Exploring the impact of panoptic heteronormativity on UK primary teachers advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusive education

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Abstract

Since the repeal of Section 28 in 2003, research and policy reform has explored how to reduce homo/bi and transphobia to make schools more LGBTQ+ inclusive places. However, heteronormativity continues to manifest in increasingly subtle ways. This article argues that teachers must remain vigilant towards the 'Panopticon of Heteronormativity' which subtly impacts efforts to foster LGBTQ+ inclusivity. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was undertaken to capture the experience of 12 participants who advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in UK primary schools. This article finds that teachers advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity still reinforce heteronormativity through discourses which regulate children's exposure to 'appropriate' identities, express concern about pushing an 'agenda' and LGBTQ+ teachers can experience a 'double consciousness' which complicates their efforts to disrupt heteronormativity. Recommendations include improving teacher training and practitioner awareness to critically reflect upon the subtle ways heteronormativity manifests in the classroom.

Keywords

Foucault, heteronormativity, LGBTQ+, panopticon, teachers

Introduction

Since the 2003 repeal of Section 28 which forbade the promotion in schools of the 'acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship' (Local Government Act, 1988) in UK schools, legislation has been introduced to protect equality (Equalities Act, 2010), tackle homo, bi and transphobia (Ellis, 2007; Rudoe, 2018) and mandate the teaching of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) (Department for Education, 2019) in UK primary schools. Alongside legislation changes, there have been increasing efforts made by teachers and researchers to ensure that children are exposed to a range of teaching practices, curricula materials and stories which make space for LGBTQ+ history, people and ideas (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Stonewall, 2022). However, these advances do not mean that heteronormativity, which Bain and Podmore (2020: 1224) define as:

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a set of organizational structures (social institutions and policies) and everyday practices that present heterosexuality and the gender binary as hegemonic norms

has ceased to exist in schools. Instead heteronormativity manifests in more subtle ways. This is evidenced in data revealing how despite increases in awareness, schools continue to fail LGBTQ+ youth who, compared to their heterosexual peers, experience higher rates of bullying (Gower et al., 2017), suicidal thoughts (METRO, 2017) and mental ill-health rates (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). Consequently, how can schools better disrupt the hegemony of heteronormativity? To understand why difficulties persist in disrupting heteronormativity there is a need to understand how it is enacted and reinforced in the classroom. By troubling hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality, teachers must engage with parental protest and backlash to this work (Carlile, 2020; Ferguson, 2019; Flores, 2014) and challenge wider (often internalised) discourses of protecting children's innocence (Morgan and Taylor, 2019) and the 'appropriateness' of teaching about LGBTQ+ history, issues and lives.

This article argues that whilst some progress has been made in making space for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools, teachers must remain vigilant to the subtle ways heteronormativity manifests in the classroom. This is important because the subtle messages teachers impart to students around gender and sexual orientation have tangible impacts on how they view themselves and relate to others (Kosciw et al., 2014). To explore the subtle manifestations of heteronormativity in the classroom this research draws upon the experience of 12 teachers who have been actively advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in the classroom for a period of at least two years. These teachers were selected on the basis of their school being recognised by Stonewall (a UK based charity promoting LGBTQ+ rights) as being a provider that demonstrates best practice in supporting LGBTQ+ inclusivity. This process involves rigorous scrutiny of school policy, curriculum materials and staff training alongside conversations around their motivation and reasoning for championing this work. This research recognises the positive impact of their work and bravery in navigating challenging situations to enact this work but asks if there are ways that LGBTQ+ advocate teachers may still be unintentionally perpetuating heteronormativity? And if so, what recommendations may be made from their experience to further develop our understanding of how heteronormativity can be disrupted in primary classrooms? What follows is a review of the literature around how heteronormativity has been disrupted in schools, followed by an outline of the theoretical framework for this article which draws upon Foucault's (1977) engagement with the metaphor of the panopticon.

