics in a profound way. Christian, an upper secondary biology teacher, describes how he has worked in different schools that are more, or less, open in relation to topics in SE. Despite variations in social climate, he describes how openness creates an opportunity for pupils to become engaged in the subject. He explains: 'Something happens there. We do something together, and their [the pupils'] interests are piqued. It is exciting, while my maths lessons rarely reach that level of [Christian laughs] interest and commitment.' Stella, a primary school teacher, describes how openness in SE is not only reserved for the pupils. Instead, it is also desired among the staff. During the interview, Stella describes how she and her colleagues' assumed openness got disturbed during an inventory exercise. Through their exercise, they, despite being a heterogeneous group of teachers, realised their own tendency to exclude a variety of representations in their classrooms.

Openness is a defining attribute of familiarity in the interviews, and openness here works to reproduce particular understandings of Nordic and Swedish exceptionalism (Habel, 2012; Martinsson, 2021). However, as Stella points out, openness does not necessarily lead to openness in practise. Instead, openness functions like a defining attribute of the familiar that sets the unfamiliar apart.

### 5.2 Objects Already in Place

In the previous section, we focused on descriptions of how the world unfolds into the familiar, and in this section, we pay more attention to how Nina and her principal were trying to resolve tensions by reaching out to objects that were already in place. While Nina reached out to the curriculum to find guidance, her principal grabbed on to a notion of how things are usually done in Swedish schools. In this section, we continue to explore how the interviewees and textbooks reproduce whiteness by reaching out to objects already in place.

In all five textbooks, Swedish legislation is portrayed as an important factor in guarding a variety of possibilities for pupils' future sexual lives. The textbooks describe, for example, how Sweden has 'abolished many laws that set boundaries' (Andréasson, 2011, p. 278), and that the law makes it possible for all, regardless of sexual orientation, to marry and to adopt children (Fabricius et al., 2013, p. 370). To describe how love and life are possible for homosexuals in Sweden, one of the textbooks uses no fewer than six different legal reforms and one reference to changes in the Church of Sweden's policy on marriages to do so (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012, p. 231). In the textbooks, the legal reforms are framed as 'happy stories' of sexual and reproductive rights ensuring sexual freedom. This taps into the trademark and self-image of Sweden and other Northern European countries as a

centre for sex-positive and liberal SE (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2020; Zimmerman, 2015). In contrast to the 'happy stories' of legal rights in Sweden, legal norms far away seem to be less happy. For example, one textbook explains that '[i]n many countries, homosexuality is still banned. Homosexuals are persecuted and punished for their sexuality with long prison sentences, and in some countries, with death' (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012, p. 231). Another textbook states that '[f]or more than half of the women in the world, there is no free abortion, while free abortion is legal during the first 18 weeks in Sweden' (Andréasson, 2011, p. 283).

The textbooks in our analysis present Swedish legislation as something exceptional and unique, as an example to follow to ensure sexual and reproductive freedom. Martinsson (2021) argues that within a frame of exceptionalism, internal differences and conflicts become strategically smoothed out. In the textbooks, we notice that, despite accounting for historical developments in legislation, there are hardly any traces of political conflicts or struggles. Rather than informing pupils about how, for example, gender-neutral marriages have been key areas for gay civil rights processes worldwide (Andersson, 2017) or discussing that registered partnership was never equivalent to heterosexual marriage (Rydström, 2012), the textbooks reproduce a happy story of progression and coherence. Similar to openness, the happy story creates a sense of familiarity but also retells a particular history that has been forged over time. In the textbook's content, legislation ensures the happy story by being something already in place, something to grab on to.

This is also noticeable in our interviews. In the interviews, objects already in place, such as legislation, are described as tools to grab hold of to motivate actions within SE. Anton, who mainly works in the school's health services team but also has SE classes, describes how he uses legislation and policy to motivate SE when parents have concerns. He says: 'I think, sometimes, it can be connected to culture, [pause] background, [pause] religion'; however, 'We always lean on Swedish legislation, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and equal value for all'. For Anton, Swedish legislation and policies are something to lean on to motivate actions that might differ from parents' views on SE.

Using objects already in place is also something Robert describes. For the past 20 years, he has worked in various schools and at different levels. Robert describes how some pupils claim religious reasons for refusing to take part in SE. Robert emphasises that this is unusual, but when they do it, he supports their choice of refusing the compulsory SE. To motivate this, Robert explains:

> There is freedom of religion in this country… If they [the pupil] claim it [a religious claim], I will not oppose it. Then, what I think and feel about religion, no matter what religion it is, is not part of the question. (Robert, teacher)

For Robert, religious claims are protected by legislation that trumps the curriculum and his personal opinions on it. Although Anton and Robert make different choices regarding the pupils' participation or not in the compulsory SE, both justify their actions by reaching out to objects already in place. For the interviewees, these objects are also within their reach to motivate actions and provide clarity in ambiguous situations when they are trying to navigate parents and pupils with views that seem far away from the Swedish curriculum on SE. Objects already in place are also evident in the practise of teaching. Lena, a biology teacher in lower secondary, describes how she has encountered difficulties concerning female genital cutting and explains that:

> They They [the pupils] have not chosen [it] themselves, but on the other hand, they [the pupils] should know their rights, what applies in Sweden... It is important not to be too judgmental… but on the other hand, you [the pupil] must be able to describe what is happening, purely biologically, because otherwise it is difficult to take a stand for or against [female genital cutting]. But in Sweden, we are against [female genital cutting], and then you [the pupil] can explain why. [the pupils] have not chosen [it] themselves, but on the other hand, they [the pupils] should know their rights, what applies in Sweden.... It is important not to be too judgmental … but on the other hand, you [the pupil] must be able to describe what is happening, purely biologically, because otherwise it is difficult to take a stand for or against [female genital cutting]. But in Sweden we are against [female genital cutting], and then you [the pupil] can explain why. (Lena, teacher)

Although Lena is not explicit about the pupils' backgrounds, it seems as if female genital cutting and pupils experiencing it are remote from something that applies in Sweden; hence, female genital cutting is a practise representing something far away. To understand Lena's implicit remarks about the 'far awayness' of some of her pupils, Lundberg (2021) points out that '[t]alking about race whilst not utilising racial terminology is a hallmark of the liberal white' (p. 152). So, while avoiding racial terminology, race is still reproduced, but in the pupils' relation to female genital cutting, in which the pupils' awareness and knowledge are put in opposition to a Swedish stance and way of being. In the excerpt, Lena emphasises that it is important not to be judgmental towards the pupils when talking about the issue, but also stresses the importance of pupils gaining knowledge about it to become active and take a stand for or against female genital cutting so they become aware of their rights. However, while Lena is trying not to be too judgmental, she also adds personal responsibility to pupils experiencing female genital cutting. Lamb and Randazzo (2016) explain that this is part of a neoliberal discourse that promotes a hyper-individualised view in which personal responsibility is highly valued as 'each man or woman is responsible for his or her own destiny' (p. 163). Rather than providing tools to acknowledge structural inequalities and social conditions concerning female genital cuttings, Lena reaches out to the pure biological facts and legislation to provide knowledge about female genitals and genitals to give pupils the tools to become active agents in making an individual choice to be either for or against rather than being passive. Lena's emphasis on choice, biological facts, and legislation become objects that put Swedish whiteness within the pupils' reach; however, in doing so, Lena also reproduces the institutional lines of whiteness as the opportunities for choice are conditioned by what is considered to be Swedish and not.

