Queer(y)ing street-level bureaucracy: Examining the policy implementation of GEEA in Taiwan

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to explore how middle school staff and teachers interpret and respond to Gender Equity Education Act (henceforth GEEA) in practice. Inspired by street-level bureaucracy theory and a body of critical pedagogy scholarship, it sets out to understand the following question: How do school staff and teachers participate in the normalization and/or reproduction of a heteronormative school environment? Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 25 secondary school staff and teachers in Taiwan. Findings of this paper point to the complexity surrounding the implementation of GEEA and school practice. It also highlights the role that teachers themselves play in creating and sustaining the conditions that allow discrimination and prejudice to flourish. The results of this research indicate the necessity for nuanced responses from school professionals working with young people.

Introduction

School bullying remains a common experience for many students in different parts of the world, with bullying defined as persistent and repeated negative acts perpetrated by one or more individuals and directed toward one or more persons who feel unable to stop these behaviors from happening (Olweus, 2001). Bullying covers behaviors such as unsolicited teasing, name-calling, spreading false rumors, peer exclusion, verbal abuse and physical aggression or assault (Duncan & Rivers, 2013). More recent scholarly attention on school bullying has emphasized its discriminatory nature (Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013; Baams, Talmage & Russel, 2017; Earnshaw et al., 2019). In fact, by drawing the connection between bullying and discrimination, Poteat and colleagues (2013) made a clear case arguing that school bullying on the ground of gender and sexuality is bias-related, as it reflects prejudice at a broader societal level.

Faced with this increasingly visible challenge, governments around the world have recognized the importance of drawing up legislation and educational policy guidance requiring schools to promote equality of access to and participation in education (O'Higgins-Norman, Goldrick, & Harrison, 2010). Here, implementation of anti-bullying policies and dealing with bullying claims are firmly within the remit of school staff and teachers (Rivers,

Duncan, & Besag, 2007; Ollis, 2013; O'Higgings-Norman et al., 2010; Swanson & Gettinger, 2016), who are in a position to facilitate change towards a more inclusive learning environment and to challenge gender constructions and heterosexual hegemony— two enabling socio-cultural factors that shape homophobic bullying behavior among schoolchildren (Youdell, 2006; Atkinson & Depalma, 2008; Atkinson & Depalma, 2009; Depalma & Atkinson, 2009b). Regarding the crucial role that teachers can play in bringing about change in school-based bullying behavior, a growing body of literature has encouraged a critical approach to thinking about gender- and sexuality-based bullying (Ging & Neary, 2019). Through such work, there has been an increasing interest in studying how gender might impact bullying and how teachers may be potentially implicated within the complex gendered and sexualized power relations embedded in schools (Rasmussen, 2006).

This study is concerned with the specific context of Taiwan's education policy that aimed to address bullying from a gender equity framework. Indeed, the Ministry of Education enacted the GEEA in 2004 to protect those with a different gender appearance, identity and sexual orientation. The enacted law requires all schools to set up a Gender Equity Education Committee and has included clear definitions of gender-based and homophobic bullying. Despite the presence of the enacted GEEA, ending bias-based bullying of this type remains an uphill battle in many school campuses. Indeed, in assessing the impact and progress of GEEA, educators and scholars have largely concluded that while considerable achievements have been made in government legislation in the past 16 years, the results of policy implementations in schools are mixed and often disappointing (Taiwan Tongzhi Hot Line Association, 2017). This scholarly assessment requires an analysis that extends beyond the policy document or the text of the law to encompass the study of policy implementation process and its enactment in practice by street-levels bureaucrats, which school staff and teachers represent. As teachers have great influence on the nature of the policy implemented, it is crucial to examine what school staff and teachers actually do and why they do it. Accordingly, it also calls for a greater interest in identifying the obstacles, resistance and opposition to implementing GEEA on the ground.

The objective of this article is to explore how middle school staff and teachers interpret and respond to GEEA in practice. It aims to answer the following question: How do school staff and teachers participate in the normalization and/or reproduction of a heteronormative school environment? While several studies have been conducted to understand school staff and

teachers' responses to the implementation of GEEA (Hong, Lawrenz, & Veach, 2005; Chang & Wu, 2012; Hsieh, 2012; Sinacore, Chao, & Ho, 2017), few have examined it from a research standpoint that gives explicit attention to both organizational structures and the broader power dynamics. To address this empirical gap, this article draws on the street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980) and a body of critical pedagogy scholarship that are inspired by Judith Butler's (1990; 1993) gender theory and that takes a queer and post-structural perspective to study phenomena. The aim of combining these two theoretical disciplines is to move beyond the tendency to explain particular organizational contexts of behavior and actions in a way that gives little or no consideration for the dominance of structural power relations, norms and privilege in organizational life. Using insights from both disciplines provides a useful basis to develop a deeper understanding of the processes of policy implementation.

The article is structured as follows. It first establishes context by introducing the street-level bureaucracy theory, before discussing a body of literature that draws on a post-structuralist and queer theory perspective to inquire into the process of the socialization of heterosexist norms in the context of Taiwanese schools. The study's methodology is outlined in the following section, and the fourth section presents the findings of the research, focusing on the two key themes: organizational structure and cultural discourses that sustain heteronormativity. The concluding discussion suggests implications for the field of knowledge with regard to Foucault's concept of power.

Theoretical framework

2.1 Street-level bureaucracy: understanding discretion at the frontline

This study draws on Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory to demonstrate how administrative and organizational structure, social relations, identities and social norms shape how school faculty and staff respond to public policy. Lipsky's seminal work provides the conceptual framework for understanding the nature of anti-bullying policy implementation in Taiwan. Street-level bureaucracy has been adopted by a number of researchers to explore how educational professionals (Anagnostopoulos, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Wray & Houghton, 2019) and school nurses (Dickson & Brindis, 2019) respond to policy. The

strength of a focus on street-level bureaucrats and their discretionary power is that it acknowledges these frontline workers as the final and sometimes most influential policymakers in the process, because until policy is being implemented on the ground, it remains as an abstraction (Maynard-Moody & Portillo, 2011). The exercise of discretion refers to the autonomy that street-level bureaucrats have in the execution of policy in their fields of expertise. Indeed, professional autonomy, or to use the words of Zacka (2017), "technical discretion", is subjected to interpretive judgment of street-level workers, who must first understand what they are asked to do and then choose the most effective means to respond (p. 40).

Increasingly recognized is that discretionary judgment can be exercised in a negative way. Lipsky (1980) has written on the coping mechanisms in dealing with citizens by frontline workers, which can lead to the use of stereotypes and discrimination (Nielsen, 2006). This has led to a burgeoning field of inquiry within Public Administration that focuses on demonstrating the use of stereotypes in frontline decision-making (Wenger & Wilkins, 2008) and the conditions that encourage the use of stereotypes (Raaphorst, Groeneveld, & Van de Walle, 2017; Pedersen, Stritch & Thuesen, 2018; Andersen & Guul, 2019; Pedersen & Nielsen, 2020). Rational choice theory is intimately associated with this field of research and crucial to this is the assumption that prejudicial behavior at the frontline can be predicted within a given context. Hay (2004) has argued that research based within rational choice "abstract so much from the complexity of realities" (p.39) that they seldom pay enough attention to the contextuality of organizational environments, which lie at the heart of scholarship on frontline decision-making.

In recent years, a range of contemporary studies have encouraged researchers to take an interdisciplinary approach, recognizing the strength of relying less on formal models and more on situated and historical explanations, focusing on human meanings, values, beliefs and feelings, to theorize governance practices (Bevir & Rhodes, 2006; Yanow, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003; Thomas & Davies, 2005). These studies have demonstrated that the success of policy implementation should be investigated in relation to work settings, administrative routines, interpersonal relations and even the position(s) bureaucrats occupy may play in shaping frontline action (Lee, Learmonth, & Harding, 2008; Dubois; 2010; Soss, Fording, & Schram, 2011; Zacka, 2017; Namian, 2019).

An interpretivist account of street-level discretion in the work of Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) illustrates that street-level bureaucrats' work environment and their interactions with citizens help develop the kind of practical knowledge and judgement that allow them to perform their role well. By highlighting the significance of identity and identification in street-level work, the authors further uncover how beliefs and meanings shared by actors emerge within an organizational context and come to influence the course of actions adopted within street-level institutions. A similar demonstration focusing on how frontline decision-making is embedded in the organizational setting and social context of citizen encounters is provided by Dubois (2010). He observed that street-level workers develop a set of working practices that help them perform their job effectively, in which individuals' personal biography, career stage and organizational position bear crucial influence.