Disrupting heteronormativity in schools

Disrupting heteronormativity which 'structures social life so that heterosexuality is always assumed, expected, ordinary and privileged' (Martin and Kazyak, 2009: 316) has become the focus of a small but increasing amount of research (see: Carlile, 2020; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Johnson, 2022; Reimers, 2020). A large part of this research explores the efforts of LGBTQ+ teachers to challenge heteronormativity in class (Leonardi and Staley, 2021) which reinforces Richard's (2015) finding that this work has often fallen onto the shoulders of minority teachers, which evidently limits the wider impact of this work. For LGBTQ+ teachers, being a disrupter of heteronormativity is a complex position to hold in schools (Gray, 2013; Llewellyn and Reynolds, 2021). It often involves a balancing act between being an out proud role model to young people and navigating the psychological pressure of visibility which can leave teachers exhausted, isolated (Bain and Podmore, 2020) and exposed to harassment and silencing (Ferfolja and Stavrou, 2015; Neary, 2013). This complexity underlines the toll of consistently disrupting heteronormativity

upon LGBTQ+ teachers. However, it is important to highlight that too often a deficit approach is taken towards LGBTQ+ teachers and their experience can be positive, satisfying and integral to sustainably disrupting heteronormativity in schools (Reimers, 2020).

In 2009, DePalma and Atkinson worked with a number of primary teachers and researchers across the UK to develop a school-wide approach to disrupting heteronormativity via the 'No Outsiders' participatory research project. This project became one of the most influential pieces of research in this area in UK primary schools and inspired the creation of a charity motivated by its work. The original project aimed to develop curriculum materials and teaching approaches to help disrupt heteronormativity in the classroom through, for example, curriculum units on alternative fairy tales, the use of trans and non-binary characters on worksheets and using stories with LGBTQ+ families and characters. Importantly, their work included teachers that self-identified as heterosexual as well as LGBTQ+ reinforcing that if heteronormativity is to be successfully disrupted it will involve the efforts of all teachers. Evidently, any efforts to challenge hegemonic practice requires constant vigilance as Atkinson (2021) found upon revisiting one of the original schools from the project 10 years later where even in a school institutionally originally committed to disrupting heteronormativity, homophobic attitudes had subtly resurfaced and once again became prevalent amongst young children.

With the question of how to successfully disrupt heteronormativity in schools unresolved, how can we develop a better understanding of how it manifests to better prepare teachers to understand the subtle ways it impacts values, beliefs and actions in the classroom? Brown (2020) argues that the solution lies in fostering space for teachers to engage in dialogue around gender and heteronormativity. Nurturing critical consciousness around the issue can make teachers more likely to recognise and challenge heteronormativity. Gansen (2017) argues that without this space teacher talk will continue to passively perpetuate the heteronormative status quo. Leonardi and Staley (2021) argue that teachers need to work alongside students to develop their critical thinking skills to challenge heteronormativity. This helps students reconceptualise schools as places to question, explore and seek out alternative explanations (Meyer, 2010). However, Leonardi & Staley's case study consisted of the practice of just one teacher and neglects to engage with how many teachers work within neoliberal, accountability systems (Ball, 2017; Colegrove and Zúñiga, 2018) reliant on textbooks, schemes and fixed 'de-theorized, technicized [and] deintellectualized' (Hill, 2004: 517) curriculums which can stifle space for critical thinking and reflection.

Accordingly, this research addresses a gap in the literature by exploring the subtle ways heteronormativity impacts the LGBTQ+ inclusive provision of teachers who have been advocating and enacting LGBTQ+ inclusive education for a period of at least two years. These teachers have been chosen as they have articulated their motivations and commitment towards challenging heteronormativity and consequently, as practitioner advocates, their experience may offer fresh insights into the subtle, unconscious ways heteronormativity may manifest in their views, values and actions. In the next section, I explore how Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon can work as a theoretical framework for a deeper understanding of the subtle manifestations of heteronormativity.

The panopticon of heteronormativity

Teachers are influenced by the wider social, cultural and historical contexts in which they teach which can result in implicit bias which the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018: 4) defines as:

> views and opinions that we are unaware of; they are automatically activated and frequently operate outside conscious awareness and affect our everyday behaviour and decision making.

Sadker et al.'s (2009) research provides examples of how teacher bias is actualised in the classroom by teachers often given more attention to boys in class discussions, being more overly concerned with girls', rather than boys', handwriting and presentation and having higher expectations in Mathematics for Asian pupils.