In the findings, Swedish whiteness appears to be reproduced through an unreflective practise. In both the interviews and the textbooks, objects already in place, such as the curriculum, legislation, policy, and scientific knowledge, appear as rigid and neutral ways of approaching SE. However, according to Ahmed (2007), whiteness is reproduced by repeating a particular form of institutional behaviour that institutionalises a certain 'likeness', a familiarity through 'repetition of decisions made over time' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 157). Therefore, by claiming these objects of legislation and knowledge, or retelling the happy story of progressive Sweden, the interviewees and the textbooks reproduce Swedish whiteness as the taken-for-granted background in which anything else stands out as less familiar.

### 5.3 Conditions for What Bodies 'Can Do'

In the previous sections, we showed how the interviewees and textbooks reach objects that are already in place or extend themselves into a collective or institutionalised notion of us. Swedish whiteness becomes a matter of embodiment, in which motility is possible while remaining invisible. In this section, we focus on embodiments to understand what bodies can do, or seem to be able to do, and what stands out.

In the textbooks, love, romance, or sexual relations are mostly represented by young heterosexual or homosexual couples with white bodies. In the illustrations, we see glimpses of kisses, handholding, physical intimacy, nakedness, and marriage. However, we also see that love and relationships are not always easily achieved. Alongside the subheading '[r]ight to choose partner', there is an illustration of women demonstrating against child marriage in Bangladesh (Martens, 2018, p. 115), somewhere else, far away. It stands out and 're-confirms the whiteness of the space' (see Ahmed, 2007, p. 159), that is, the whiteness of the textbook's 'room', namely the SE content. This is also a reminder that freedom of love and relationships cannot be taken for granted but are something that has been achieved through what we earlier described as happy stories of legal progressions 'here', in Sweden.

Through the textbook content, pupils and teachers become familiar with some diverse possibilities for love and relationships. This is something that also occupies the interviewees. Lena describes how, during her classes, she consciously tries to use gender-neutral pronouns to describe couples to avoid exclusions and reproduce heterosexual norms. Lena says: 'After all, I have several pupils coming out as gay or bisexual, … therefore, I want to be inclusive and not exclusive so that everyone feels that they have a part in my teaching'. Using gender-neutral pronouns and addressing possibilities for various sorts of love and sexual relationships is also something Christian, Stella, and Nina do. In their experiences, SE provides an opportunity for all pupils to learn about the possibilities of finding love and starting a family, despite norms and cultures that might surround them in their everyday life. Thus, through SE, love and opportunities to reproduce in Sweden come within their reach.

In addition to possibilities of love and sexuality, there are also facts for pupils about how different contraceptives work and other consequences of having sex. Alongside facts about abortion, there is an illustration (Henriksson, 2010, p. 319) to show how it might feel afterwards, consisting of a young woman comforted by another woman of the same age, holding her arm around her. The caption explains that there are 30,000 abortions on a yearly basis in Sweden and that the woman can experience a feeling of emptiness and guilt afterwards. Therefore, it is rational that she might need someone to talk to and get support from her surroundings. On the topic of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, and contraceptives, another textbook shows an illustration of an inflated condom in the hand of a young child, about 6 to10 years old, standing in a landscape in a seemingly foreign country. In the caption, the textbook states: 'Use a condom? Condoms, if used properly, can help reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies. They also provide good protection against infection' (Martens, 2018, p. 113). The two textbooks are set out to treat similar topics in SE, but for some reason, the bodies orient differently in relation to whiteness. In the first picture, the woman's need for comfort and her friend's act of support present a roadmap to abortion in Sweden. Although it is not depicted as a political act, the picture and text mark a standpoint on abortions as an emotional yet non-religious choice for women in Sweden, regardless of their sexual past. In contrast, the child far away

with the inflated condom appears as someone unable to make proper use of the object in their hand. The image stands out and becomes hypervisible. The image of the irrational use of a condom, here as a misused and wasted contraceptive device, reproduces a rationality divide through its distance from progress and development (Ideland, 2018). Instead of harmonising Swedish norms, as in the first picture, the second picture comes to embody difference, something far away.

Ahmed (2007) describes a discourse of 'stranger danger' (p. 162), where threats and unpleasant phenomena are seen as something from outside, from somewhere else, from far away. In the textbook's descriptions, the far away takes on different shapes. For instance, there is a prevailing view of diseases as problems deriving from distant countries. The history of syphilis recounts how the infection was brought from America in 1493 by Columbus' crew (Martens, 2018, p. 108) and spread to Europe (Henriksson, 2010, p. 320). The textbooks also describe how AIDS spread from Africa to the USA (Henriksson, 2010, p. 321) and later to Thailand and Russia (Fabricius et al., 2013, p. 387). In the textbooks, there are illustrations showing one of the, until then, 14 million children in Africa who have lost their parents due to AIDS (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012, p. 241), HIV-infected children in Moscow, Russia (Andréasson, 2011, p. 290), and a world map of HIV infection with a caption stating that most people do not have access to treatment through antiretroviral drugs (Andréasson, 2011, p. 291). Through these examples, seemingly neutral facts about sexually transmitted diseases are repeatedly embodied by people far away.

In the context of female genital cutting, one of the textbooks uses a picture of a girl carrying a bucket on her head in a field somewhere in Africa (Henriksson, 2010, p. 311). Female genital cutting is thus positioned as something far away, somewhere else. However, this is not entirely the case in the interviews. Both Elsa and Lena describe how they have met pupils who have been subjected to female genital cutting. Elsa also remembers how one of her pupils realised how it had been carried out in his vicinity. During SE, he burst out, 'Aha! Now I get what they mean when they say they will remove the foreskin on girls, too.' For her, the pupil's reaction became one of those moments when she felt that she had reached a pupil and made a difference. By not placing a phenomenon solely elsewhere, but rather creating a sense of a shared space, she explains that it becomes possible for pupils to engage in SE. In education, bodies move and orient regardless of skin tone in relation to whiteness. However, in the textbooks, the motility and opportunities for embodiment are less vivid.