Although a close analysis of lived and organizational experiences of public service professionals is useful in focusing on particular aspects of discretion, such an explanation remains largely silent on the power relations and the kind of knowledge that structure, reproduce and maintain institutions (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Discussion of structural power relations, heteronormative norms and privilege are rarely tackled within the street-level bureaucracy tradition. This is what Lee and colleagues call for in their 2008 paper on the queer(y)ing of Public Administration, arguing that queer and poststructuralist thinking can make visible the workings of cultural and organizational norms that govern identities and practices, which in turn demonstrate how public services may fall short of achieving the stated policy objectives. This can be seen when analyzing the shortcomings of sexual health promotion in the U.K. The authors have pointed out that quantitative studies showing the failure of sexual health promotion to achieve its objective, start from the assumption that this failure is due to gay men refusing to listen to these health messages (Lee et al., 2008). When this assumption is challenged, it can be seen that the messaging itself can be viewed as counterproductive. This is due to the way in which gay men are portrayed in these advertisements, as hedonistic, hyper-sexualized and irrational, which may lead to the undesired outcome by alienating the target audience. It could also be said that these advertisements have mixed messaging, due to this portrayal of gay men which can be seen as promoting unsafe sex (Lee, 2007). Lee and colleagues (2008) point out how queer and poststructuralist theory can be used to question how power shapes the beliefs and understandings that frontline professionals and policy makers hold, which can bear limited

resemblance to the realities of those effected by the policy, undermining the initial policy goals.

The foregoing discussion highlights the analytical contribution of queer and poststructuralist theory, which can be identified as their ability to interrogate organizational and cultural norms that govern identities and practices and (re)produce structural inequalities. Turning now to the educational context of anti-bullying program implementation, the section below briefly discusses research inspired by post-structuralist and queer theory.

2.2 Queer(y)ing the implementation of anti-bullying programs

Queer theory is a theoretical perspective that opposes and challenges normative knowledge structures and common understandings. It allows us to examine how the widespread prevalence of heterosexuality and binary genders, as the cultural norms, shape what is considered 'normal', with non-heteronormative sexualities seen as 'non-normal', 'deviant' and 'other' (Depalma & Atkinson, 2009a). Heteronormativity can also be seen to maintain hegemonic identities of gender roles and arrangements, such as behaviors considered appropriately male and female, traditional family structures and romantic relationships (Blaise, 2009), leading in some cases to a backlash against this 'other' through bullying and violence (Payne & Smith, 2013). From this, queer theory can be used to question the infrastructure of anti-bullying policy, strategy and practice.

In recent years, a growing body of studies have noted that the phenomenon of school-bullying is largely understood within psychological frameworks, which conceive bullying as the aggressive behavior of individuals, with the intention to hurt (Ringrose, 2008; Walton, 2011; Formby, 2015; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015). However, Rivers and colleagues (2007) have argued for a more encompassing understanding of bullying, with it understood "not as the sum of unpleasant behaviors that are owned by children, but the product of complex interactions within a system of social relationships that cannot be changed by simply removing bullies or reinforcing victims" (p. 35). This is important as it takes into account the school-based culture, emphasizing bullying practices as a reflection of broader social prejudice rather than reducing it to individual terms. Heteronormativity, which is the cultural privileging of heterosexuality and gender normativity, creates a system that is reproductive of gender stereotypes and informs children's understanding of what is 'abnormal' (Adriany,

2019). Youth, whose behavior and appearance transgress expected ideals of masculinity and femininity, are subject to bullying (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Homophobic bullying can take many forms, that of an overt nature such as name calling and physical aggression, and subtle forms such as marginalization and ostracization.

Scholars working within the critical pedagogy tradition have pointed out that policies aimed at stopping bullies have had limited success in changing how kids behave in the school environment (Rasmussen, 2006; Payne & Smith, 2013; Ging & Neary, 2019). This body of scholarship has provided a deeper insight into the policing function that bullying serves, with students' everyday practices reinforcing normative expressions of gender and sexuality (Payne & Smith, 2016; Ringrose and Renold, 2010). Therefore, this has led many to highlight that efforts to address incidents of discrimination must take into account the broader power relations and cultural understandings that give rise to these patterns of behaviors in the first place (Youdell, 2005; Payne & Smith, 2013; Payne & Smith, 2019). Within this context, a number of studies have shown that school-based initiatives, such as a zero-tolerance policy, have done little to encourage teachers to educate about and engage with discussions around gender and sexuality normativity, which leave intact structural oppression (Neary, Irwin-Gowran, & McEvoy, 2016; Temko, 2019). Other studies have further addressed the role schools themselves play in sustaining the cultural biases that enable homophobia to flourish. For instance, recent research has highlighted how taken-for-granted assumptions and teaching practices in education are productive in the development of normative gender identity throughout a child's formative and teen years (Renold, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Adriany, 2019).

While critical pedagogy studies have contributed considerably to current understanding on bullying, not much has been done to explore how institutional features (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009), organizing processes and material aspects of organizational life account for the role power relations and norms play in schools to sustain oppressive relations and uphold systemic inequality. Interpretivist-oriented research on street-level bureaucracy has contributed to the general knowledge of how policies are concretely implemented on the ground with insights that are overlooked within this discipline. To date, ethnographic research has shown that it is equally important to recognize that professional judgment and discretion are nested within the organizational context of routines, interpersonal relations, rules and law. Zacka (2017), for instance, highlights the challenges of street-level work, as

public servants are confronted with conditions such as shortage of staff, rules that hinder action, incompatible objectives, severe workloads, conflicting demands and a limitation of resources. This calls for the need to reconceptualize organizational and cultural phenomena in such a way that the active role of power relations and the way organizational processes interact within school environments are fully taken into consideration.

Methodology

3.1 The empirical context

An overview of GEEA in Taiwan. The effort to promote Gender Equity education in Taiwan is the result of close collaboration between NGOs, government sectors, education workers, feminist activists, gender studies scholars and researchers (Hsieh, 2012; Liao, 2019). In the early 1990s, a major reform of education was underway, in which, at first, gender was not considered whatsoever. Only through the efforts of feminist activists was the issue of gender included in the education reform (Hsieh & Lee, 2014). Major social events have driven further reform of education with regard to gender. The rape and murder of feminist Taiwanese politician Peng Wan-Ru in 1996 pushed forward a number of stalled bills in the legislature relating to women's rights, one of which is the Two-Sex Equity Education Act (Lee, 2011). In 2000, the death of a 15-year-old Junior High School Student Yeh Yung-Chih, thought to be the result of gender-based bullying, prompted the Ministry of Education to modify this act further, leading to the formation of the GEEA.

In 2004, the GEEA was passed, becoming the first law that prohibits schools to discriminate against students on the basis of their gender, gender expression, gender identity or sexual orientation. The enacted law requires all schools to establish a Gender Equity Education Committee (GEEC), to address discrimination and to implement Gender Equity education and to provide a safe, "gender-fair" learning environment (Laws & Regulations Database of Taiwan, 2018). The main task of the GEEC is to ensure that all the components of the GEEA, including education, prevention and investigation of gender inequity incidents, are carried out (Sinacore et al., 2017).

Since 2004, GEEA has been revised four times: major revisions were made in 2011, alongside minor revisions in 2010, 2013 and 2018. From these previous revisions, three key modifications of the act were made: (1) explicit mention is made of gender- and sexuality-based bullying; (2) greater responsibility is placed on schools to report incidents; (3) the scope of gender equality is expanded to promote gender and sexuality diversity (TMOE, 2016). Understanding gender as a social construct has led to the latest revision of the law to emphasize the respect and consideration of 'gender identity', 'gender characteristics' and 'sexual orientation' (Hsu, 2019).

The introduction of GEEA has prompted schools in Taiwan to implement school policies that protect students who tend to be victimized on account of their gender, gender expression and/or sexual orientation. The enactment of the GEEA was widely understood to be an important starting point for acknowledging, tackling, and preventing gender- and sexuality-based bullying.