Foucault's use of the panopticon as a metaphor for how systems of control are internalised (1977) can be a useful theory to better understand how dominant (heteronormative) discourses subtly and often unconsciously impact teacher beliefs, values and actions. The origins of the panopticon stem from Jeremy Bentham's 18th century design for prisons which involved a centrally constructed tower within which a guard surveys the prisoners below. In this design, behaviour is regulated in anticipation of being constantly monitored by the guards in the tower. However, the prisoners cannot see into the tower and do not know when they are being observed (Manning and Stern, 2018). Consequently, over time prisoners start to self-police their own behaviour in anticipation of being continuously under surveillance. Foucault's (1977) work *Discipline and Punish* built on Bentham's work by exploring how centralised disciplinary mechanisms have moved beyond the prison to impact surveillance throughout society to foster and maintain power in society through a process of surveillance, normalisation and examination. In school this can manifest through a culture of 'panoptic performativity' (Perryman, 2006) whereby teachers internalise constant accountability and perpetual examination against the accepted 'norms' of teaching. Foucault (1977) describes this as being like a 'gaze' we internalise to the point where we become our 'own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself' (Foucault, 1980: 155). Additional research into the panoptic nature of education has demonstrated how teachers regulate their behaviour and reconstruct their teacher-selves in anticipation of the constant threat of Ofsted (Troman, 1997), how self-regulation narrows the curriculum teachers teach (QCA, 2001) and how it limits teacher risk-taking (Robinson, 2005). Bi's (2020) research into the impact of the Trojan Horse Affair (an alleged conspiracy to introduce an Islamist ethos into several Birmingham schools) on Muslim pupils at one of the implicated schools demonstrated how heightened levels of anxiety were experienced as they navigated the panoptic surveillance of the media, teachers and Ofsted. Bi highlights the 'permeability' (p. 338) of the school to outside opinions and wider discourse around what can and cannot be taught in schools and the damaging impact that has on the teachers and pupils within such an environment.

Heteronormativity, shaped by religious beliefs and government institutions (Henshaw, 2014) is one of the primary forces structuring society and works as a form of panopticon in schools. However, rather than surveillance being solely from above, in postmodern society power is more dispersed and flexible (Koskela, 2003) subsequently, teachers also experience heteronormative surveillance from those around them like parents and coworkers. Moreover, Ganascia (2009) states that the panopticon is an incomplete model when in an age of social media and mass communication we are increasingly watched by everyone around us. Therefore, for teachers, Bentham's prison guards are replaced by 'conservative' minded parents and staff who defend the heteronormative status quo, aiming to protect children from 'difficult knowledge' (Britzman, 1998) and recruitment into the 'gay agenda' (Herman, 1997). The parents are not physically in the classroom but their gaze is internalised by teachers resulting in a 'penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life' (Foucault, 1977: 198). Furthermore, this has implications for how teachers enact their LGBTQ+ inclusivity work in classrooms. Additionally, heteronormativity and surveillance intersect to create the 'Panopticon of Heteronormativity' which establishes 'subtle, invisible and pervasive mechanisms of control' (Kuhar, 2011: 157) over teachers. This article argues that a better understanding of how the panopticon of heteronormativity regulates teacher efforts to enact LGBTQ+ inclusive education can reveal further possibilities for transgressing its gaze.

Methodology

To explore the subtle effects of the panopticon of heteronormativity on LGBTQ+ advocate teachers' values, beliefs and actions, a methodological framework was needed that could foster an in-depth exploration of these teacher's life worlds (Habermas, 1987). Consequently, an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) was selected for the research as it aims to help researchers understand how participants' make sense of their own lived experience in relation to their own social, cultural and historical context (Spinelli, 2005). The process involves a double hermeneutic whereby the researcher provides space for the participant to reflect upon and interpret their own experience. Later, the researcher interprets the way the participant is trying to make sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2009).

After ethical permission was granted by the University, participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach which aimed to recruit teachers who had been teaching for LGBTQ+ inclusivity for at least two years. As well as each school being recognised for its LGBTQ+ inclusivity work via Stonewall, participants were asked about their own motivations for this work to better understand their commitment to disrupting heteronormativity. These motivations ranged from valuing social justice, to growing up as LGBTQ+ under Section 28, to wanting to support friends and family members within the LGBTQ+ community. The schools' teachers taught in various sized state schools with most concentrated in and around Greater London. Whilst the majority (*n*=8) identified as white heterosexual female, two of the male participants identified as gay, one heterosexual and one genderqueer (using he/his and they/them pronouns). All but two of the semi-structured interviews (which lasted between 1 and 2 hour) were undertaken in person, one via video and one via telephone. Participants were asked to share their experience of educating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity including any challenges they had faced. After the interview, anonymised transcripts were returned to participants for member checking.