Ahmed (2007) argues that institutions can practise a non-performativity of empty signs or illusions that diversity has been achieved and completed. By including and showing diversity, it becomes a 'sign of an overcoming of institutional whiteness' (Ahmed, 2007, p. 164): 'Look, you're here!'. In this 'sea of whiteness' (Vidal-Ortiz, 2021, p. 225) that is predominant in all five textbooks' SE chapters, there is at least one picture of a non-white body in each book. There are also some illustrations that are drawn, allowing for almost unlimited variety and diversity compared with photographs. In a multiple-choice task, there is a drawing of five pupils, one of whom is non-white (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012, p. 251). In a drawing illustrating development during puberty (Fabricius et al., 2013, p. 376), there are four naked pairs of girls and boys, in which all the girls are white while the boys have darker skin tones. However, despite the potential for various possibilities, all drawings of genitals and penis-in-vagina intercourse consist of only white or slightly pink bodies. Here, in line with Ahmed's (2007) 'institutional overcoming', we want to draw attention to the risk that the few inclusions of non-whites may constitute 'empty signs' of achieved diversity.

While there are some attempts to mirror the diversity of society today, problems are repeatedly embodied by bodies far away. When one of the textbooks covers prostitution and trafficking, it states that '[i]n Sweden it is punishable to purchase sexual services, but in other countries prostitution takes place more openly' (Kukka & Sundberg, 2012, p. 243). It is explained that in prostitution and trafficking, mostly women, but also men and children, are forced to sell their bodies, both within and across national borders, because of poverty, drug abuse, sexual assault, or social exclusion. On the same topic, another textbook describes how '[y]oung people from other countries are lured to Sweden with promises of ordinary jobs' (Fabricius et al., 2013, p. 381). Little is said in the textbooks about what forces lie behind international human trafficking. Instead, the focus is placed elsewhere. Problems are often associated in the textbooks with non-white bodies, giving the impression that these issues are outmoded, inadequate, and far away, while opportunities are embodied through Swedish whiteness, in which opportunities for love and family are embedded in a happy story of exceptional progress.

### 5.4 Beyond Body—a Landscape of Whiteness

To illustrate how Swedish whiteness goes beyond skin and conditions bodies, we learn from one of our interviewees, Karim. He has 20 years of work experience within SE and describes during the interview how he has faced racism and navigated between a sense of Swedishness and non-Swedishness at school. In Swedish SE, norm-critical pedagogy is part of the work to examine norms around the body, sexuality, and relationships, and in discussions about, for example, gender equality and discrimination (Bengtsson & Bolander, 2020; Bredström et al., 2018). Karim has a norm-conscious perspective in his teaching and adds that it is something he has also developed in other parts of his life. Over the years, he has acquired skills in navigating various social environments by decoding how he 'appears' in relation to a given 'room'. He explains that each room has different 'rules', and depending on the 'room' and its 'rules', he can adjust himself. Although he is not always aware that he is decoding 'the room', he nevertheless feels that he has this knowledge of how different rooms work and how he 'fits in'.

During the interview, Karim gives an example of navigating 'rooms' by telling a story related to SE content from the teachers' lounge. During a break, one of the teachers asked a colleague, here called Nadia, whether it went well with her divorce, gently referring to Nadia's Muslim background. Karim recalls how Nadia responded in a bold tone and replied that her brothers would never dare say anything about the divorce or decide for her. She had simply told her brothers that if they or anyone else tried to decide for her, they could stop considering her their sister or daughter. The other teachers were surprised by Nadia's bold response and wondered if she might be punished because of Muslim honorary culture. According to Karim, their colleagues could not understand how Nadia's divorce was unproblematic, since that went against a Swedish perception of Muslim women, relationships, and honorary culture. However, Karim immediately understood what it was about and therefore asked Nadia further questions. In the interview, Karim re-enacts the conversation as follows:

> Karim: Your father, he is not alive anymore, is he?
> In Nadia's voice: No, my father passed away, but my mother is alive, and I have a bunch of older brothers.

> [Karim pauses the re-enactment and turns to the interviewer, Author 2, and says]: You get honour now, how it works, who will take on the responsibility. [A2 nods and Karim continues.]
> Karim: But you are the youngest one?
> In Nadia's voice: Yes.
> Karim: Then you must have been the favourite.
> In Nadia's voice: Well, yes, I was always the favourite.
> Karim: Ah, then, I get it. You go above the hierarchy and skip the honour part because you are the favourite, and then you can do as you please, but your brothers, they have to follow the honorary codes…

At first glance, Karim's story about Nadia may seem out of place, but when interpreted in terms of whiteness, a web of racial relations is revealed. When Karim addresses how he has faced racism and navigated between a sense of Swedishness and non-Swedishness, his experiences reflect what Frankenberg (1993) calls a 'social geography of race' where people, or Karim in this case, find themselves in systems of dominance and power. In this system, the dominance of whiteness remains unmarked and unnamed while other racial categories are revealed and named. Having experiences of navigating between Swedishness and non-Swedishness and being on the receiving end of racism is a cruel reminder of occupying an unprivileged position in a racial system.

Karim's experiences of navigating different spaces can also be understood as his encountering the institutional lines within organisations (Ahmed, 2007). According to Ahmed (2007), institutional lines provide relative markers of taken-for-granted ways of being within an institution. By staying within these lines, it is possible to sink into the background and smoothly fit into the institution, whereas crossing the lines brings full exposure to something or somebody because they will stand out—become hypervisible—against the taken-for granted backdrop. When Karim provides his story about Nadia and his navigation of a racial geography, he exposes the school's institutional lines and demonstrates that his professional experience cannot be separated from experiences within a system of race. In Karim's story, the Swedish perception of relationships and divorce appears as an invisible background and a taken-for-granted outpost. Without explicitly mentioning it, the colleague's gentle question to Nadia about divorce, relationships, and honour pins down how divorce for Muslim women is imagined as problematic and in contrast to a perception of a smooth, easy, familiar, unnamed Swedish way of dealing with divorce. The unexpected response from Nadia leads to her becoming hypervisible: first in relation to her colleagues' image of her as a Muslim divorcee and second by standing out as the exception to an imagined rule about problems associated with Muslim honour culture. Nadia's deviation from the institutional lines exposes how the casual talk among teachers reproduces Swedish perceptions of Muslim honorary culture as something imagined to be 'far away', while it happens 'here', on Swedish soil. According to Ahmed (2007), whiteness materialises beyond bodily attributes in a form of repetition and style of embodiment, so when Muslim honorary culture appears as something 'far away', it also reproduces the familiarity of Swedishness. Karim also becomes hypervisible as he deviates from the institutional lines. Through exposing his close acquaintance with honorary culture, he breaks with the style of embodiment within the institution. As long as he stays silent, he appears to share his colleagues' perception of honorary culture. However, in the interview, Karim exemplifies how he was able to reveal 'the whiteness of the room' of their workplace.

