Heteronormativity: School, ideology, and politics

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Abstract: This article analyzes discomfort about sexuality expressed in formal education. It draws on Foucault's analysis of sexuality as a privileged object of biopolitics (the object of regulation, surveillance, and discipline) and the most instrumentalized element in power relations in the Western world. Related to this is also the pedagogization of child sexuality, which even today is still characterized by ambiguities and discomfort. The author concludes that silence about non-hetero-sexualities and the biomedicalization and physicalization of (homo)sexuality are the most common and obvious symptoms of discomfort about (homo)sexuality in Slovenian schools. These manners of treating sexuality are usually interpreted as neutral, but the author interprets them as strategies of conflict avoidance which in fact support a heteronormative social order and (implicitly or explicitly) even legitimize the exclusion of all who cross the boundaries of 'normal heterosexuality'. They strengthen prejudice, motivate ignorance, and can even be used as an excuse for violence. The article points out that education does not provide a magic formula since it cannot foresee its own effects due to the complexity of social relations and the nature of the education process (e.g. Millot, 1983).

Key words: sexuality, gender / sexual norms, heteronormativity, discomfort, school, education

Introduction

Sexuality is placed "at the pivot of the two axes along which developed the entire political technology of life" (Foucault, 1978, p. 145): disciplining of the body and regulating of the population. As Foucault (1978) points out, disciplining of the body and regulating of the population are the primary axes along which a new form of control was exerted in western societies from the end of the 18th century on: power over life. From that time on sexua-

lity has been the most instrumentalized element in power relations in the Western world (1978, p. 103), the privileged object of biopolitics, therefore the object of regulation, surveillance, and discipline. Birth control, political control and economic regulation through moralization: organization of the “conventional” family and juridical and medical control of “perversions” and “perverts” are the mechanisms that have been used since then in the name of “a general protection of society and the race” (1978, p. 122), of the biological existence of a population.

The technology of power that at first was focused on alliance, i.e. on a system of marriage, kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions, also spread to “sexuality”, i.e. desires and all other “insinuations of the flesh” (Foucault, 1978, p. 19). It is just this deployment of sexuality that “engenders a continual extension of areas and forms of control” (1978, p. 106). While the severity of the codes relating to sexual offenses diminished considerably in the 19th century, agencies of control and mechanisms of surveillance multiplied. *Scientia sexualis*, as Foucault calls procedures for producing the “truths” of sex(uality), characteristic of Western civilization from the end of the 18th century onward, with its diagnostic, prognostic and normative knowledge, establishes standards of “(ab)normality”, among which a special place is occupied by the distinction between “natural” (“regular”) (which are not always so) and “unnatural” (“peripheral”) sexualities. Namely, according to Foucault, before the end of the 18th century “unnatural” was only perceived as a form of “acts against the law”. The “service” of *Scientia sexualis* is that it multiplies “unnatural”, “peripheral” sexualities and subjects them to medical, psychiatric and psychological control and scrutiny in addition to criminal prosecution: psychiatrization of perverse pleasure, hysterization of women’s bodies, socialization of procreative behavior, and pedagogization of children’s sexuality are all form specific mechanisms of knowledge and power. The medicalization and psychiatrization of pleasure under the guise of science iterate moral norms, construct sexual “perverts” and sexual “perverseness” as a matter of pathological personality, and establish a classificatory system through which sexual behavior is controlled, stimulated, rewarded, punished. Heterosexual monogamy perhaps becomes an even stricter norm than it was before “the discursive explosion of the eighteen and nineteenth centuries,” but quieter: a privileged object of scrutiny has become “the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; the sensuality of those who did not like the opposite sex; reveries, obsessions, petty manias, or great transports of rage” (Foucault, 1978, p. 38-39), and “the body, sensation, the nature of pleasure, the more secret forms of enjoyment or acquiescence” (1978, p. 106). All this is a constant threat to the family and its heterosexual foundations and the health of the