3.2 Data collection

Research participants. This study was conducted to better understand the decision-making process behind teachers and staff members' implementation of the GEEA. The SLBs referred to in this research context consist of three main groups of school staff and faculty members who are involved in the implementation of the GEEA at different levels: they are schoolteachers, guidance counsellors and coordinators of the counselling office. Twenty-five face-to-face interviews were conducted in this research, which lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours and were carried out between April and May 2020. Participants were selected using a 'snowball' method, where interviewees were asked to suggest other faculty and staff members to interview. The initial contacts were established through a personal network of formal and informal contacts, which then snowballed.

Of those interviewed, there were fourteen school teachers, eight guidance counsellors and three school counselling coordinators from eighteen different schools, located in Southern and Northern Taiwan. Half of the school teachers interviewed teach Health Education and ten had taken up the position of a Homeroom Teacher. Homeroom teachers in Taiwan play a significant role in a child's education, as these teachers take up a large amount of pastoral care outside of normal lessons for a homeroom class throughout the entire Middle School. In

terms of implementing Gender Equity education in classroom, Health Education teachers and Guidance Counsellors[1] assume the majority of teaching responsibility, as Gender Equity topics are not taught in standalone classes but incorporated into the curriculum of the respective courses of Health Education and Integrated Activities Learning. The primary responsibility of the counselling coordinator is to support the development and the implementation of Gender Equity educational programs and activities. In addition, they work collaboratively with other departments to enhance outreach and prevention services on campus.

Research design. The interviews covered a range of topics that include questions about workload, teacher's understanding of the GEEA, the teaching of Gender Equity education content in lessons and its proceeding, the planning of school-based Gender Equity activities, awareness of classroom bullying behaviors, second-hand observation of school bullying incident(s) and experience with addressing these events. By studying how teachers reacted, or failed to react, to students' bullying behaviors and their responsibility to teaching or implementing GEEA, it can provide a more nuanced view of the context in which 'decisions' and 'actions' take place in schools. Greater reflection on how schoolteachers give meaning to their work and their experience with handling bullying behaviors requires asking follow-up questions regarding what the respondent thought, believed, felt or decided, as well as obtaining concrete information regarding the context within which events occurred (Weiss, 1994). This is because, according to Czarniawska (2004), the recounting of one's experience entails judgment about what one finds meaningful in the situation, which is to say that these accounts provided by teachers and staff members will present a given view of the reality from their perspective.

A semi-structured format is a convenient way of gathering information. While it allows the interviewer to act as an initiator to prompt for detail and to decide the style, the pace and the line of questioning in an interview, it enables interviewees a greater reign of freedom to provide responses in their own terms. Brannen (2013) suggested that semi-structured interviews have the potential to give space to an interviewee, thereby allowing the possibility to generate a narrative talk. At the same time, doing interviews requires a sense of flexibility

[1] Not all counsellors are responsible for teaching GEEA in schools.

and adaptability to be aware of the interview context in the moment and adjust the interview accordingly.

To encourage participants to expand on their brief comments, reciprocity of conversation is important, as it allows rapport building within a relatively short period of time. During the interviews, this was done by adjusting the language, listening sympathetically, giving validation and, when appropriate, sharing personal aspects of the researcher's life.

An example of this can be seen in the midway of one interview when the participant felt uneased by the line of questioning that seemed to suggest she holds stereotypical views of LGBTQ youth. This caused the participant to feel caught out:

Teacher: I…I think…maybe I…I…myself…I know you may think that teachers themselves hold stereotypical views of LGBTQ youth, which is why we think they are special.

Interviewer: …I'm asking this, because…take myself as an example, when I was younger, I used to study in America. I used to say "oh he is pretty gay", or "that is really gay" a lot, but it was never meant to make fun of anyone. It was never meant as an insult. As I got older, I grew out of using this term. A while ago, this term slipped out of my mouth one time, and my boyfriend told me off. He said: "it's 2018 for god sake!" I did not mean it in a bad way, and it made an impression…which is why I probed earlier."

After the researcher had finished sharing her story, the participant was no longer flustered and returned to answering the question. While it is certainly important to have established a reliable research relationship prior to asking difficult questions (Weiss, 1994), it, nonetheless, in the case here shows that by offering a personal story, the respondents can be motivated to engage more deeply with the interview. This makes a world of difference between a respondent closing up and giving an authentic answer during a vulnerable moment.

The interviewer's presence and interaction play an integral part in the data collection process. This is a point made by Cramer (2015), who argued that a researcher's presence and interaction become a part of the data, unique to that researcher. Similarly, this extends to the analysis of the data, which is influenced by the researcher's own positionality (as a non-white, straight female researcher) and reading of selected academic literature.

3.3 Data analysis

Twenty-five interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed soon after each interview had taken place. All interview transcriptions were first coded by hand and, with reference to this set of codes, recoded for a second time using NVivo. Table 1 provides an example of the coding process. Following the coding guideline of Boeije (2010), the analytical process can be described as following the iterative stages of open, axial and selective coding. The main activity during open coding is to break down the entire data into segments and to assign appropriate names for individual fragments that capture meanings or experiences of research participants. This analytical procedure followed the format of incident-by-incident coding with an emphasis on coding verbs and gerunds (Charmaz, 2006). By paying close attention to patterns of actions and interactions, the researcher is able to recognize actors' contextual responses and tacit assumptions, leading to the identification of the micro-actions that participants used in their work context to manage the conflicts that arise in the teaching and implementation of GEEA.

In axial coding, fragments of data are put into common categories, with further distinctions between these categories made and their content clarified. Doing so allowed initial comparison between codes across the transcripts of semi-structured interviews. At this stage, heteronormativity is used as a sensitizing concept to understand, interpret and explain these teachers' experiences. Greater epistemological attention is directed to studying the 'unmarked' and 'unnoticed' elements of social reality, rather than that of the 'marked' and 'salient' features (Brekhus, 1998). By not privileging more salient behaviors, such as homophobic remarks and actions, the focus on the unmarked provides insights about everyday interactions that might go unnoticed. For instance, rather than focusing on 'explicit' form of homophobia, it turns to the meanings of those things that are not talked about by employing Scott's (2019) sociology of nothing, an interpretive framework to understanding negative social phenomena. This is accomplished from acts of active commission and passive omission. According to Scott, omission is an act of passive neglect, whereby a position is reached unconsciously, conversely, commission is a position that may be reached through conscious intent

Table 1
Codes, categories, themes

Examples	Codes	Descriptions of category	Categories	Theme
"Maybe it is because the teachers in my school are quite young, so we are more accepting." (Health Education teacher)	View on school environment	Bullying uncommon	Organizational change	Organizational changes and barriers
"It [bullying] is less common in recent years. It was more of an issue in the past." (Health Education teacher)	View on bullying incidents			
"Our school works with the [regional] Gender Equity advocacy group. So, I think my school has fewer problems of this kind." (Homeroom teacher)	Education makes a difference			
"What I see now is that students would joke around, but these jokes seem to be well received…Like it could be about someone's [gender] characteristics. The student who received such a comment would say something back in return. No one gets hurt, so I think this is fine." (Counselling coordinator)	Perceived positive peer interaction			
"Because people are concerned…Because there are laws behind the implementation of Gender Equity. It requires schools to do at least four hours of courses or activities on Gender Equity education each semester." (Health Education teacher)	Legal backing of Gender Equity education	Deployment of whole school approach	Organizational change	Organizational changes and barriers
"We are asked to do four hours of school-wide Gender Equity courses. In addition, Gender Equity is specifically taught in Integrated Activities Workshop. Other subject areas also need to integrate Gender Equity education into their curricula." (Counselling coordinator)	School-wide Implementation of GEEA			
"Indeed, gender bullying is now a huge focus. It is a very serious matter, so the director of the school affairs office takes these incidents very seriously. School staff are aware that if there is a report from a student or a teacher, it must be dealt with immediately." (School counsellor)	Strict school regulations			
"Students would tease each other…For example, they might call someone a sissy… Then of course if we witness this or hear about it in class, we will stop them." (Homeroom teacher)	Teachers stepping in	Shift in teachers' attitude	Organizational change	Organizational changes and barriers
"I think a lot of what I just mentioned… a lot of these ideas may come from students' families…[and so] they are ingrained in them. I think this is where education needs to come in. We need to clarify these issues for them." (Health Education teacher)	Necessary to teach Gender Equity			
"Once you become more sensitive to these things, you realize not many people have this kind of awareness. Then you think to yourself, 'Wow, I need to hurry up and teach my students these things, because they will grow up one day.'" (School counsellor)	Motivated to teach Gender Equity			
"I know some [homeroom] teachers who are opposed of same-sex marriage, but these teachers will not oppose other teachers educating around LGBTQ issues." (School counsellor)	Aware that not all homophobic teachers will oppose openly			
"Because our class time is really too short, so I can only talk about it briefly or skip it." (Health Education teacher)	Short classroom time	Lack of time	Challenges to implementing GEEA	Organizational changes and barriers
"I do not have time to delve into this too much. I have other course content to cover." (Health Education teacher)	A lot of course content to cover			