Considering Ahmed's theory of whiteness, Karim's account can be seen as an experience of the institutional lines of the workplace and school. When Nadia's divorce deviated

from the already 'trodden' lines, notions of Muslim relationships became visible. Thus, by crossing the institutional boundaries of whiteness, bodies and experiences will represent something foreign and thereby reveal or unmask Swedishness. In relation to the latest curriculum, Karim's story seems even more important because honour culture has been added to the teaching content within SE (Skolverket [Swedish National Agency for Education], 2022). According to a quality review of Swedish schools' SE, many teachers state that they feel uncertain about how to handle issues related to honour (Skolinspektionen [Swedish Schools Inspectorate], 2018, p. 32). Regardless of how teachers feel about their competence regarding honour culture within SE, Karim's story provides an example that education does not take place in an 'empty' space. Instead, it is influenced by how particular ways of being and thinking are promoted, where certain experiences will fit in while others will be perceived as foreign and thus not belong to more familiar forms of Swedishness.

## 6 Concluding Remarks

To summarise, drawing on critical race theory and utilising Ahmed's phenomenological conception of whiteness, this article provides an understanding of how Swedish whiteness is constructed and reproduced through a fluid and context-bound racial landscape and orients objects and people so that some seem familiar and 'near', while others appear to be less familiar and 'far away'. In our findings, we show how Swedish whiteness is constructed as familiarity, in which 'here-ness' becomes a taken-for-granted starting point where 'here' is the place for progression, openness, and the possibilities of happy future sexual lives. From this outpost, biology textbooks and teachers reproduce 'happy stories' of Swedish exceptionalism by promoting openness, gender equality, love, and sexuality and navigate the racial landscape of SE by reaching to objects, such as legislation, policies, and biological facts, to justify orientation towards the familiar while simultaneously preventing change. In this construction, stories about 'this happy place' become a background against which other places come to stand out and appear as hypervisible examples of the less familiar and less happy, belonging to something 'far away'. Although the happy and positive messages in Swedish SE may stem from good intentions, our findings show that turning a colourblind eye to racial hierarchies and emphasising the 'happy stories' of, for example, gay rights, free abortion, and gender equality contributes to reproducing Swedish whiteness and reinforcing racialised misconceptions and Swedish exceptionalism.

As we have explored Swedish whiteness, we have found it to reproduce as a form of institutionalised orientation that is constructed by intertwining norms, social values, people, and objects such as subject knowledge, policy, and legislation in a complex web. This web situates SE, teachers, and pupils in a racial landscape that constructs and reproduces particular understandings of Swedish whiteness by assigning each and every one a position in relation to familiarity. The insight that institutions such as schools organise and reproduce race relations is not new, but this article contributes to the literature on critical race theory, education, and SE by showing how Swedish whiteness operates as "an ongoing and unfinished history, which orients bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (Ahmed, 2007, p. 150). Although our study is situated in Sweden, we believe that the findings can be useful in analysing other contexts, as they reveal the unreflectiveness of a system of race as both planned and unplanned aspects of education tend to reproduce racial relations through stories that reinforce what is already in place and its exceptionalism in relation to the world.

With that said, we specifically remind the reader that while whiteness can be a powerful phenomenon, it is not stable; race and categories change over time (see Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 21). Since whiteness, regardless of its form, is reproduced through repetition, we urge everyone to remember that patterns can be altered. Bonilla-Silva (2022) argues that racial systems are unaware embodiments in which reproduction of domination is fundamentally made possible and maintained by inactions, in which 'neutrality in the face of systemic inequality amounts to supporting the status quo' (p. 20). So, to produce change, or, as Lundström and Hübinette (2022) put it, 'the urgent need to once and for all break with the prevailing colour blindness in Sweden and in the Swedish education system' (p. 194). Similar to Lundström and Hübinette (2022), we too urge a change away from colour blindness as it cannot address the complexities of any racial system. As we have shown whiteness and Swedish exceptionalism to reproduce in SE, we also urge teachers and textbook producers to think about whiteness and whether racial representations can provide a pedagogic resource to explore the instability of race. Even if norm-critical pedagogy, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism can backfire (see Bengtsson & Bolander, 2020), these pedagogic interventions can serve to open up conversations in the classroom to address race and problematise racial hierarchies. Whether promising or not, as educational researchers, we hope that by showing how SE sometimes gets stuck in orientations towards forms of 'here-ness', we, in line with Ahmed (2007), will remind ourselves and others to keep the possibility of new habits and changes open.

> What passes through history is not only the work done by generations, but the 'sedimentation' of the work is the condition of arrival for future generations. (Ahmed, 2006, p. 41)

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**Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate** Data concerning participants have undergone ethics approval by The Swedish Ethical Review Authority, Dnr 2020-01873. All participants have given their informed consent and been anonymised throughout.

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## Paper II and Paper III

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# IV

SEX EDUCATION
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group



# The teaching body in sexuality education – intersections of age, gender, and sexuality

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper illuminates how teachers are influenced by age, gender and sexuality in teaching about sex and relationships. In this analysis grounded in feminist theory, age, gender and sexuality are considered to be enacted as doings. Six interviews with teachers working with sexuality education in K-12 schools in Sweden were chosen from of a larger body of material consisting of 21 interviews with professionals engaged in school-based sexuality education. The six interviewees were selected because they explicitly addressed how teachers' age, gender and/or sexuality come to matter in the classroom. Findings show how male and female teachers organise their teaching in relation to normative expectations of age, gender and sexuality. In sexuality education, the diverse life-courses of (hetero)sexual women offer a wide range of pedagogic possibilities for female teachers to address issues of sexuality, consent and relationships whereas male teachers are constrained to doing safe(r) forms of masculinity by directing attention away from their bodies and experiences. In understanding these results, I argue that the figure of the *tant* has been key in forming the pedagogic backdrop to Swedish sexuality education, hence embedding a normative 'who' in the 'how' to teach sexuality education.

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## Introduction

How best to teach young people about sex has engaged researchers, policymakers, professionals and civil society from across the political and religious spectrum (see Luker 2007). Kehily (2002, 121) argues that sexuality education is a 'complex and contested political issue, forming the backdrop to pedagogic practice'. For some, sexuality education is a controversial topic considered to advance adult views that rob children of their innocence (Robinson and Davies 2017). In the most demonising portrayals offered by anti-gender crusaders, sexuality education is described as a practice of 'sexualizing children' (Venegas 2022, 489). In Poland, right wing conservatives stigmatise teaching about sexuality and its educators of promoting 'gender ideology'[1] (Davies 2020, 17). Political regression in relation to gender equality, abortion, LGBT rights and sexuality education is not unique to Poland;

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instead, under the influence of right-wing populism ideas such as these are sweeping across the globe (see Bialystok et al. 2020, Corredor 2019).