An important concept within IPA is that of bracketing which is a need for the researcher to attempt to recognise and name their bias before engaging in the research. Hence, my engagement with the participants' stories was shaped by my own experience as a gay person educated during the time of Section 28 which as an adult fuelled my motivation to promote, as a teacher, the LGBTQ+ inclusivity in primary schools that I did not experience growing up. Through critical reflection, I have become increasingly aware of how I have both actively disrupted and reinforced heteronormativity within my own practice both as a primary school teacher and as a university lecturer and researcher. Moreover, I felt a bond with the participants having experienced similar challenges and success. I am mindful of positioning myself as either an insider or outsider within the research as this may reduce complexities to generalities (Holmes, 2020). I prefer to understand this process as a 'continuum with multiple dimensions' (Mercer, 2007: 1) which shifts over time. Accordingly, my proximity to the participants and the subject matter did help me in asking more meaningful questions and sharing my own experience of this work with participants may have elicited more 'honest' answers. However, there are clear challenges posed by my proximity to the area of study (Kusow, 2003) like my being inherently sympathetic to the participants and unknowingly biased. Therefore, it was important for me to critically reflect upon and clarify my positionality within the research and remain mindful of how my proximity to the subject of the research was impacting data collection and interpretation. Consequently, during interviews, I kept my gaze fixed on what was said (Gadamer, 1979) and during analysis I read the transcripts several times looking for examples of heteronormative language and ways it could be affecting their actions, values and beliefs. Evidently, it is impossible to enter the thoughts directly of the participants and to understand explicitly their conscious and unconscious beliefs. However, the best way to capture instances of implicit bias was to look for moments of speech that were in opposition to

their expressed motivations to disrupt heteronormativity, this meant careful attention to unusual word choice, repetition and their interpretations of their experience. Data was coded and three main themes emerged; the discourse of appropriate provision, concern with promoting an agenda and the negotiation of double consciousness. What follows are the research findings followed by a discussion and recommendations.

Findings

Internalised heteronormative discourse

Several teachers wrestled with notions of the 'appropriateness' of educating primary aged children about LGBTQ+ inclusivity. These concerns were often in relation to direct comments from parents 'They just said it was inappropriate to be teaching their children' (Sophie) and colleagues who had questioned the work, 'Should we be teaching this?' (Sarah). For Sophie, the concept of appropriate provision was at the forefront of how she described the provision provided at school:

> To make it appropriate for reception children all the way through to year six, so that everyone could access something but it was to an appropriate level. . . so obviously, we weren't going to reception and going into detail about the terminology of different things, you know we. . . as educators. . . know what is appropriate.

A similar vigilance to what might be considered 'appropriate' to teach young children was recounted by Olivia sharing a story about two male penguins who adopt a baby penguin:

> I remember the first time we watched *And Tango Makes Three (Richardson and Parnell, 2007)* me and my teaching assistant being more like, 'Huuuh' [worried about their reaction] and all the kids just watching it and not caring and we were all like waiting for a reaction. we were like, 'Ahhh hear it comes, we have got to be ready!'

Here Olivia and her colleague anticipate a potentially negative reaction from the children in engaging with material about same-sex parents and are surprised when it does not materialise. Furthermore, there was a sense amongst some participants that certain words related to the LGBTQ+ community were appropriate to share with children at different ages:

> We had an LGBT week and because it was the first time we were teaching it, it was about the different terminology and what different words mean. When it should be appropriate to use different words. (Stephanie)

Stephanie envisages a hierarchy to terminology related to gender and sexuality and when it should be used with children to potentially avoid confusion.

This was not the case with all teachers, John who had encountered conflict from a parent around his sexuality but was supported by wider school staff and parents, describes using LGBTQ+ terms and themes with children all throughout their schooling from reception to year six:

> Every Monday, I run worship anyway as part of my job as deputy head. We introduce themes, whether it be geography, history, global, we introduce a theme, talk about it. What it means to be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual this is right from children who are small, five years old, right up to year six we use all that language all the way through.