"These counselling coordinators really have too much to do. The Ministry of Education is not only paying attention to Gender Equity education. There are also many other topics that they need to plan. So, a team leader may have to take care of all these issues. For him, Gender Equity is just a small part." (School counsellor)	Many educational agenda to implement	Workload	Challenges to implementing GEEA	Organizational changes and barriers
"I think the school will be very worried about the occurrence of incidents [of gender- and sexuality-based bullying], and they will need to report and deal with follow-ups, so they are careful about preventing these incidents from happening." (School counsellor)	Complex investigation procedure			
"Parents feel very anxious about schools teaching Gender Equity. A few years ago, some parents group learned that body anatomy was taught in a Health Education class and protested about the course content. In the textbook, there was a cartoon drawing of a naked girl on one side and a naked boy on the other side, and when you close the book, the two cartoon drawings would touch. Then there were parents making unreasonable complaints, questioning whether students really need Gender Equity education." (School counsellor)	Parents showing disapproval	Teachers' apprehension	Challenges to implementing GEEA	Organizational changes and barriers
"It did not get too bad over here. Maybe it is because my school is in Yilan [a remote county], away from the center of the storm. But at the time of the referendum, my colleagues and myself publicly gave our support to same-sex marriage, and then we received a call from someone, saying 'How can you be teaching students these things" (Counselling coordinator)	Experiences of community protest			
"A while ago, during the time of the referendum, there was this hype about what we teach in school. Even the Ministry of Education had to come out and clarify that the textbooks do not teach anything about anal sex in Junior High School. It is unbelievable that this needed clarification." (School counsellor)	Incorrect information among communities			
"There are a lot of things that I would like to teach, but I feel that this school does not support me." (School counsellor)	Lack of support from senior management	Lack of institutional support	Challenges to implementing GEEA	Organizational changes and barriers
"Parents have been very vocal about their disapproval, and if the school does not back their teachers up, then this could directly harm us." (School counsellor)	Teachers feeling exposed			
"We have always been told that we need to integrate Gender Equity content into our teaching, but to be honest, I'm not sure how it is related to what I teach." (Homeroom teacher)	Perceived unrelatedness to courses	Challenges to teaching gender and sexuality diversity	Challenges to implementing GEEA	Organizational changes and barriers
"With teaching Gender Equity, I will first consider the atmosphere of the class. If the students get defensive like a hedgehog and it becomes difficult to bring these issues into the class, I might not bring up these discussions so soon. Because I think someone would become a target…Students will find something that they can talk about to attack someone in the class." (School counsellor)	Hostile classroom environment			
"Some 7th grade classrooms are really immature. With some issues, I would not cover it with too much depth." (Homeroom teacher)	Students' immaturity			
"I don't think I have the ability to talk about [sexuality and diversity education]. Because facing a group of fourteen and fifteen-year-old children, I feel embarrassed if you ask me to talk about it. But when it comes to gender roles, I think it's okay. But regarding awkward moments, when students bring what they learn from the internet into the classroom, sexually explicit things they have learnt, it gets awkward for me." (Homeroom teacher)	Marking out one's lack of professional knowledge			

The final stage, selective coding, is aimed at reassembling the data. According to Strauss and Corbin (2007), the purpose of this stage is to select and develop the core category, while relating it to other categories for further refinement. In this stage, the short narratives that are encapsulated in the nodes are read alongside scholarly work that approach gender-and sexuality-based bullying from a poststructuralist and queer theory standpoint. The description above may depict the research procedure as distinct, separate stages, but in practice the entire process is iterative, recursive and reflexive, with the researcher going back and forth between data collection, data analysis and sampling, while also referring to relevant literature.

Findings

Two themes are identified in this study: the organizational structures in schools that support heteronormativity and the cultural practices that are (re)productive of heteronormative ideals of masculinity and femininity. This section is divided into two parts. The first part begins by recognizing the general improvements in school climates that respondents have witnessed, before detailing the existing organizational barriers to the implementation of GEEA. The second part goes on to examine the productive power and discourse that are evident in teaching practices, of which two mechanisms, known as 'othering' and 'silencing', are identified.

4.1 Part one: Exploring organizational changes and barriers

GEEA implementation and organizational change

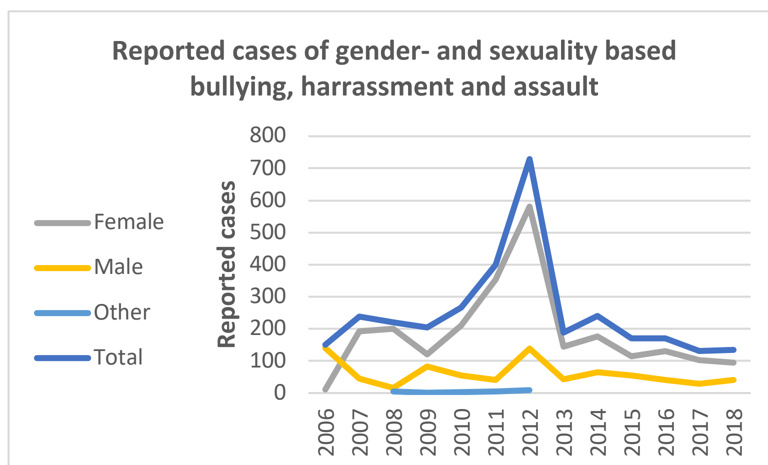
'We do not see bullying anymore.' Participants have pointed out that while gender- and sexuality-based bullying was more common five to ten years ago, they have rarely witnessed or heard about any bullying incidents in recent years. More than half of participants further indicated that there has been an increase in student acceptance of peers who are different in terms of their sexual orientation and conformity to gender norms. Commenting on peer acceptance, a Health Education teacher said:

"I believe as a result of our efforts, in recent years, there is an increase in students' acceptance of peers who are gender nonconforming, such as those perceived to be gender-neutral, feminine and masculine, irrespective of their biological sex."

Teacher support and positive classroom environments were also cited as factors that buffer against the efects of victimization for gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth, leading tfor example, with boys feeling comfortable wearing make-up or earrings and performing a sexually provocative dance in a school talent show. A guidance teacher noted:

"Even children with such [gender-nonconforming] characteristics have become more accepting of who they are and appeared more confident in themselves. Students of this kind used to be marginalized. They were quiet in class, but now they are more expressive and unafraid to be themselves."

These comments are corroborated with data collected by the Ministry of Education. This data is collected from schools indicating where an investigation was carried out into gender- and sexuality-based bullying, harassment and assault (Department of Statistics, 2020). Between the years of 2007 and 2012, reported incidents increased from 238 to 729. From 2012 to 2018, reports of incidents have remained stable at less than 200 cases, with the exception of 2014[2]. Teachers have credited this progress within schools to broader structural changes, resulting from a series of legal mandates and whole-school interventions to address homophobic bullying and promote gender and sexual equality.



Graph 1. *Data for 'other' are only collected for some years*

[2] It is not known why such a dramatic increase and decrease of incidents is seen over these years. It can be speculated that this is due to an increase in awareness and reporting due to GEEA& (Sinacore et al., 2019).

The deployment of a whole-school approach. To foster positive educational climates, various organizational practices to tackle gender- and sexuality-based bullying have been implemented at all levels. First, teachers are legally obliged to report any incidents of bullying, harassment and assault within the first twenty-four hours and can be fined for failing to do so. Second, schools must provide periodic professional development for all faculty members to ensure that they recognize bullying and know how to act when it occurs. A common recurring message in professional learning workshops is teachers' responsibility to report all incidents found to be a violation of GEEA. Professional learning for educators has been reported to have facilitated a positive cultural shift in teachers' attitudes.