Despite these regressive moves, research has clearly shown that knowledge about sex and sexuality does not harm children and that efforts to stop children learning about sexuality can lead to a harmful ignorance (Goldman 2008, 421). While some have argued that the provision of sexuality education may increase sexual activity among youth, research clearly shows the opposite and that knowledge instead helps promote a culture of safe sex and decreased sexual risk behaviour (see UNESCO 2018, Weaver, Smith, and Kippax 2005, Hayes, Burns, and Egan 2022). When young people are provided with good quality sexuality education they encounter opportunities to explore issues such as consent, mutuality and respect. In the process, they gain personal insights into what each of these concepts mean – both in general as well as within the context of sexual relationships (Reiss 2022).

Against this background, in this paper I aim to study the pedagogic backdrop to the provision of sexuality education and ask how age, gender and sexuality affect practices in the classroom and in schools. I focus on Sweden which tends to pride itself on being the first country in the world to make sexuality education a compulsory part of schooling. Over the years Swedish progressive sexual pedagogy has become a trademark and part of the country's foreign policy efforts to promote sexual and reproductive rights worldwide (Irwin 2019, Martinsson, Griffin, and Giritli Nygren 2016). In Sweden, sexuality education (like other work on discrimination, harassment and inclusion) is part of the national curriculum in K-12 schools. The aim is to provide knowledge about sexuality, consent and relationships but also to address issues of gender equality, honour violence, and pornography (see Skolverket 2021, 2022). Considered to be a core value in the national curriculum, the consequence is that every teacher working in Swedish schools is obliged to engage with sexuality education and discuss issues of gender, sexuality, consent and relationships.

## *Doing age and gender*

To conceptualise and analyse intersections of age, gender and sexuality in the pedagogic practise of sexuality education, I turn to feminist theory. Joan Acker (1990, 2006, 2012) has argued that all organisations are gendered. According to her, social structures are produced and reproduced within the organisational logic of work. Through work, divisions and social categories become institutionalised since doing the job, also means *doing* gender. Acker argues that gender is not separate from other social structures and that class is 'constructed through gender', since 'class relations are always gendered' (Acker 1990, 145). This means that a focus on gender is not only useful in analysing the historical construction of sex but also in making sense of how gender is done as it intersects with other social categories such as age, sexuality and class. Informed by such a perspective, Acker (2006) argues that organisations function as inequality regimes since organisational practices within them reproduce inequalities based on gender and other social categories. Through body and work, femininity and masculinity are performed and given meaning in a way that naturalises notions of inequality both within the organisation and beyond.

In a similar vein, Clary Krekula (2021) argues that the working body not only naturalises gender and sexuality but also age. Similar to Ackers's notion of *doing* gender, age is also a *doing*

that is repeated and performed within organisations (Krekula et al. 2005, Krekula 2021). Rather than perceiving age to be the result of chronological development of life, age may be understood as the result of social processes within a given context. Krekula (2021) proposes:

> We do age, among other things, by trying to adapt to age norms and age expectations, by judging both our own and other's actions based on age, or by trying to take advantage of, or limit ourselves, and others to, ideas about what is assumed to be appropriate for different age groups. (Krekula 2021, 61, translated by author)

In other words, *doing* gender is also a *doing* of age in which the individual embodies age by adjusting to the social ideals and expectations of different age groups across the lifespan. Krekula (2021) argues these *doings* are relational. In this view, 'young people' such as children and adolescents, are considered as 'not yets' with their life ahead of them and lacking life experience. 'Older people' on the other hand are considered to be 'has beens' with their life behind them. Within organisations, 'young' or 'old' also mark distance to (or from) the normative working body. Similar to hegemonic categories within other hierarchical relationships, the normative body has the privilege of being unmarked and unnamed (Krekula 2021).

## Materials and methods

As indicated above, teachers in Swedish K-12 schools are expected to deal with issues of sexuality, consent and relationships in all of their classrooms (Skolverket 2021, 2022). However, how sexuality education is carried out varies between schools (Luthman 2018). To better understand this diversity, interviewees for this study were recruited via snowball through sampling using the author's personal networks (Bryman 2016).

As part of a larger study 21 individuals were interviewed. All were professionals engaged in different aspects of K-12 (6–18 years) school-based sexuality education. Of the 21 interviewees, 16 worked as teachers and 5 specialised in supporting schools' pedagogic practices on sexuality education at the time of data collection (2020–22). The interviewees worked in nine different cities across Sweden (6 in the capital city, 9 in large cities and 6 in smaller cities). Because data were collected during COVID-19 and its aftermath, all the interviews except one were conducted remotely via video or telephone depending on the interviewee's preference. Each interview lasted between 1 to 2.5 hours and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

From the total corpus of material the study generated, six interviews with teachers were selected because they explicitly addressed how teachers' age, gender and/or sexuality come to matter in the classroom.

### *Ethical considerations*

The project received approval by the Swedish Ethics Review Authority. In accordance with the authority's guidelines, all participants provided informed consent prior to the interview. To reduce the possibility of identification, participants were approached individually. To protect the integrity of the research participants and any individuals mentioned in the interviews, interviewees and the accounts they provided were anonymised. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

### *Interviewing about and through memories*

In this study, I draw upon Frigga Haug's (1999, 2008) memory work as a means to access interviewees' experiences. Rather than being personal and subjective, Haug (2008) argues that memories are collective and mutable experiences that can point to the discursive and normative features of a society. Following Haug's (1999, 2008) line of reasoning, asking interviewees to share memories is a way of accessing to the discursive and normative aspects of how teachers (and other professionals) experience and navigate their practice.

At the beginning of the interview, interviewees were asked to give a brief account of their work-lives. They were then asked to share a memory from their practice of sexuality education. From this initial memory, the interview gradually developed to create a rich description of the interviewee's experience. In the course of the interviewee's stories, I discovered that despite working with different age groups, in different schools and in geographical locations, interviewees had broadly similar experiences of, for example, how sexuality education takes place both in formal teaching sessions and in ad-hoc interactions with students.

### *A selection of stories*

As explained above, the analysis focused on six interviews selected because within them teachers explicitly engaged with issues of age, gender and/or sexuality in relation to their practice and the bodily experience of *doing* age and gender. According to Acker (1990), in the process of *gendering*, different conceptualisations intertwine and through repetition become meaningful social categories. By focusing on the interviews that explicitly addressed *doings* as *gendered practices*, it becomes possible to gain insight into how age, gender and sexuality come to matter in teaching practices.

While 15 out of 21 interviewees provided slightly less explicit accounts of age, gender and/or sexuality, the silences they contain may be considered part of the gendered pedagogical backdrop as well. Krekula (2021) describes how normative bodies have the privilege of remaining unmarked and unnamed in social settings. In this sense, not recognising or categorising oneself as gendered implies alignment with what can be considered to be experiences of the normative teaching body in school. In this paper, I do not analyse these silences of the normative teaching body but instead focus on more explicit experiences of age, gender and sexuality.