And Nicole was mindful of terminology and language but was conscious that it did not inhibit her from getting her LGBTQ+ inclusivity message across to her students:

> Working in schools we are a safe environment where we can make those mistakes [using the wrong gender and sexual orientation language and terminology]. So, yes, you do have to think about the correct language and the correct terminology, but if they are going to make mistakes it is much better to do it in the school environment where we can teach rather than outside in society.

Whilst Nicole is keen not to feel constrained by mistaken uses of gender and sexuality terminology other participants were hypervigilant about the language they use and its perceived impact in the school and classroom:

> Their biggest issue with the whole thing [educating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity] is, 'What am I saying? Am I saying the right thing? Am I creating more misconceptions? Am I saying something that is illegal?' Which seems to be a big, big concern (Stephanie),

There was an anticipation that parents would be offended by the terminology used:

> I mean if I get this wrong and then they go home and their parents come in raging at me because of what I have said.

Aside from considerations of 'appropriate' provision, Sophie's account of a serious case of homophobic bullying, which resulted in some children being excluded from the school illustrated how heteronormative discourse characterised her understanding of events:

> We did have quite a bad case of homophobic bullying and it was when the Head had just taken over. He had to deal with it and he had to exclude some students because of it. . . because we had a boy in year six who was quite errm. . . quite a character, you know, he was overly dramatic and we had a group of boys, all your typical sporty boys errm. . . who used to pick on him.

Sophie is keen to challenge homophobic bullying but the way she characterises the victim as 'quite a character' and 'over dramatic' insinuates campiness or femininity in his behaviour. Contrast this with the antagonists as a group of 'your typical sporty boys' which implies that their behaviour is normal (typical) and that by transgressing gender norms the victim was 'asking for it'.

Having an 'agenda'

Some of teachers who identified as gay and genderqueer shared concern that their inclusivity work may mean them being accused of pushing an 'agenda'. A concept introduced by the Christian religious right concerned with efforts to change law and policy on LGBTQ+ rights and recruit and or convert children and adults to homosexuality (Herman, 1997). Alexander explained his difficulty in actualising his work and defending it with parents:

> I do feel like especially at school and kind of for the lack of a better word, the clientele of our parents, it would look as if I am pushing an agenda, I would find it quite uncomfortable but I haven't had it personally but I would find it very uncomfortable having a conversation where they were challenging the teaching of LGBT and for me to stand up for it as it could be labelled as me trying to push an agenda. I would think if I was straight, I would find it easier to justify my opinion and actions in that respect because it would come from a neutral perspective.

The perceived threat of being accused of pushing an 'agenda' did not solely affect the gay and genderqueer teachers and two of the heterosexual participants described how not being a member of the LGBTQ+ community exempted them from hypothetically being accused of pushing such an 'agenda' Petra describes how:

> When I'm suggesting policy changes I think if I was a different sexuality and identified and was openly gay, I think I would imagine I would come up against some backlash because people would possibly think that I was trying to put forward my own agenda just because of how some people view it [LGBTQ+ inclusive education] . . . so I suppose I find it easier.

Additionally, Sophie describes how through a conversation with a gay colleague who had been accused of having an 'agenda' she feels that LGBTQ+ inclusive work might be easier to accept if it came from heterosexual teachers rather than LGBTQ+ teachers:

> Because so for me obviously for me saying it, coming from my perspective I think it is easier for the parent to kind of go, 'Oh ok. She just wants everyone to get on'. The agenda thing . . . I think he is maybe sensitive of it and because he has had that bad experience.

Their experience reflected a theme that LGBTQ+ inclusive work was potentially more difficult for LGBTQ+ teachers to enact, as they experienced the added complexity of reconciling their LGBTQ+ selves and their teacher selves.

Experiencing double consciousness

Reconciling these two selves meant participants experiencing a form of 'double consciousness' whereby an oppressed group must develop a sense of self whilst also being aware of how they are seen through the eyes of the oppressor. The term 'double consciousness' was coined by Du Bois (1903) and originally created to understand the experience of Black Americans in the early 20th century. Double consciousness can be applied to LGBTQ+ teachers who are aware that their identities in classrooms are contested by some elements of wider society. This inner contradiction manifested in how the gay and genderqueer participants spoke about their identities. Whilst Charlie was out to his students and even brought his partner in to the classroom to teach Science with his year six children, this wasn't the case for the other gay participants. Alexander explained how:

> I would never go into a classroom now or in the future and say, 'Ok you said that but one day I would like to find myself with a husband', I would never do those conversations as I don't think that's appropriate.