Indeed, according to the teachers interviewed, ongoing teacher training is said to have led to an increased awareness toward the damaging effects of homophobic bullying and the vulnerabilities experienced by gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth in schools. Almost all participants reported their willingness to step in and address misbehavior, while also making it clear that they do not accept homophobia in their classroom. Some teachers have also said that while they are aware of colleagues who hold an opposing view on homosexuality, they know that these teachers would not challenge the school's Gender Equity curriculum or openly discriminate LGBTQ youth. As one teacher puts it,

"That's why I am saying GEEA has brought many positive impacts. I am saying this, because, thanks to the faculty training, teachers in our school, a majority of them, will not criticize nor disapprove of these students. So, I think these behaviors are a part of the positive changes I have witnessed."

Professional development workshops also stress on teachers' responsibility to come to terms with their role in implementing GEEA. Part of their new role consists in becoming trusted sources for students who, without formal discussions around gender and sexuality, are left with little effective guidance and will seek information from other sources, usually the internet, which is perhaps more likely to expose them to misinformation and risk. This messaging from workshops aligns well with teachers' general view of their role as educators, with many citing schools as an important site to challenge beliefs that underpin gender inequality. They argued that while, ideally, children will get all the information they need at home from their parents, the lack of parents' involvement in children's sex education leaves the responsibility to teachers. During interviews, teachers also expressed their motivation to teach topics related to GEEA well, and that this should be done from an early age:

"There is an opportunity for these students to influence the wider community with more inclusive and open attitudes that they acquire from the Gender Equity education, as they will grow up and become parents one day."

Lastly, positive changes for LGBTQ students in the school environment are credited to the development of a comprehensive Gender Equity curriculum, made mandatory through the GEEA. Because there is no nation-wide curriculum, schools must create their own. When funding is available, some schools have taken a further step to employ personnel with a formal qualification, who are better able to design and administer Gender Equity education. Often, faculty and staff members collaborate with each other to implement GEEA, but it is down to teachers' discretion whether Gender Equity content is taught within their classes.

Some courses, such as Health Education and Integrated Activities Workshop, are deemed more appropriate for Gender Equity content than others. Teachers in other subject areas, such as Mathematics, Science, Mandarin and History, are encouraged to integrate a similar discussion into their lesson plans. While some teachers have pointed out that they struggle to bring topics of gender and sexuality into the subject they teach in class, they claim to correct and challenge students to think about their attitudes when they witness misbehavior, such as name-calling[3] and unwanted touching. Gender Equity education is also taught outside of formal lessons, such as during school assembly and weekly homeroom class meetings[4]. Within the classroom setting, Gender Equity topics are brought into the classroom through discussion of recent events, opinion pieces, activities, movie clips and YouTube content. These activities often take the format of an interactive, open discussion.

School-wide Gender Equity education is seen as a preventative measure to reduce the likelihood of bias-based aggression occurring. These lessons are acknowledged by teachers as having a certain degree of influence on student behavior, as they help to identify myths

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[3] From the interviews, it was suggested that common pejorative terms for feminine boys are niang niang qiang (娘娘腔) and niang pao (娘炮), with niang pao also meaning gay. Students could be made fun of and called these names for the way they look, speaking in a higher pitch or using gestures deemed to be feminine.

[4] A school assembly is a gathering of all or some grades of a school, where announcements or programs are given on a weekly or monthly basis. Homeroom meeting refers to a class session where daily attendance is registered, and miscellaneous teaching activities are given. Students are assigned a homeroom class when they enter school and remain in that class for the duration of middle school.

about gender roles and reflect on wider cultural stereotypes, while educating students about the existence and legitimate visibility of LGBTQ people. Students' lack of awareness is cited as the main cause for discrimination in response to noticeable differences in peers, as expressed through clothing, haircuts, behavior, or bodily characteristics. Teachers observed how students have come to understand LGBTQ issues differently and expressed increased tolerance as a result of these sessions. One homeroom teacher noted:

"If students are more aware of the existence of homosexual orientation—that this is nothing out of the ordinary—then they will realize that there is nothing strange about it. There is no need to make fun."

From the perspective of teachers, counsellors and administrative staff, GEEA implementation is said to be on the right track in that there is a core team of teachers involved in educating young people and a coherent response to serious incidents of gender- and sexuality-based bullying, harassment and assault. However, the structure and culture of an organization have an influence over the amount of change that can be promoted and how much young people can learn about Gender Equity, as the next section explores.

Challenges and struggles to implementing GEEA

Although teachers are vocal with their support for the implementation of GEEA, they also face challenges, pressures and anxieties with implementing Gender Equity education. Participant responses were consistent with several challenges that street-level bureaucrats are said to be confronted with when implementing public policy. Some of the cited challenges were heavy workloads, inadequate teaching time, a low level of trust from parents and the wider community, a lack of authority and control over the outcome of their work and students' resistance to issues of sex education and LGBTQ rights.

A common challenge that was pointed out is the amount of work teachers and counsellors are confronted with (see also Change & Wu, 2012). Two counselling coordinators described struggles with fitting GEEA content into an already overloaded curriculum timetable[5]:

[5] Under the 12-year national education curriculum in Taiwan, nineteen learning objectives are expected to be integrated into the design of courses in various subjects. Curriculum design should attempt to integrate the following issues: Gender Equity, human rights, environment, marine life, informatics, environment, international education, security, energy, ethics, indigenous education, family education, career planning, multiculturalism, outdoor education, international education, life education, reading literacy and the rule of law.

"The school administration demands a lot from the counselling office, as we are expected to organize many activities and events. There are many benchmarks we need to meet in every academic year and semester. This results in activities being organized that tick multiple boxes in one go, such as an activity that covers both Gender Equity and human rights education. This results in a very shallow exploration of each topic."

A similar struggle has also been pointed out by teachers, with many reporting the lack of class time available to provide an in-depth coverage on Gender Equity issues, as Gender Equity education forms only a small part of an already large subject curriculum that teachers must follow.

Educational climates remain ambivalent about teaching LGBTQ issues in schools. While teachers support an inclusive Gender Equity education in theory, many are uncomfortable with addressing sex education and LGBTQ rights because, they fear a negative reaction or even a formal complaint from parents. These teachers cited a known incident in 2017 of an Elementary Teacher who faced formal complaints from the school and the Bureau of Education at the regional and national level, for undermining public morality by teaching sex education. Furthermore, the result of the 2018 Taiwanese Referendum brought another layer of discomfort: A proposition for ending inclusive sexual education was passed, demonstrating that many people are not comfortable with schools teaching about same-sex relationships and LGBTQ identities. There is a general fear in teachers that these classroom discussions around gender and sexuality equity would be understood as encouraging homosexuality[6] or causing youth to become sexually active. These presumptions place an invisible boundary around what is considered appropriate to address in the classroom and what is not.

[6] During the referendum, a well-funded and organized campaign led by conservative Christians launched a coordinated effort spreading misinformation and causing voters alarm, warning of an AIDS epidemic and low birthrates, as well as leading them to believe that educating students about different sexual orientations would change their sexual preference.

Interestingly, Dickson and Brindis (2019), identified trust from students as an important component of the introduction of sexual health education in US schools, which resulted in a smoother implementation of this policy. A similar point is expressed in the following quote:

"In the beginning trust has to be established. This comes from the daily interaction between you and the students. For example, if he has a new haircut or has a new pair of shoes, you can ask him and say, 'Hey, you cut your hair.' This will make him think you care about him…So when you talk to him about serious things, he will not resist and be defensive."

Trust is also argued by Zacka (2017), in the wider context of street-level bureaucracy work, as an essential element, a failure of which leads to suspicion and poor relations. Outside of school, the implementation of Gender Equity education faces backlash from families, communities and local authorities who are against the teaching of gender and sexuality diversity. Some teachers report "the importance of building trust and good relations" with parents through communicating what is being taught. However, not every teacher has the opportunity to do this.

Given the commonly held view that schools have no right to educate around private matters, community climates remain hostile to schools teaching LGBTQ issues and are distrusting of schools to provide suitable content in sex and sexuality education. This has made senior management fearful of getting into what it deems as "unnecessary trouble". Highlighting the lack of encouragement from senior staff, a school counsellor relayed her disappointment with the organizational support for educating around gender and sexuality diversity:

"I was left with a strong impression from something the principal said in a GEEA task force meeting, which happens annually. This must have happened during the year we had the referendum. As the chair of the meeting, the principal reminded everyone sitting in the meeting to integrate GEEA content into their lessons. But later, he added, 'Eh, there are some sensitive topics, such as LGBTQ issues that...eh…everyone should be a bit more careful with. Try to avoid it.'"