## Findings

Each of the interview excerpts focused upon in this paper departs from a binary understanding of gender and heteronormativity. Because of this, it crucial to put them into dialogue with previous scholarly work to develop a useful explanation of how heteronormative assumptions about age, gender and sexuality relate to one another thereby creating pedagogical possibilities and limitations.

In the first example below, age and gender are used to explain how an 'older' female teacher can acquire authority when discussing issues of sexuality and relationships with students. In the second example, I show how female teachers may use their (hetero)sexual life-course as a pedagogical resource as part of their pedagogical practice. The final

example shows how male teachers' everyday *doing* of age, gender and sexuality can arouse suspicion, while the explicit use of a norm-critical pedagogy can allow male teachers to enact safe(r) forms of masculinity when engaging in sexuality education.

### *Age and authority – the advantage of being an "older" female teacher in sexuality education*

Eva has worked as a 7–9 grade science teacher in a small city in the north of Sweden for the past 20 years. During the interview, she suddenly began to talk about how her age and gender becomes a resource for her in teaching sexuality education. She said, 'I get a lot for free because I'm an older woman'. As I understood Eva, getting 'a lot for free' was a description of an experience of how she benefited from something compared to her other colleagues. She explained,

> [. . .] I've heard from other students that they think it's easier if it's [from] a *tant* [*auntie*], like me, because I'm neutral. Do you understand? I am like a mother figure to many of these. [students]. (Eva)

In using the Swedish word *tant*, Eva described how she was perceived by students. According to Eva, being a *tant* made her more approachable and helped avoid some of the tensions that can arise when students want to discuss issues of consent, sexuality and relationships. She continued:

> There is nothing embarrassing about me. They don't have to be afraid of me; I have no male authority. I think they see me very much as a type of mother figure, so they dare to ask. (Eva)

In describing herself as a *tant* and a mother figure, Eva presents her body as an accessible neutral phenomenon. By means of being this neutral motherly figure, she conveys a non-judgemental attitude towards students and the questions they might ask. In contrast to male teachers, Eva describes how she, as a *tant*, lacks male authority, making it easier for students to approach her.

That said, a *tant* is not without authority. Eva described how she does not hesitate to call out students when they are silly. In interview, Eva recalled how one of her female colleagues, a school counsellor, had been discussing pornography with the students when one of the male students asked what happens if a girl stops breathing during strangulation sex. According to Eva, her colleague overinterpreted the student's question and as a result overreacted to the situation. In her view, this particular student was taking advantage of the situation to test the school counsellor rather than pose a serious question. Eva said that this can happen when a situation becomes embarrassing for students or if the students do not have a good relationship with the person who is teaching sexuality education.

She went on to explain that if the same student had asked her the question, she would have started by replying [in an amused voice] 'Well, what do you think?!' to demonstrate that she was not fooled by the ploy. Eva also explained that she did not always answers students' questions immediately. Instead, she asks about each question to identify whether the student is being frivolous or whether the question is an attempt to reach out and build trust. By questioning the students' intention in asking, Eva exercises a form of professional authority derived from her experience working with a particular student.

To understand Eva's practice and her embodiment of a *tant*, it is important to recognise the cultural meanings associated with being a *tant*. Like many linguistic figurations, the meaning of *tant* is contextually given. Lövgren (2013) explains there is no immediate equivalent to the word in English, but it could be something similar to *auntie*. While *tant* implies a certain age (an 'older' female), the meaning of *tant* is ambiguous as it both symbolises an outdated and desexualised type of femininity while simultaneously representing a robust and sometimes rebellious figure (Lövgren 2013).

Similar to other representations of women, the *tant* is a somewhat fragile figure who lacks control and autonomy in the world (Martin 1992). Bremmer and Wennman (2011) describes how the Swedish *tant* was constructed during and after the second world war to denote a generation of women who had never experienced youth. Instead of building. womanhood around a youthful femininity, the female ideals of the *tant* are those of duty, usefulness and matriarchal homemaking. Today, the *tant* has been reshaped to represent a radical female form of social wellbeing, which simultaneously symbolises a lost time of strong morals and sound ethical principles (Liliequist and Lövgren 2012).

The radical strength of the *tant* was also part of Eva's experience. In interview, she described how students often thanked her for having the courage to address difficult and sometimes embarrassing issues as part of sexuality education, while retaining hope in love and relationships regardless of a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. Eva's practices as part of sexuality education can be considered to be what Bengtsson and Bolander (2019) describe as inclusive norm-critical pedagogy. Without hesitating, Eva engages with sexuality education and uses her authority to disrupt underlying cis-normative assumptions about gender, sexuality, love and hope.

Embodied in the figure of the *tant*, Eva's intersections of age and gender elide to provide the *tant* with approachability and authority whilst avoiding the embarrassment students may feel when discussing issues of sexuality, consent and relationships. This experience contrasts with Goldschmidt-Gjerløw's (2022) study of Norwegian teachers in which older female teachers were less likely to engage with challenging topics such as harassment and abuse as part of sexuality education.

## *Lived experience – the (hetero)sexual female lifecourse as a resource for sexuality education*

In the previous section, the *tant's* age and gender were described as conferring on her an authority in the student-teacher relationship in sexuality education. Apart from embodying a particular type of radical femininity, the *tant* also conveys a de-sexualised femininity (Lövgren 2013). During interview, Eva stated, '[. . .] there is nothing sexual about me'. In her description, being a *tant* is a *doing* of age and gender in which sexuality appears as something in the distant past, a sexual "has been'' that is not sexual anymore.

Despite Eva's description of herself as a *tant*, students were aware of her being a sexual person. According to Eva, students were curious and wanted to know about her personal life. To illustrate this type of conversation, Eva impersonated one of her students:

[Student in a childish voice]: Are you married, Eva?

[Eva]: Yes

[Student in a childish voice]: What's the name of the person you're married to?

[Eva]: John

[Student in a childish voice]: Oh, so it's a man

[Eva]: Yes

[giggly laughter]

For the students, Eva was a heterosexual married woman with children and grandchildren. The giggly laughter of the students' inquiry reveals an innocent dialogue between a teacher and her students. However, the dialogue also exemplifies how a *tant* has become a knowledgeable and desexualised subject as the result of following a normative life course (Krekula 2021, Krekula, Närvänen, and Näsman 2005). In teaching sexuality education these experiences function as a way of legitimising her teaching. Eva explained that being a 'young' teacher can be challenging since they may lack the experiences of, for example, giving birth, having children or even having a relationship. Eva said:

> I had a female colleague once, [. . .] she was a Christian, she was 20 years old, and she thought this [sexuality education] was the worst thing she had ever done. The kids took advantage of this, so they took the opportunity to ask her personal questions [. . .] it may have been curiosity because they felt close in age, but at the same time, they took it for granted that she must have been involved in [sexual] things, but that was not the case.