For Alexander, there is a clear separation from his private life and his school life which impacts the kinds of conversations and relationship he has with his pupils. Charlie also exhibited his own regulation of his sexuality even though he is open to both staff and students about being gay:

> I wouldn't class myself as a particularly gay acting person in the sense of being particularly camp and those sorts of things and it's not the first thing I say when I introduce myself to people, I am very open with it. On the other hand, I am not someone who would rub it in their faces and talk about it all the time and never get off my high horse about it, it is just a part of me.

Charlie is keen to move past his sexuality as a topic of discussion and expresses an understandable desire to be accepted for who he is rather than being reduced to one characteristic of his identity.

For John, the road to acceptance from the wider school community was more difficult and complicated by his appearance, 'I paint my nails or wear make-up sometimes. I refuse to wear a suit to work'. John described how:

> The older I get the more I realise that actually . . . errrm I actually do think that a lot of parents value me just as a teacher as opposed to having to personalise any of their views on my identity and I feel that, I am hoping that, quite a lot of parents can actually just, regardless of their own views. . . just see through that [looking beyond being a 'genderqueer' teacher].

After experiencing homophobic abuse from a parent several years ago, an example of how queer bodies can be targets of bullying and violence in educational spaces (Francis, 2021), John now takes a more hopeful view of the parental community and in contrast to some of the other participants anticipates acceptance rather than conflict.

Discussion

The participants expressed their concern of the appropriateness of their LGBTQ+ provision often in relation to encounters with parents who had openly disagreed with this work being carried out in their schools. The discourse of appropriateness stems from the hetero/homo binary which privileges heterosexuality at the expense of the 'deviant' other (Donelson and Rogers, 2004). The panoptic nature of these discourses can be so all-pervasive that they subtly impact how teachers think about their LGBTQ+ inclusivity work even whilst they are advocating for it. These discourses perpetuate the idea that talking about LGBTQ+ people with children is problematic, difficult and dangerous. It is important to note that concern around 'difficult' topics extends beyond issues of gender and sexuality to cover race and racism with Pellegrino et al. (2019) and Chang-Bacon (2022) finding that even with ample resources and support teachers are still largely evasive of topics related to race and racism.

Their experience reflects how supposedly controversial issues (Richardson, 1986), including those related to sexuality and gender (Elia, 2000) are subjected to vigilant monitoring by the expert and public. These controversies are concerned with what Richardson (1986: 27) details as 'different opinions, values and priorities, and, basically and essentially, with different material interests'. They are the subject of vocal public discussion about what is considered 'right, permissible, acceptable, and healthy, and what is not' (Čeplak, 2013: 164). And whilst attitudes towards gender and sexuality have become more progressive (Nussbaum, 2018), hysteria over same-sex relationships has died down in many (but not all) schools with 82% of 1001 parents questioned by the charity Just Like Us (2022) supporting LGBT education and learning about LGBTQ+ . However, the same desire to deem what is appropriate now focuses increasingly around children learning about gender identity and transgender rights.

On an intellectual level, Sophie and Olivia know that this work is necessary to help young people understand that LGBTQ+ people exist in society and can help erase feelings of stigma, shame and guilt about non-heterosexual identities. However, they are drawn into a state of surveillance where they become hypervigilant about the 'appropriateness' of their teaching. A heightened feeling of surveillance accompanied by a lack of critical reflection upon the influence of these discourse renders them unable to work effectively as professionals (Perryman, 2006) in alignment with their ideals and values. Unconsciously, they are affected by what Giroux (1996) refers to as a 'Walt Disneyfication' of school culture whereby students must be sheltered from the real world and injustice which deprives them of opportunities for developing empathy and an understanding of the world and how to change it. Ultimately, as Olivia found in the

children's reactions, it was rare that the children had a problem with, for example, hearing stories featuring same-sex parents and rather the adults are the ones projecting a sense of apprehension and uncertainty.