entire population (according to the theory of degeneration), while the family itself is seen as a potential source of evil. The “discovery” of children’s sexuality, which is simultaneously treated as both “natural” and “contrary to nature”, precious and dangerous, for example highlights the issue of the “necessity” for the pedagogization of children’s sexuality (at first primarily in the struggle against onanism), which includes “innumerable institutional devices and discursive strategies” (1978, p. 30) around the sexuality of children and adolescents (ways of speaking about sex were of course carefully selected, controlled, and hierarchized), normification of sexual development, careful description of all the possible deviations, constant surveillance, expert assistance to parents; through pedagogy, as well as through medicine and economics, sex became a concern of the state (1978, p. 116)

In the 20th century, the pedagogization of children’s sexuality did not go away, even though “a good many of the taboos that weighed on the sexuality of children were lifted” (Foucault 1978, p. 15). Some old ambiguities perhaps lost their significance, but some were preserved and new ones arose, associated with the tensions between general principles of equality on the one hand and the tendency to preserve the heteronormative order on the other; between the imperative of individual pleasure and the imperative of the welfare of the population (or nation, race); between the treatment of sex as something valuable and something dangerous; between intimacy and the imperative to talk constantly about it. Schools and educational institutions in addition to the family are a crucial place where, through the mediation of controlled knowledge about facts and worthiness, conscious and unconscious processes of reproduction and naturalization of a heteronormative symbolic order and processes of constructing individuals as gendered and sexualized subjects unfold. School, in particular compulsory primary school, according to Althusser (1980), is the number one *ideological state apparatus*, i.e. the institution in which due to its critical role in reproducing the social order control over the knowledge and the manners of its transfer is extremely “attentive”. “Controversial” issues, among which certainly belong sexuality and gender dichotomies (see e.g. Elia, 2000) are especially subjected to vigilant monitoring by the expert and lay public. Contested subjects on which society is divided are characterized as “controversial”; according to Richardson (1986, p. 27), controversies have to do with “different opinions, values and priorities, and, basically and essentially, with different material interests.” They are the subject of rancorous public discussion about what is right, permissible, acceptable, and healthy, and what is not.

This article is based on the premise that can be derived from Foucault’s conceptualization of disciplinary institutions and power relations as well as from Althusser’s (1980) analysis of ideology and *ideological state ap-*

paratus: that school is simultaneously one of the spaces of reproduction of power relations and domination as well as of resistance against them. It is the space where contradictory “truths” and opinions about sexuality (and gender) are (implicitly or explicitly) expressed – from moral condemnations of sexual behavior which diverges from dominant sexual and gender norms to the deconstruction of self-evident norms whose short-term aim is the reduction of sexual stigma and prejudices and the creation of a safe environment for their victims. We assume that heteronormativity¹ is a general, poorly reflected and at the same time powerfully protected and defended ideological basis which, despite its deeply taken for granted status, is not completely resistant to alternative gender and sexual norms. We further postulate that contradictory sexual and gender norms create a more or less hidden discomfort: in addition to being indicators and symptoms of heteronormativity they are the very origins, symptoms and methods of resolving discomfort about sexuality, above all discomfort about same sex orientation in syllabuses and teaching practices in *primary schooling* in Slovenia, the central topic of the article. In this context we critically analyze the content of the interdisciplinary curricular area Education for Health for primary schools, prepared by the National Education Institute (2004), and we also rely on data from analyses of syllabuses and textbooks for primary school and the attitude of pupils and teachers towards the teaching of content relating to sexual and gender norms. For a better understanding of the ideological context we describe key political dilemmas and conflicts associated with the principle of equality regardless of sexual orientation, and controversies in the legal regulation of the rights of gays and lesbians.