According to Eva, being 'young' can be a disadvantage when teaching about sexuality and relationships. In contrast to being a sexual 'has been', Eva's description of 'young' refers to a category of teachers considered to be sexual 'not yets' who lack the experiences that 'older' teachers have (Krekula, Närvänen, and Näsman 2005). However, despite being 'young', a female teacher can have sexual experiences to lean upon. Following Krekula, Närvänen, and Näsman (2005), being young has less to do with chronological age than acquiring expected life experiences. In this way, being young in chronological age is not always a disadvantage.

This is was exemplified by Lisa, a 7th-9th grade science teacher in a small city in southern Sweden. In interview Lisa described herself as a 'young' teacher since she was only a few years older than the students when she began to work. Being new to the job, Lisa was both young in experience and young in age. At the time of interview some years after she first began teaching, Lisa was still 'young' and explained that the students often tested her abilities to teach by asking her what she thought about sex and relationships. Lisa explained that when this happens, she stayed calm and replied that she thinks it is fun to teach sexuality education because sexuality is relevant to everyone. According to Lisa, by responding in this way, the students become more serious about the subject. In her teaching, Lisa does not deny the closeness in age. Instead, she explained that she '[. . .] jokes with them and says that, you know, we are kind of the same generation and yet I have no idea how you behave on social media? [laughs]'. According to Lisa, she makes use of the relatively small age gap between herself and the students by swapping love stories with them. As part of their sexuality education, she asks students to create a fictional love story while she shares with them how it was for her when she was a nervous 8th grader going to school dances in a larger city, the pressure of kissing and making out, and how the whole school once ended up with glandular fever. Lisa

explained that the students can sometimes be quite shocked by how it was to be a teenager when she grew up, but 'think it's fun to listen to'.

The use of personal experience of sexuality was also something Maria, a 7th-9th grade science teacher in a different small city in the south of Sweden, described. At her school, Maria had noticed the prevalence of homophobic behaviour amongst the students, and she felt she needed to do something unexpected to make the students reflect on their harmful and discriminatory behaviour. Maria explained that the students saw her as a heterosexual person but to make the students think twice, she told the students how she had fallen in love with a woman when she was 'younger'. By talking about her unexpected same-sex love, Maria explained that she is able to stress the importance of not making assumptions about someone's sexuality. Her intervention provided an entry point from which to discuss how people cannot choose who they fall in love with. Maria explained that at first, she had hesitated about sharing her personal story because she did not know if it might trigger negative consequences, but in hindsight, it did not. Instead, Maria explained that 'I think the students became a bit curious about who I am [laughs]'. Although she could be sure of cause and effect, she noticed there has been much less use of homophobic language among the students since she shared her story.

While previous research has questioned the importance of the educators' age and gender in student perceptions of who was a good sexuality educator (Allen 2009), these interviews exemplify how teachers' doing of age, gender and sexuality comes to matter when teaching. Despite being an 'old' or a 'young' teacher, female teachers can draw on their sexual experiences of (hetero)sexual life to exercise authority when it comes to discussing issues of sexuality and relationships. By doing so, female teachers can use their embodied experiences of 'womanhood' as pedagogical resources with which to disrupt normative assumptions about sexuality. However, by making use of their own experience and fulfilling the heterosexual contract (see Butler 1988), female teachers also reinforce a 'culture of heteronormativity' in school (Davis and Hay 2018, 291). And, as we will see in the next section, this has consequences for their male counterparts.

### *Doing safe masculinity*

While (hetero)sexual female teachers can use their experiences of sex and love to gain authority in their teaching, male teachers do not have the same benefits. Eva described the situation as follows:

> I know many male teachers who have experienced that … as they've got older, it's been easier … but it's difficult for men. They get some kind of label, I think. That they are more fixated on sex than women […] It's tougher, yes. They [male teachers] have it much, much tougher. They [male teachers] have to choose their words carefully before they can say them, while I, as a *tant* feel that I am neutral.

The assumptions about male teachers that Eva describes relate to what Davis and Hay (2018) identify as the discourse of risk and sexuality, although their study concerned primary schools in which any adult can become an 'object of unease' (Davis and Hay 2018, 289). In theorising gender and age, or perhaps more specifically, ageing and masculinity, Sandberg (2011) emphasises how Judith Butler's notion of gender as the performative

enactment of sex and age is disturbed by the ageing body. This could explain Eva's statement about how it may be easier for 'older' men to teach sexuality education.

Despite sexuality education becoming easier to teach as male teachers becomes 'older', Eva describes how male teachers are at greater risk than her. As a *tant*, she is neutral, whereas male teachers are not. To understand the special challenges associated with being a male teacher, I turn to the experiences of three interviewees. Marcus who had worked with all age groups in school in a large city central Sweden explained that although teaching about sexuality, consent and relationships was difficult for everyone, he thought, 'It's more sensitive for guys to talk about it, even though it shouldn't be, but it probably is'. Marcus elaborated as follows:

> [. . .] You have to understand what kind of signals you send out. I am a man, I'm 40 years old, and along comes a 15-year-old girl and asks how she is going to have sex with her boyfriend. It can send out the wrong signals somehow. [. . .] Personally, I wouldn't care about it because I don't see it that way, but it is there in other people's minds and in society, and therefore you have to deal with it

Marcus describes how even if students want to have a personal conversation with him, he cannot freely engage in it. Instead, he has to guard himself to prevent anyone from getting the wrong impression.

Julian, who worked as an upper secondary biology teacher in a larger city in the south of Sweden, recalled an experience when the students made him aware of how they perceived him as a heterosexual cisgender man. Julian described how he was working in a class in which students were very open about their sexualities and gender identities. At one point, Julian decided to test their openness by asking them 'Can I be queer?'. He remembers how the whole class went quiet and exchanged glances before one of the students replied in an educating tone: 'Julian, [pause], you are not queer'. Julian laughed when he retold the story and explained that while there was openness among the students, this did not include him. To his surprise, his students assumed him to be a heterosexual cisgender man.

While Julian had imagined his students might be a bit more open-minded about the idea that he also could be queer, his story provides an example of how teachers' sexual identity is conditioned by a 'culture of heteronormativity' (Davis and Hay 2018, 291). In Julian's story, the *doing* of heterosexuality belongs to a school culture of heterosexuality that is not only practised in the teachers *doing*, but also supported by students. As Davis and Hay (2018, 290) point out, the 'straight face of schooling' is also connected to safety as heterosexuality is regarded as neutral and non-sexual, whereas anything else is considered sexual.