Sophie and Olivia's examples highlight how the panopticon of heteronormativity impacts what they can and cannot say in a classroom even within schools where LGBTQ+ inclusive work is supported and promoted by the school leadership and with support from most staff and parents. Consequently, they 'agentively participate in their own surveillance' (Page, 2018: 385) imagining the perceived gaze of hypothetical disapproving parents and police themselves accordingly even when the majority of parents support this work (Just Like Us, 2022). To counteract this, teachers must critically grapple with their own internal conversations (Archer, 2003) and ask if they align with their intentions to embed LGBTQ+ inclusivity or with panoptic heteronormativity which aims to fix into place the universal, timeless nature of heterosexuality, the family and typical gender roles (Dowson, 2009). Evidently, whilst most of the teachers did at some point experience some resistance towards their work, a wider perspective is necessary and the considerations of a minority of vocal parents need to not take precedence over the supportive majority and the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, LGBTQ+ friends and family, and the children within their care with same-sex parents who derive enormous value from inclusivity education.

Nicole and John's experience contrasts with Sophie and Olivia's. John's experience suggests a peace made with the vocal minority and a focus on wider values of inclusivity and acceptance. John describes speaking plainly about LGBTQ+ people and themes with children of all ages and lacks the hypervigilance displayed by Sophie and Olivia. Perhaps having experienced conflict with parents around his non-normative representation of masculinity in school and being supported by parents and teachers, John feels more confident knowing it is a small minority who disapprove of him and his work which is otherwise widely supported by the quiet majority. Nicole demonstrates an active resistance to the tools of panopticism (Proudfoot, 2021) as she clearly grasps how language and terminology act as barriers to inhibit this work even beginning and instead implores teachers to move beyond their concerns about offending someone to reconceptualise school as a safe space to learn acceptance and respect for diversity before entering wider society as adults.

A further regulating discourse of the panopticon of heteronormativity is the perceived idea that LGBTQ+ people are pushing 'an agenda' (Herman, 1997) to turn children gay and dismantle the nuclear family (Walton, 2014). The discourse is ultimately one of suspicion, a suspicion around what happens within the classroom, a suspicion of the influence of teachers over children. No one explicitly states what the agenda is, or details accounts of being accused of having 'an agenda'. However, the power of the panopticon of heteronormativity is such that there is an embedded collective understanding of this agenda being out there which must be considered each time LGBTQ+ lives enter the classroom in a way that no teacher is ever fearful of promoting a 'straight agenda' when reading 'Sleeping Beauty' or 'Cinderella'. Concurrent with Bi's (2020) research into the Trojan Horse affair, the teachers were susceptible to the permeation of wider public opinion and discourses into the school and classroom impacting what and how they taught.

Evidently, this discourse affects the gay and genderqueer participants and heterosexual participants in different ways. Alexander hypothesises that if he were straight his LGBTQ+ inclusivity work would be easier as he would be teaching from a 'neutral position' which he believes would nullify hypothetical accusations of having an agenda. Petra and Sophie both understand the wider discourse around the 'LGBTQ+ agenda' and imagine their (hetero)sexuality facilitates LGBTQ+ inclusivity work as their motivations are 'purer' around wanting 'everyone to get on'. Whereas the

unstated assumption here is that when this work is enacted by an LGBTQ+ teacher there are more subversive aims at play. The question becomes can teachers teach from a 'neutral position?' Nieto (2006) argues that teaching is political work and issues of power and privilege saturate the school through the layout of the building down to the design and choices made around the knowledge taught within the curriculum. Instead, teachers should be encouraged to embrace the inherently political nature of teaching and feel confident defending their pedagogical choices in terms of how they tackle inequality and foster empowerment and social justice in the classroom. This would evidently entail a shift away from accountability and attainment cultures which have neglected the socio-political and economic factors which shape children's lived experience.

Throughout the data collection, it became clear that the panopticon of heteronormativity affected the gay and genderqueer identifying teachers in different ways compared to their heterosexual colleagues. The gay and genderqueer participants constantly make choices around the parts of their identity that they share in school. For example, Alexander refusing to discuss a hypothetical husband with his pupils to Charlie not wanting to 'rub' his sexuality in the faces of his colleagues. This becomes a form of 'panoptic performativity' (Perryman, 2006) where LGBTQ+ teachers potentially experience pressure to play the role of the de-sexed, nonthreatening, 'good' gay teacher, an identity which potentially comes with a constant self-policing of language and behaviour in fear of imagined consequences (Goldstein, 2004).