School and its Contradictions and Ambivalence

According to Althusser (1980, p. 43), school is the central ideological state apparatus which “teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure *subjection to the ruling ideology* or the mastery of its ‘practice’”; it is a privileged place for constant examination, surveillance, and normalizing judgment, which are elements of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1984); it is an institution of

¹ The concept of heteronormativity refers to gender and sexual norms arising from a binary sexual division: it assumes the division of people into two separate, complementary genders, each of which has specific social and biological roles; heterosexuality in accordance with this is regarded as the only normal gender/sexual orientation, and a union between so-called biological gender, gender identity, and gender roles appears natural and self-evident (e.g. Plummer, 1992). In so doing it communicates the message that heteronormativity assumes two biologically defined genders on which gender identity is directly dependent, and this gender identity is prescribed unequivocal gender roles by heteronormativity.

power that maintains relations of domination (Foucault, 1978, p. 140); the educational system is one of the key institutions which shapes, trains “good citizens”, i.e. self-reliant, self-respectful, versatile (Lasch, 1979).

Althusser's (1980) conceptualization of school as the number one ideological apparatus of the state explains its central role in social (re)production and in subjectivization processes, as a result of which it is the subject of numerous conflicting theorizations, public and private speeches, ideological and especially political battles. With the introduction of compulsory primary education, schooling in western countries in the 19th century occupied a leading position among ideological apparatuses whose function is the reproduction of “capitalist relations of exploitation”, since these relations are presented to children very early on as self-evident. However, that does not mean that the state apparatus or the ministries in charge control absolutely and manage everything that happens in school. These institutions are themselves exposed to the constant pressure of various social groups which address conflicting demands to education authorities, and usually no single one of these has explicit dominance (Štrajn, 1994). Or as Althusser (1980) says – the ideology of the ruling class can only be realized as the ruling ideology through conflict within the ideological apparatuses, and always has to do with resistance; results are not clear in advance. Althusser thus regards resistance similarly to the way Foucault (1984) does – as a side effect of every authority, as something which escapes its intentions and control. It is this unpredictability which continually triggers new (old) arguments over the socialization function of schooling. Foucault's attitude towards schooling also draws attention to the contradictory role of schools in the (re)production of power relations – it is true that school is treated by him as a disciplinary institution, but he never fought for its abolition, since this would mean the “unschooling” of society (Baskar, 1986). Foucault (2007a, p. 257) in reference to the pedagogical institution even explicitly maintained that he does not understand what is wrong in the actions of someone who in a given game of truth knows more than someone else and teaches that other person, imparting knowledge and techniques: what is dangerous are the dominating effects, i.e. the arbitrary and unnecessary subordination of the student to the teacher/professor.

For this reason Apple (1995) emphasizes contradictoriness as a fundamental characteristic of school and the educational system, and also emphasizes its relative autonomy. Contradiction or contradictoriness is a key concept of his critique of the assumptions regarding simple causal relations between school and the macro system, and at the same time also a critique of postmodernist and poststructuralist conceptions which neglect the structural dynamic and marginalize the significance of class, racial, and ethnic belonging and of gender, and argue in favor of a radical relativism.

Formal and informal education do indeed bear a significant portion of the responsibility for the reproduction of subordinating relations which are tied to class, ethnicity, and “racial” membership as well as gender and sexual orientation. It has an influence on the child’s value system already with the selection of facts which it mediates, and with the implicit value judgments about them, but with the discovery of conditions, mechanisms and consequences of discriminatory praxes it can deconstruct its effects and facilitate resistance against the hegemonic ideology. Therefore, school is not a “mirror image” of “macrocosmos” (it does not simply reproduce the ruling ideology and inequality); neither does it directly influence changes in the macrocosmos. Milner (1992, p. 30) notes that high expectations of these other assumptions lead to disappointments, and one of the effects of these disappointments are efforts to reform school so that it becomes a “consolatory space”, which reformers wish to distinguish from the rough outside world and change into an egalitarian and absolutely democratic community, where the truth about a child will prevail and ensure a happy childhood. In this way analyses of school praxes and their effects—what and how we learn in school, what is rewarded and what is punished, how to cooperate in the construction of identity, how we are made into subjects—without a simultaneous analysis of educational policies and the ruling ideology (and competing ideologies) frequently turn into condemnation of (or praise for) the direct participants of educational praxes: pupils, their parents, and teachers.