The practice of performing a safe masculinity to prevent suspicion (Davis and Hay 2018) was also noticeable in Fredrik's story. Fredrik has worked as a civics teacher in an upper secondary school in a small city in the south of Sweden. When discussing issues of sexuality, Fredrik described how he tries to frame the conversation by creating a comfortable entry point for himself. In order to discuss issues of sexuality and relationships, he directs the students' attention towards an image or the media. Fredrik explained that he can sometimes be very direct in his approach and use provocative images to invite students to think out aloud with him. Inspired by these images, both teacher and class

discuss bodies, sexualities and norms. Fredrik described how his students perceive him to be someone they can relate to and talk to.

> I think the students feel that I can still relate in a certain way, that I'm not 60 years old and have no idea at all about their world. [. . .] I don't think that the students perceive me as particularly outdated, and they feel comfortable talking to me about it because . . . well, I'm not judgemental. (Fredrik)

For Fredrik, being a teacher that students can talk to is showing that he is being able to relate to young people's everyday lives. According to Fredrik, it is important to have a sense of what is going on for young people and not be too judgemental. Fredrik compared himself to an 'older' male colleague and explained:

> He was very knowledgeable in his subjects [biology] but I think he barely addresses anything about sexual knowledge other than this is biology, and when it comes to that, I think the students have a pretty decent grasp of [it] anyway. (Fredrik)

According to Fredrik, the students experience little room for discussion with his 'older' male colleague and the discussions they do have are awkward. This colleague's less interactive style makes the students feel the 'older' teacher is embarrassed and too stiff in his approach. While Fredrik's 'older' colleague avoids the subject of sex, he is also considered to be a 'has been' in his approach to sexuality education (see Krekula, Närvänen, and Näsman 2005). In contrast, Fredrik feels students respond well to his teaching as he lives up to the expected practice (see Skolverket 2021, 2022).

Similar to Fredrik, Marcus described how sexuality requires much more than teaching about the biological body. Instead, he thinks that it should open up conversation about sexuality so that students can relate it to their lives and make better sense of what is around them. Marcus explains that when it comes to sexuality education, 'nothing is a taboo' because 'if we [the school] do not talk about [for example] anal sex, it will become the most interesting [thing] ever'. Marcus explains that having in-depth conversations with students is important to create a safe environment for all students because otherwise, they may never know how their behaviour affects other people.

While all the male interviewees found it important to engage with sexuality education, they did so by organising their teaching around safe(r) forms of masculinity. In contrast to the female teachers, men's experience of their bodies cannot be used as a pedagogical resource to discuss issues of sexuality, consent and relationships. Instead, attention must be deflected away from their sexuality, their bodies and their personal experiences, using starting points such as events in society or young people's social lives in order to discuss various issues of sexuality. In contrast to previous studies of norm-critical sexuality education (see, for example, Bengtsson and Bolander 2019), male interviewees in this study did engage their students in norm-critical analysis of sexuality, relationships and society through in-depth discussion with students.

## Discussion

By exploring teachers experiences of embodying age, gender and sexuality, this study addresses how sexuality education does not only emerge from intended teaching strategies but also from gendered structures as they affect how differently aged, gendered, and

sexualised bodies can approach issues of sexuality and relationships. Although this study only accounts for a few of the experiences that teachers have, it sheds new insight to the role of the teaching bodies in sexuality education. Findings show how both male and female teachers organise their teaching in relation to normative expectations of age, gender and sexuality. By utilising experiences from an expected life-course, female teachers mobilise normative notions of age, gender and sexuality to address and challenge normative assumptions about gender, sexuality and relationships. In contrast, male teachers, regardless of age, are conditioned to *doing* safer forms of masculinity. In particular, through the use of norm-critical pedagogy, male teachers can engage with sexuality education by directing the focus away from their bodies and onto external issues of gender, sexuality and relationships. To teach sexuality education in this way, male teachers rely on an up-to-date view of society in order to discuss issues of sexuality, consent and relationships whereas female teachers can draw on their experiences of 'womanhood'.

To understand these findings, it is necessary to recognise how both contemporary and past ideals in sexuality education in Sweden have centred in the practice of talking sex (see Lindgren and Backman Prytz 2021, Bengtsson and Bolander 2019). Developments and practices in sexuality education are grounded in socio-political history (Sherlock 2012). In Sweden, the development of sexuality education is strongly associated with the earlier half of the 1900s pioneering female figures, or *tanter*.

One of these figures was Karolina Widerström (1856-1949) who argued that sexuality education should seek to demystify the nature of sexual reproduction (Widerström 1903). Through her teaching and writing, Widerström later added gender to a previously genderless human body (see Lindgren 2018, Thorsén 2021), but she also used her womanhood to inform other women about the remarkable female body and its role in reproduction (see Widerström 1903). Another important *tant* at the beginning of the 1900s was the activist Elise Ottesen-Jensen, the founder of *Riksförbundet för sexuell upplysning* (RFSU) [the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education]. In addition to acknowledging the importance of biological knowledge for understanding the reproductive body, Ottesen-Jensen travelled widely across Sweden agitating for openness in talk about sex, desire and sexual pleasure so that people would have greater agency in their sexual lives (Lennerhed 2002).

Due to this groundwork, making sexuality education a compulsory part of schooling in 1955 was not the result of a controversial decree by the state, but simply involved the recognition of an already widespread practice (Lennerhed 1994). Their way of talking about sex in a natural way, giving clear answers to the questions asked, and adopting a matter-of-fact approach were advocated in teachers' guides as far back as the 1940s (Lennerhed 1994).

Although Widerström and Ottesen-Jensen were not alone in promoting sexuality education, these two *tanter* came to symbolise sexuality education and a 'Swedish way' of talking about sex with young people. Through an unbroken chain of teacher guidance and open-minded curricula the practice of sexuality education in Sweden created its own history of talking sex in school.

## Conclusion

While norm-critical pedagogy currently constitutes best practice in Swedish sexuality education, findings from this study confirm how the 'teaching body' (the teacher that

is) is expected to embody a (hetero)sexual life-course. In consequence, female teachers, and especially 'older' female teachers who have followed a normative life course are placed in a position of strength whereas male teachers are restricted by normative expectations of their sex when discussing issues of sexuality, consent and relationships. Viewing the teacher's body as a pedagogical device in Swedish sexuality education shows how dominant forms of femininity work to ensure schools remain protected spaces for heteronormativity.

Although this is not clearly stated in this article, these stereotypical images of a teaching body have also been shaped by particular notions of class, whiteness and ableness. By shedding light upon a few of the features of the teaching body, this article accentuates how bodily norms are embedded in schooling, hence showing that there is a normative '*who*' in the '*how*' to teach sexuality education.

## Note

1. According to Davies (2020, 17) gender ideology is 'a vague term designed to conflate often quite unrelated issues including LGBT rights, abortion and paedophilia'.

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