In the example above, there is a teacher who is willing to address sexual equality in the classroom, but the school principal did not encourage this. This leads to a sense of insecurity for teachers, as they are unsure whether senior management will back them up if challenged by parents. While not all counsellors and teachers have had experiences of negative reactions

from parents, senior management or colleagues, these recent events have, nonetheless, instilled a sense of caution about teaching issues that are considered sensitive. Another counsellor described her experience educating around GEEA issues in the classroom:

"I am very familiar with raising awareness around bullying, harassment and assault. This is because they are based on law. In each awareness raising session, I would refer to the GEEA. Because of this, I am less worried about parents challenging me on what I am teaching, because it is based in law. There is no grey area in these lessons. It is just letting the children know that they cannot do certain things. When I am not feeling strong, I will fall back to this topic."

The counsellor pointed out that she is more comfortable with raising awareness around bullying, harassment and assault, as she believes these issues are free from controversy, and parents are not going to object. On the other hand, she is less willing to engage with issues around gender and sexuality diversity:

"[Other] topics I teach include gender awareness, sexual assault, harassment, sexuality-based bullying, family education, gender identity, breaking gender stereotypes, gender discrimination and gender power relations. These are the things I teach, but out of all of these, I feel most confident educating students about sexual assault, harassment and bullying. I have become more cautious in what I teach. One time I was raising awareness of LGBTQ issues, in which I normally talk about the spectrum of gender and sexuality diversity. I have continually cut down the content. I ask myself what should I be teaching so that when students go back home and talk about what they have learned, parents will not misunderstand and sue me? This has happened in my county before. I decided to take out so much of the content that I am left with very little to say. When talking about LGBTQ issues, I am even reluctant to use material provided by the Ministry of Education. I told my team leader that I do not want to engage with [every aspect of] gender and sexuality education, because it covers many topics, such as gender awareness, assault, harassment, bullying, gender identity, etc. I prefer teaching safer topics, so I do not want to teach LGBTQ issues."

While teachers have mentioned family beliefs as a possible hindrance to talking more about LGBTQ issues, others pointed to the difficulty of questioning ingrained beliefs and expressions of gender and sexuality held by students. One teacher highlighted feeling unsure how to respond to students when they expressed discomfort with her using the terminology to describe sex organs. As a result, teachers tend to dumb down with the use of terminology.

Teachers have also reported difficulty in teaching LGBTQ issues with students reacting with hostility or openly challenging the more tolerant views that teachers are trying to portray.

Thus far, the results indicate that structural changes adopted by schools appear to be somewhat successful. However, closer inspection suggests that the variety of approaches and education strategies developed are met with strong resistance within and from outside of schools, resulting in the ad hoc manner in which GEEA is being implemented.

It is important to bear in mind that the challenges facing frontline public servants are constituted within specific organizational settings, through "moment-to-moment interactions between and within entangled discourses, materialities, identities and emotions" (Harding, Ford, & Lee, 2017). The analysis presented thus far in this section also indicates that organizational space is not neutral but always sustained and regulated by the power relations of heteronormativity. This theme will be explored more extensively in the next section.

4.2 Part two: Cultural discourses that 'other' and 'silence'

By drawing out the mechanism of 'othering' and 'silencing', this section underlines concern for the implementation of Gender Equity education, as current approaches re-entrench marginality of nonconforming and LGBTQ youth.

The GEEA policy and education model are driven by the intention to provide protection for victims of gender- and sexuality-based bullying, harassment and abuse and to prevent future incidents of these kinds occurring (Taiwan Ministry of Education, 2010). Within the core syllabus content provided to teachers for the courses of Health Education and Integrated Activities Workshop, very little covers the Gender Equity topic of sexuality diversity (Hsieh, 2012). As teachers follow course content closely when giving these classes, the depth of teaching in Gender Equity topics is limited.

Consistent with previous research (Hong, Lawrenz & Veach, 2005; Hsieh, 2012; Sinacore et al., 2019), the analysis has found that teachers spend a majority of Gender Equity lesson time educating around the topics of sexual crime prevention, relationships, family structure,

women's equality, consent, emotional wellness, healthy physical boundaries and abstinence[7]. The analysis that will follow shows how, when discussions around 'gender and sexuality diversity' do occur, broader cultural norms are not challenged, and the othering of LGBTQ and gender nonconforming individuals is, unknowingly or unconsciously, (re)produced in this environment.

Othering

Asserting the 'normality' of being LGBTQ. When approaching LGBTQ issues, course content is largely focused on addressing gender stereotypes, challenging the assumption that boys should be masculine and that girls should be feminine. There is an attempt to normalize various expressions of gender so that students learn that these expressions do not fall within the binary categories of 'male' and 'female.' While these types of classroom discussions have the potential to destabilize the gender code of behaviors and stereotypes among peer groups, genuine learning experiences around gender and sexuality diversity is lacking. The analysis of interviews highlights that the learning experience is instead mobilized by a simplistic understanding of gender dichotomy. For example, when asked how she would deal with gender- and sexuality-based discrimination in the classroom, one teacher said:

"I often tell students that boys who are more feminine… For example, I mentioned this in one of my lessons… [pause] When I brought this topic up, students would turn their head [to the feminine boy in class]. Then I begin with making a distinction between [nonconforming gender expression and] homosexuality. Everyone has male and female hormones. Those who are gender nonconforming have a hormone imbalance. So, when puberty comes, some boys are more feminine."

Here, instead of challenging gender norms, femininity in boys is explained through an essentialized understanding of masculine and feminine differences, namely through biological hormone imbalances.

Education about Gender Equity happens in a reactive manner. Often the only time young people hear about LGBTQ issues is in the context of bullying prevention (Gilbert, Fields, &

[7] Addressing abstinence in classroom focuses on the physical and psychological effects of having sex at a young age, while encouraging students to wait until they are of legal adulthood age and in a committed relationship. Depending on the confidence of individual school teachers, some may talk a little more in depth, giving instructions to contraception and safe sex.

Lesko, 2018). It begins with teachers acknowledging the existence of LGBTQ people, emphasizing that they bear no difference from straight people, and same-sex attraction is not a crime:

"Compared to murderers, criminals or those who are selfish and have hurt people, they [LGBTQ people] just do their own thing. What is wrong with that? Most of the students will agree that there is nothing wrong with this. They did not do anything to offend anyone. I'm here to get them to think that there is nothing wrong with these people. The problem here is the way we think, or the traditional beliefs we hold.

Others facilitate this line of discussion, by highlighting that they have done nothing wrong to deserve mistreatment:

"This is not their fault. They do not want this for themselves. You would not want this either. It is not something we can solve, neither can they. You must not discriminate against them."

It is implied here that being gay is not a choice, nor what one would hope to be. Both statements attempt to convey the idea of LGBTQ individuals as good people, who are undeserving of exclusion. Normality of being gay is constituted by contrasting it to criminals and/or constructing it as an affliction, and only through framing of these kinds does the claim to normalcy becomes intelligible.

Another way to teach about sexuality difference is to include positive representations of LGBTQ individuals in classroom discussions. Examples teachers give of LGBTQ people are exceptional people, who have gone on to become very successful in society, such as Alexander Wang and Jason Wu, both fashion designers who are of Taiwanese descent and Audrey Tang, an IT 'genius' who has gone on to become the first transgender official in the top executive cabinet in Taiwan.

Putting famous LGBTQ celebrities and people on pedestals does not translate into acceptance for the majority of gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth. Here, the "passing into normalcy" for LGBTQ youth is defined in terms of heteronormative mainstream practices and values of success (Richardson, 2004). The idea of the normal LGBTQ student suggests that gay and lesbian students can be the "same" as heterosexual students, if they are out of the

ordinary—that is with an exceptional life or status. Rather than attempting to bring about changes in how classroom practices operate, teaching practices are reproductive of stigmatized categories of behavior and identity.

Much of the discussion around GEEA content that the interviews addressed avoids substantial discussion that would disrupt institutional power structures. Rather, it can be seen as passing on the knowledge students need to know in order to get them to accept people who are or look different from them.