The crucial sources of the ambivalence that characterizes the attitude towards sexual education are ingrained heteronormativity and (fragile) belief in the existence of unequivocal binary gender differences and in stable gendered subjectivity (e.g. Butler, 1990) on the one hand and a declarative democratic principle of equality on the other. Each erotic, loving, sexual relationship between individuals of the same sex, and even nonheterosexual desire itself, threaten existing power relations based on gender and sexuality; at the same time insistence on heteronormativity, which reproduces discrimination and stigmatization based on sexual orientation, violates the democratic principle of equality. Democratic societies on the one hand strive to uphold the norm of tolerance and even equality, but on the other they are based on various forms of discrimination, which implicitly justify hate, as noted by Adorno et al. (1950). In the social regulation of sexuality the contradiction of social norms is expressed for example in the relations between the general political principle of equality and the legal provisions of the relevant laws and/or even between (liberal) legislation and (exclusionary) dominant mores. Namely, according to Foucault (2007a, p. 121), sexuality is one of the fields in which the dominant morality is a more effective instrument of control than the law. Legislation, for example, guarantees sexual rights

to individuals but the practices of everyday life restrict, violate, and ignore them. In his analysis of human rights in Europe, Graupner (2005, p. 125) even finds that “human rights tribunals more often follow the attitudes of the majority rather than apply the core task of human rights, which is to protect the individual and minorities against unjustified interference by the majority”. That ambivalence is also expressed in the attitude towards individuals. Those who break basic social norms commonly serve as scapegoats in political battles and in private, personal encounters with powerlessness and uncertainty, or they are perceived as victims of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980)². Or, as the findings of a study by Franklin (1998) on the psychosocial motivation of hate crimes show, violence against gays is perceived as legitimate—as a demonstration of masculinity and adherence to sexual stereotypes—even as it is regarded as the intolerable violation of basic civil norms. That is the reason for the vehement opposition to emancipation movements and alternative educational programs, for the discomfort which is expressed through ambivalent and contradictory beliefs, feelings, and discourses on sexuality in school (and elsewhere).

As already noted, educational content relating to sexuality is the subject of ideological conflicts, opposing opinions, beliefs, values, priorities, (material) interests. For this reason teachers who provide instruction on it are especially subjected to control – all the more so if the educational system, education and school authorities allow them autonomy. A good example is Jose’s (1999) analysis of discussions on sex education in the school curriculum in South Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. He shows how the Australian Education Department gave in to the demands of an Australian organization dedicated to upholding Christian values and moral standards for the “moral integrity” of teachers. Specifically, this organization stressed that the “education program should emphasize above all else family life and the values of chastity and fidelity”. This could apparently only be realized with the participation of experienced teachers who “should have ‘demonstrably stable and happy marriage’ and, ideally, should themselves have children of their own.” And the Education Department, as Jose notes, “basically agreed with the principles of maturity and marital stability.” Those who favor close supervision of teachers know (intuitively or because, for example, they are familiar with psychoanalytical theories of identification) how important a role the teacher has in educational process; they have at

² According to Rich, the term “compulsory heterosexuality” refers to the critique of heterosexuality as an institution; as a default, required or even obligatory sexual orientation, compulsory heterosexuality among other things is also expressed as an expectation, an assumption of the individual’s heterosexuality. It is the basis for institutionalized inequality between heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals, between men and women.

least indefinite feeling that knowledge is transmitted by the explicit and implicit or hidden curriculum. The teacher can transfer the educational content in keeping with the syllabus, but the educational effects are achieved through unconscious mechanisms of identification (Millot, 1983). This uncertainty strengthens the tendency towards supervision and the demand for the selection of teachers based on their “moral impeccability”. It could be said that supervision and selection give illusory support to certainty in uncertain circumstances, since even intense supervision and “careful” selection can spur unpredictable effects on pupils –in fact, they can be even opposite to those desired, if they do not identify with the teacher.