Interestingly, Alexander advocates and educates for LGBTQ+ inclusivity but deems his own sexuality inappropriate for the classroom. He appears to exhibit a double-consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) whereby he arguably constructs elements of his sense of self through the eyes of the oppressor. It could be argued that Alexander's panoptic self-regulation makes him complicit in his own subordination (Bushnell, 2003) colluding in his own invisibility (Patai, 1992). On the other hand, the decision to reveal one's sexuality is a personal one fraught with complexity (Gray, 2013) no doubt informed by extensive homophobic bullying he detailed having experienced in his own schooling. Evidently, teachers are entitled to boundaries between their public and private lives and whilst no teacher should feel obliged to discuss their sexuality or relationship status, DePalma and Atkinson (2009) remind us that what is worth Alexander, and other teachers in his position, considering is how much children benefit from the openness of LGBTQ+ role models in the classroom and the hope and reassurance their visibility can provide.

Meanwhile, Charlie responds to a common trope that gay people want to 'rub people's face in it' or flaunt their sexuality and must thus appear 'acceptably gay' (Gray, 2013: 707) which reinforces how heteronormativity categorises the other as deviant and provocative. Instead what Charlie does is 'tone down' his sexuality to make it safer for public consumption (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009). Charlie's words could be read as endorsing heteronormative values or they could be viewed as a strategy to help him effectuate his LGBTQ+ inclusivity work as Bandura (2001: 8) highlights how:

> Agents are not only planners and fore thinkers. They are also self-regulators. Individuals manage their behaviour by self-sanctions within a self-governing system. They do so by adopting behavioural standards against which they evaluate their performances. They respond with positive or negative evaluative self-reactions depending on how well their behaviour measures up to their adopted standards.

Charlie is aware of the difficulty of this work and perhaps tactically adopts a toned-down approach to his own sexuality to help ensure the implementation of his LGBTQ+ inclusivity work and if that includes some (perhaps temporary) regulation of his own sexuality that is a sacrifice he is willing to make to actualise his goals.

It is important to consider that self-identities are not fixed and that a sense of self develops over time (Elliott, 2007), the selves participants shared in this research offer a snapshot of a feeling, a reaction in time and the recollection of which may shift with new narratives of self-emerging with the accumulation of new knowledge and critical reflection (Lutovac, 2020).

Conclusion and recommendations

This article has attempted to illustrate how even those teachers most committed to educating for LGBTQ+ inclusivity are not immune to the subtle effects of the panopticon of heteronormativity which impacts the provision they provide to their students as well as how they come to understand their teacher identities. How then can teachers escape panoptic self-surveillance? Firstly, teachers must become more aware of the subtle ways heteronormativity impacts their speech, actions and values in the classroom otherwise they will continue to transmit messages which reinforce heteronormativity and marginalise LGBTQ+ identities. This is vitally important as children learn behaviour through modelling the language, actions and values of those around them (Bandura, 1977) and are particularly impressionable at primary age as their opinions and beliefs about others are crystallising (Isaacs and Bearison, 1986). Additionally, adequate training is needed for teachers to explore how implicit heteronormative bias manifests and impacts their thoughts and values. Once they are trained to spot their assumptions they can set them aside and consider their experience in new and unfamiliar ways (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). A simple starting point could be for teachers planning lessons to ask in what way is this lesson promoting heteronormativity? In what way is it disrupting it? And how would this lesson be interpreted by a member of the LGBTQ+ youth? Additionally, teachers must consider the needs of the LGBTQ+ community, same-sex parents and the majority of parents who support LGBTQ+ inclusive education over the vocal minority opposing this work. Repeated consideration of counter-hegemonic messages can help to replace outdated perspectives (Fiarman, 2016). Over time this may make it easier for LGBTQ+ teachers to reconcile contradictions experienced by their identities as LGBTQ+ people and teachers within the classroom. Evidently this research was limited by its sample size and cannot offer generalisations. Further research can be carried out to incorporate the experiences of lesbian, bisexual and trans identifying teachers and to explore how intersections of race and class impact teacher intentions to disrupt heteronormativity in primary schools.

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Note

1. Richardson, J. (2015) *And Tango Makes Three*. Little Simon. A children's book based on the true story of two male penguins in a New York zoo who adopted and raised an abandoned egg/chick.

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