Invoking victimhood. Teaching experiences also focus on building empathy and ensuring that children acquire an understanding of acceptance for LGBTQ people by raising awareness about the harm that bullying can cause. Teachers underscore the emotional pain and psychological trauma that victims often endure to help students come to grip with the serious consequence that bullying can have for those who are bullied. For example, the short documentary film that tells the heart-wrenching story of Yeh Yung-Chih from the perspective of his mother, has been used as material to teach students about the importance of the acceptance of differences. Capturing the subjective experiences of the emotional pain, the film's personal narrative is said to profoundly touch students, leading many to develop empathy and reflect on the actions that hurt victims and their family.

Teaching approaches that raise awareness by acknowledging and bringing marginalized voices into school spaces can certainly be a powerful tool. However, there is need for a much broader discussion for real change to occur. Genuine dialogues of this kind are often left out. Reflecting on the activity planning undertaken by the counselling coordinator in one school, a school counsellor said:

"Regarding topics on gender identity and sexual orientation, I do not remember having covered such things. So, I think that [the GEEA lessons] are also very narrow, generally focusing on gender characteristics... And to not bully people who are different from us. It will probably stop here. So, I think that content is very small. Then I remember that about five years ago, I told my team leader… There is a transgender teacher, who gave speeches at school. It was when her wife passed away that she decided that she would change from a male to a female. His lecture focuses on his emotional journey. I asked my team leader: Can we invite him to give a lecture? I think this topic is very good,

given that many students of ours are thinking about cross-dressing. I remember that my team leader told me that this would be too much for middle school students to handle."

While highlighting the plight of LGBTQ people as a means to protect them and promote tolerance is acceptable for learning, certain activities, such as the one mentioned in the quote above, are perceived to be controversial. The results showed that certain issues are included for being considered safe, leading to an over focus on victim narratives, while leaving out empowering stories that reflect diverse lived experiences.

DePalma and Atkinson (2007) have argued that while public concern about bullying has helped to push schools to take it seriously, the casting of those who are bullied as weak and helpless victims stops short of inspecting the effects of heteronormative school cultures. Elsewhere, it has been put forward that greater action than 'passive and disingenuous tolerance' of LGBTQ people is needed in order to open real conversation about sexuality and gender (Depalma & Atkinson, 2009b). This is needed if the stranglehold of heteronormativity on society and reductive stereotypes of marginalized people are ever to be challenged (Neary et al., 2016).

Silencing

This sub-section explores the theme of silencing, by examining what is not practiced and voiced. There is a natural tendency by researches to focus on phenomena that are out of the ordinary or unusual (Scott, 2019), which leaves the unremarkable, but much more common reality of a given context unstudied.

Enacting heterosexual domination. Sexuality remains to be an issue that sits uncomfortably in relation to school teaching. The lack of engagement around gender and sexuality diversity is sustained or undercut by this discomfort, on the one hand, and the privileging of traditional heterosexual behaviors or beings, on the other. There is the presumption that all teachers are heterosexual, and all students will grow up and marry a person of the opposite sex. This underscores that non-heterosexual relationships, while accepted, occupy a tangential status to heterosexual relationships.

One example that illustrates this claim can be seen in how teachers take up care work, supporting student wellbeing. It became clear during the interviews that teachers who are

perceived to be LGBTQ friendly are those who students approach when they grapple with personal problems, such as uncertainty about their sexual orientation. When students question their sexuality, these teachers report that their main role here is to listen. Often, they tell these students that it is common to wonder and that their sexual orientation is not yet decided at this age. Young people are often told, “This is probably just a phase,” or “You are too young to know for sure,” and are advised not to declare their sexuality but to keep their mind open. Yet, if the same students were to say that she or he is attracted to someone of the opposite sex, no one would question it. This can be seen in the way teachers handle heterosexual students dating, where relationships are discouraged. The reason behind this discouragement is not because these students are too young to be sure of their sexual orientation, but because they believe they are too young to be in a relationship, as can be seen in the following quote:

“A handsome boy and a beautiful girl… Of course, I think it’s normal. I told these two students that it [developing romantic feeling] is completely normal. However, at this stage of your study, I think it is inappropriate.”

It is important to keep in mind that some LGBTQ students recognize their sexuality at a young age and others as teens, and they are, therefore, not given the support they need. This is not something straight students would ever have to contend with, as the comment above shows. These incidents exemplify one of the ways in which teachers, despite good intentions, implicitly enforce heterosexual and cisgender social norms.

Behind the marginalization of LGBTQ youth is a cultural discourse about the naturalness of a binary gender system in which there are two, and only two, genders (e.g. male and female) that derive from the biological sexes (men and women). Heterosexual expectations are embedded in the discourse of teaching practices. These everyday interactions (re)inscribe a linear relationship between sex and gender, with gender taking precedence over sexuality. As Richardson puts it succinctly, “sexuality is a property of gender, a gender that is pregiven and located in the sexed body” (2007, p. 462).

To illustrate this, it is worth examining how teachers approach the topic on same-sex attraction in GEEA lessons. As one Health Education teacher put it:

"The way I explain homosexuality…well… it is when a girl, who is biologically female, plays the role of a boy. I would say it is when a boy's soul, accidentally, ends up in a girl's body. That is it."

The same teacher went on to share her experience with how she brought this discussion up in class:

"I play a lot of video clips. One that left me with an impression is a [wedding cake] advertisement from Isabelle. In Isabelle's advertisement, there was a gay couple and they had been together for about thirty years. It had been thirty years, and they had been living just like a couple. You could tell which one was playing the role of a wife and which one was playing the role of a husband. I let students see that side. After watching it, they had a knowing smile on their faces. Um… It was about letting them know that homosexuality is not what they had in mind… This clip is heart-warming. It would not give them the impression… that…that leaves them with a bad impression (. Yes, it [the video clip] is just really heart-warming. It is about letting them know that even though the two have an appearance of a man, the way they live together…Like I said, a female's soul is in a man's body. One played the role of a woman, a mother. She made breakfast and ironed shirts. When she hurt herself, the man would put medicine on for her. That kind of intimacy is there in the video clip."

As shown in the excerpt above, the teacher was worried the students would have a negative reaction toward the idea of homosexual couples. The teacher attempted (rather successfully) to get the students to overcome this, by presenting the gay couple under a positive light. Doing so relies on the notions of sexual and gender binaries, of male/female and masculine/feminine. The reinscription of the familiar narrative of traditional gender roles (e.g. the woman figure that cooks and irons shirts) and the repeated emphasis on the expression, 'a woman's soul trapped in the body of a man', underscores the dualistic logic of gender and sexuality as coherent. The way sexuality is articulated is through the assumption that there is the essence of a man and a woman. Sexuality becomes 'fixed' within this dichotomized framework of sex/gender, allowing gay and lesbian identity to become intelligible only through the re-making of the heterosexual figure. It becomes unthinkable to understand sexuality without invoking a binary logic of gender. Needless to say, the explanation teachers provide proves limiting and leaves out various sexual and gender minorities.

The use of this type of explanation to facilitate learning about sexual minorities is not uncommon, and it is in some way understandable, given the tensions that surround LGBTQ

issues. Some participants reflected on their experience with addressing topics on sexual orientation and diversity. In particular, one Health Education teacher said:

"To be honest, the school has not asked us to talk about it specifically. It depends on what teachers feel comfortable doing. Let me think about it…Students are interested to know how same-sex sexual behavior works, but it is not convenient for me to elaborate too much during class time. I will tell them that it is more appropriate for me to talk about what happens for most people. If you ask me how men have sex with men or how women have sex with women, I would not know to be honest. I do not know too much about it."

While not every teacher would think discussion around sexual orientations are beyond students at this age, it does not mean teachers feel comfortable approaching it. As one homeroom teacher explained:

"I think it is hard for me to draw a line between health and eroticism within my profession…
To define the boundary, wherein a correct conception of gender can be appropriated."

It becomes clear that teachers often conflate sexuality identity with sexual activity and such a simplistic understanding closed down opportunities for education around sexuality identity (see also Neary et al., 2017). For a teen who is not heterosexual, this can affect his or her journey of self-discovery, making it much more difficult. The lack of explicit support and open, inclusive discussion may actually serve to exacerbate the silencing of these students because in the absence of information the default always assumes the place of the normal.