In order to more easily understand the dilemmas relating to sex education which arise in Slovenia, below I describe current political debates on (in) *equality* regardless of *sexual orientation* (or gender identity). I focus primarily on the gap between (liberal) general principles and (conservative) specific legal provisions. This gap and the discomfort it arouses is also reflected in Slovenian legislation and in school curricula: as Apple (2000, p. 70) points out, education is “profoundly ethical and political by its very nature”.

Social/political Legitimization of Sexual Stigma and Sexual Prejudices

The gap between generally accepted liberal principles and the concretization of these principles, as the dominant sexual morality constantly demonstrates its power, indicates a deep ambivalence toward sexuality and sexual norms in Slovenia. This ambivalence itself is the result of a long-term political and social battle: on one side, in the name of political and social equality, there is a demand for the equal treatment of gays and lesbians while on the other the privileges of the heterosexual community (primarily married heterosexual couples and their biological children) are preserved in the name of the traditional order. Political and social conflicts between gay rights advocates and their neo-conservative opponents in Slovenia are part of a wider, more general political and ideological conflict that became visible at the end of 1980s. Namely, at that time neo-conservative groups (they gradually transformed in political parties) disseminated a discourse of threatened Slovene nation/national identity by the “remnants of the totalitarian regime” such as social, minority and women’s rights. They pleaded (and they still do) for restoration of traditional, “genuine” family values, including strong (heterosexual) marriage and strong, unified families, gendered social roles, restrictions on abortion legislation – i.e. restoration of “single ‘grand narrative’ of personal life” (Plummer, 2003, p.18). This traditional discourse was in sharp contrast with politics of feminist, gay and lesbian movements of

that time and even in with already existing “fragmentations, pluralizations, multiplicities” (ibid). of *intimate* lives and intimate relationships in Slovenia.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Slovenia decriminalized homosexuality in 1977 (i.e. still in the Yugoslav period), and a year later all records on homosexuals were destroyed (Kuhar, 2001, p. 86-87); the current Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (1991) guarantees equality regardless of personal circumstance, and the 1994 Criminal Code explicitly bans discrimination based on sexual orientation. The fact that the turnout at the Gay Pride Parade in Slovenia’s capital city is bigger each year, and groups which publicly advocate for the rights of the marginalized are becoming more numerous, are indicators that attitudes towards same-sex sexuality and sexual minorities are becoming more liberal.

Nevertheless, the limits of this liberalization became clear from discussions in 2001 regarding a law regulating artificial insemination and treatment of infertility. At a referendum called for by conservative political parties, the proposition that women without a male partner should also have access to artificial insemination was voted down, in the name of child welfare. In debates before the referendum, opponents of equality displayed their phantasms of how single women, and especially lesbians, threaten children and the Slovene nation generally with their “pathology” and lifestyles; the model of the two-parent heterosexual family was imposed as the only “natural” and “healthy” environment for children and as an essential condition for a happy childhood (from Transcript of the National Assembly session, 2001). Thus in Slovenia the current legislation gives access to artificial insemination only to women with a steady male partner, i.e. in a stable heterosexual relationship.

Conflicts between advocates and opponents of equal treatment have been further exacerbated by the treatment of the law on same-sex civil unions. In 2005, after almost two decades of effort on the part of pro-GLBT movements for the legalization of same-sex unions, the Parliament of the Republic of Slovenia adopted the Registration of a Same-Sex Civil Partnership Act. The Act regulates the conditions and procedures for registration and termination of registration, and imposes the obligation on partners to care for and support one another in times of illness, but it does not grant them the status of kin, and for this reason they cannot enjoy the same rights under social, health, pension and other types of insurance which are based on the status of kinship. Above all it does not regulate relationships with children. At the beginning of 2010, the new (“left-wing”) government coalition (2008 elections) introduced into Parliament a draft of the new Family Code based on the equal treatment of same-sex and heterosexual partnerships and families (at the symbolic as well as material levels); the first draft also anticipa-

ted making adoption of a child possible for same-sex couples. The Act was passed by Parliament, but the opposition called for a referendum because of the articles that would give a legal basis for the equality of different types of families and partnerships. Their campaign against the Family Code draft legislation began with the first debate in Parliament, in which the moral disqualification of lesbians and gays (and of the supporters of the proposal) was a common refrain—lesbians and gays were branded as “neurotic”, “confused”, “contaminated”, and incapable of long-term relationships, and some critics of equality even went so far as to attribute a tendency towards criminal acts of sexual abuse to gays. In order to maintain the appearance of objective rationality, some also made use of (mistaken and ill-intentioned) interpretations of research results and statistics which are not even relevant to the area that would be regulated by the family code. Among the “arguments” could even be found obvious lies, such as, for example, that the European Convention on the Adoption of Children does not allow adoption by same-sex couples (transcript of the parliamentary session, 2010). Ultimately, in March 2012 the Act was rejected in a referendum (with a *voter turnout* of 30.31%, of which 54.55% voted against the Act).

This example of the gap between liberal general principles and specific legal provisions indicates that the general principle of equality related to sexuality is merely an expression of liberal political correctness and liberal norm, i.e. an expression of liberal tolerance. Namely, “toleration is not the same thing as positive evaluation, approbation, or approval” (Fiala, 2004). It implicates a negative judgment about the entity, in our case about homosexuality, and can thus be interpreted as an expression of prejudice toward same-sex sexual orientation.³ Sexual prejudice and sexual stigma are elements of the ideology of heteronormativity and one of the cornerstones of a social order grounded in sex/gender binaries and compulsory heterosexuality. As soon as we move from general principles of equality to proposals which implement these principles and thereby undermine myths regarding

³ I use the concepts *sexual stigma* and *sexual prejudices* (instead of the concept of *homophobia*) as elements of the ideology of heterosexism and one of the cornerstones of a social order grounded in sex/gender binaries and compulsory heterosexuality: *sexual stigma* as societal negative regard for any non-heterosexual behaviour, identity, relationship, or community; *sexual prejudice* as individuals’ negative attitudes toward sexual orientation, i.e. internalization of structural stigma (Herek 2004; 2007; 2009). As Haslam (2009) puts it, prejudices are “collectively shared and organized phenomena, not individual pathologies,” not an exclusively psychological category. Namely, prejudices are pre-existing categories and they have a history which goes beyond individual lives. They are implicit or explicit moral judgments and have direct support in ideology, legislation, in unquestioned assumptions of scientific concepts and practices. They are the subject of rancorous public discussion about what is right, permissible, acceptable, and healthy, and what is not.

natural, moral, normal sexuality and gender dichotomy, we encounter criticisms regarding the “unacceptable promotion” of same-sex sexuality and hate speech labeling gays and lesbians as “social degenerates”, i.e. discourse that is, according to Foucault (1978, 2007b), closely connected with racism.

This demonstrates that there are at least three categories of powerful agents at work in the battles for and against equality regardless of sexual orientation: those who advocate complete equality regardless of sexual orientation; those who insist on maintaining heteronormativity; and those who advocate equality regardless of sexual orientation at the declarative level but for the sake of social peace and welfare of children call for “moderation” in the demands of (pro-)gay and (pro-)lesbian movements. The last group are predominantly silent or at best appeal primarily for tolerance. Based on the voter turnout for the referendum we can conclude that they had a decisive influence on the outcome: most of those who failed to take part likely belong to this category.

It is thus not surprising that in Slovenia silence is the most widespread “educational content” about (homo) sexuality – it could be considered as a strategy of conflict avoidance. I discuss this in more detail in the following section.