Calling for respect. Teachers understand that what is taught in school is often in conflict with the values taught at home or in places of worship. This led many to claim neutrality around gender and sexuality issues, while emphasizing a zero tolerance to gender- or sexuality-based aggression and bullying. For instance, when met with classroom aggression and misbehavior targeting nonconforming and LGBTQ students, teachers speak about "respect", a powerful concept that is used to circumvent issues in recognizably sensitive areas, as one teacher demonstrates here:

"[I tell my students] you can disagree with someone, but you have to respect the person. [Likewise,] you can disapprove of homosexuality, but you have to respect them for the choice they made. You cannot go after or hurt someone who is homosexual just because you disapprove."

As illustrated in the example above, teachers do not expect every child to become a supporter of LGBTQ rights, as this is a personal choice and there is no way to enforce it. They do, however, expect children to respect and be 'nice' to each other. However, niceness, as pointed out by Payne & Smith (2013), cannot erase the stigma of non-masculine behaviors or homosexuality—it only masks this through the dominant majority acting kind to those who are different to them.

Teachers' approaches to educate about respect for gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth is situated within a 'human rights', but thoroughly de-sexualized frame. A comment from a health education teacher illustrates this:

"When I talk about LGBTQ issues, I will still link my discussion back to the idea of having respect for people and not because they are gay. That should not matter. Gay people are also human, just like you and me. They are not any different. If you already have respect for people, then you should not have to emphasize that they are gay and therefore deserve respect."

However, there is an inherent tension between their attempt to enact a de-sexualized approach alongside the way teachers handle incidents of implicit hostility that LGBTQ students encounter. This led to a reactive approach in combating homophobia and discrimination against gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth (Hsieh, 2012). Here, solutions primarily focus on counselling bullied students on navigating around classroom aggression directed toward them, or to ask these students to overlook these incidents. This was particularly evident in relation to the support LGBTQ students receive. In her account of dealing with aggression targeted at LGBTQ students, a homeroom teacher recalled:

"Some teachers have said things [to LGBTQ students], then the students would come to me and let me know what happened. I will tell them: 'See, there are different perspectives out there.' We should respect these voices, unless this teacher hurts you. I said if a teacher hurts you, then you come and tell me. If not, he or she simply holds a different opinion... We should also respect people who hold a different opinion from us."

Teachers' attitudes towards discrimination against LGBTQ students suggest a lack of awareness of the indirect hostility they face daily. This example demonstrates that only when an unfriendly encounter becomes serious, and constitutes an incident of physical harassment or bullying, would a teacher intervene. This notion of implicit aggression not being 'an issue', while continuing to be a part of LGBTQ youth's school experience, serves to silence the realities of their lives and closes down opportunity for reflection on school culture.

This can be seen in the following quote, whereby three students walked past a teacher, two of them whispering behind the other's back:

"I approached these two students and had a word with them. I said, what were you talking about behind that student's back? Then they said because he was wearing high heels and had his nails painted and a fake ring on. He was talking [with his pinkie pointed upward] on a fake mobile phone, and we both found him strange. I told the students I think you did pretty well. You did not laugh at him or bother him. You were quite respectful of him. I think it was good of you. This was what I said to them and they nodded their head. I think, as a teacher, it is my duty to step in and say something to these children, so that when they meet this group of people one day, they would not do things that would hurt them."

These examples demonstrate that "respect" emerges as a blanket statement that only addresses the explicit forms of aggression and hostility toward LGBTQ youth. Reflecting on this approach to educate students, a school counsellor said:

"Concerning how GEEA is currently being implemented, I think it is still about telling students you should not get physical. Like it is about telling students not to harass another person, but that is it. It is only about respecting body boundaries. Respect of this kind is only physical...If you ask me whether current implementation of GEEA can help achieve gender equity… I have my doubts."

Discussion and conclusion

Data collected through this study has shown valuable insights through a qualitative analysis into the workings of GEEA implementation and how teachers have dealt with this. A limitation of this data is a possible selection bias through the means of gathering contacts, although no obvious results have suggested this. Interviewees were also not disaggregated

according to urban and rural area, which may have been an interesting aspect to investigate. Participants were also aware of my position as a researcher looking into LGBTQ issues in schools, so may have been guarded in some respects of their answers. In these ways, the data may be limited in scope, but rich in content otherwise.

Through the data collected, this study has shown the material dimensions of policy change on the ground, as well as the organizational barriers to further the implementation of GEEA. The presence of a clear Gender Equity policy, curricular development, professional learning and a general improvement in teachers' attitudes were articulated as crucial in the effort to reduce bullying. However, responses from those interviewed also illuminated the challenges that they face in implementing GEEA. Some of the struggles participants of this study have reported are heavy workload, inadequate class teaching time, managing conflicting demands of teaching Gender Equity and lack of support. These findings are critical to map out the existing obstacles to achieving the goals of GEEA.

The second major finding was that policy alone was not a guarantor of adequate Gender Equity education in practice. Collected interview data suggests LGBTQ issues are added into the wider Gender Equity framework with the purpose of addressing homophobic bullying but only appear in a small proportion of classroom discussions. As the analysis showed, this has done little to address the heteronormative environment in which the wider framework is being taught in. Narratives of teaching practices, as reported by participants, indicate the risk of producing a range of othering and silencing effects that re-stigmatize gender nonconforming and LGBTQ youth.

For instance, while teachers attempt to 'normalize' gender nonconforming expressions and non-heterosexuality, accounts of teaching practices are underpinned by essentialist binaries (e.g. feminine and masculine; gay and straight). These accounts further demonstrate that teachers attempt to construct the normalcy of non-heterosexual attraction by comparing it to heinous crimes and focusing on LGBTQ students as victims. This may result in the opposite, as this comparison to criminals – while emphasizing that LGBTQ individuals have done nothing to deserve mistreatment – implicitly states that they are abnormal. Students are also taught to feel 'sorry' and show 'respect' for marginalized genders but are not taught to understand how societal social constructs shape what they feel is normal and can lead to a

sense of entitlement over those who are deemed different. This is followed by silencing of the realities of LGBTQ lives, such as same-sex parent families. In other instances, even though initiatives that promote positive representation of LGBTQ people have been increasingly brought into lessons, classroom dialogues have done little to acknowledge sexuality diversity and get students to explore further the issues of inequality in relation to heteronormativity. Taken together, these viewpoints only serve to stigmatize LGBTQ identities and can impact negatively upon young people's sense of self (Depalma & Atkinson, 2009b).

The evidence from this study suggests that school-based organizational and cultural practices support and maintain heterosexual norms in the everyday routines of school life. This is manifested through the (re)inscription of heterosexual norms and binary gender stereotypes in teacher-pupil and peer to peer interactions (Pascoe, 2013), as well as the teaching practices that take place. Specifically, this can be seen when covering topics such as relationships in a Health Education class, where exclusively heterosexual couples are talked about, without acknowledgement of LGBTQ relationships. If topics that fall under Gender Equity education are not taught in a way that addresses the broader heteronormative environment, these underlying assumptions carried by teachers and children will prevail and not be challenged. This paper interprets these incidents discussed to be a part of a phenomenon that upholds the discourse of heteronormativity and considers how those who are constructed as gender and sexual deviants are entrenched in a position of marginalized visibility.

The aim of this paper is not to suggest that the concept of, or responses to, bullying should be altogether abandoned (Formby, 2015), but that a broadened understanding of the situation and the means by which school staff and teachers address Gender Equity education is needed. An inclusive Gender Equity curriculum would make clear that sexuality diversity is not only an issue for bullied young people who look different, but for all people. In practice, it would mean that anti-bullying work is not the only time LGBTQ identities appear.

One such way in which queer politics can emerge from current challenges to subvert heteronormativity is through a critical re-engagement that is situated in the everyday practice. By employing Foucault's *Security, Territory and Population,* this article suggests that a 'counter-conducts approach' highlights how subversive practice can work to unwork conducting power of heteronormativity. To counter conduct encompasses a broad range of meanings that can be taken as reworking "the processes implemented for conducting [the

queer] others" (Foucault, 1978, p.268) that "[does] not always take the form of rejection or refusal of conduct", but aims to "redistribute, reverse, nullify and partially or totally discredit [heteronormative] power" (Odysseos, 2016, p.183). Challenging heteronormativity does not have to be an overt act carried out in a dedicated lesson but can be more subtly addressed, through many small actions.

For changes that are so deeply rooted in the personal to happen, it requires a radical opening-up to oneself and others. More can be considered in regard to building a positive relation and network that can support a culturing of an environment that takes human interdependency as its foundation. Perhaps a feminist politics of care can be the direction forward.

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