Heteronormativity in (Primary) School: Conflict Avoidance Strategies

The basic laws regulating (primary) education in Slovenia (the Organization and Financing of Education Act and the Elementary School Act) in their opening provisions explicitly state that one of the goals of education is to teach mutual tolerance, respect for diversity and cooperation with others, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to develop the ability to live in a democratic society. This goal as defined in this way among other things opens up possibilities for the deconstruction of heteronormativity, processes, and effects of stigmatization regarding sexual orientation and gender roles. This opportunity is further widened by an article of the Organizing and Financing in Education Act (which applies to all levels of education). Specifically, teachers are explicitly provided with partial professional autonomy and they are obligated to respect the law and “objectivity, critical thinking, and plurality.” As we will see below, in everyday school praxes these provisions of the law are revealed as one of the aspects of the responsabilization of teachers: the responsibility/burden of teaching of “ambiguous” and “controversial” content is placed on their shoulders.

Silence, Medicalization and (implicit) Heteronormativity

The main findings from analyses of primary (and even secondary) school syllabuses and textbooks in Slovenia, and empirical research among youth on how much and what kind of information about sexuality, sexual orientations, and associated rights they receive in school are that primary (and even secondary) school gives no or negligible attention to human sexuality (applicable especially to non-heterosexuality): it is in large part up to the teacher as to how the possibility for autonomy in the field relating to this topic is used (e.g. Komidar & Mandeljc, 2009; Kuhar et al., 2008, 2006; Magić, 2012; Maljevac & Magić, 2009; Pinter et al., 2006; Švab & Kuhar, 2005; Vončina, 2009;). At first glance this is a neutral position, enabling the constitutionally guaranteed rights of parents to bring up their children. However, more detailed analysis of primary (and even secondary) school syllabuses and textbooks in Slovenia shows how deeply heteronormativity is ingrained: in verbal and pictorial learning materials representations of heterosexual couples (representations of families, loving couples) (see Komidar & Mandeljc, 2009) and representations of individuals who can be identified unambiguously as male or female absolutely predominate.

It is not just that this apparent silence is not neutral – it is even dangerous. As Lipkin (1999, p. 230) points out, “mandated silence may prevent rational adult-led conversation, but it does not stop all utterance at the schoolhouse door”. Apparent silence about sexuality conveys (or even propagates) the message that heterosexuality is the only “normal” sexuality –by perpetuating gender dichotomy, through images of “typical” families and heterosexual relationships, through speech on sexuality purely in the context of “natural” biological reproduction or in contexts which are based on heterosexual relationships. These messages, based on common sense and/or scientific classifications that create a special map of hierarchised sex(ual) categories (e.g. Foucault, 1978, 1984), at least implicitly, support the image of same-sex relationships and the image of those who cultivate them as (morally) deviant or even pathological, thereby implicitly justifying violence against them. School is thus for many of those who impose the ideology of heteronormativity a dangerous place, as also shown by research on violence in schools (e.g. Elia, 2000; Kuhar et al., 2008; Magić, 2008; McKay & Bissell, 2010). In these circumstances silence about sexual diversity continuously subjects students to the heterosexual norms according to which they scrutinize and govern themselves – it functions as a strategy of normalization (e.g. Foucault, 1984).

Another strategy of conflict avoidance is a manifestation of *Scientia sexualis*: biomedicalization and physicalization (e.g. Elia, 2000; Foucault, 1978) of same-sex sexual orientation and of sexuality in general. This strategy also

at least implicitly supports a heteronormative social order: it is a common practice that the discussion of sexuality in biology lessons is limited primarily to biological reproduction, while talk of same-sex sexual orientation takes place in the context of sexually transmitted diseases (e.g. Komidar & Mandeljc, 2009; Magić, 2012). A specific case of implicit medicalization is a *proposal* for the interdisciplinary curricular area Education for Health for primary school, prepared by the Slovene National Education Institute (2004), which covers sex education as well. The placement of sex education under health care is itself symptomatic, since it implicitly medicalizes sexuality in general and presumes the danger, if not even outright harm, that sex poses for the individual and the population in general (e.g. Foucault, 1978). Sexuality is therefore (implicitly) treated as a health (and public) problem and not as a right.

Even more problematic is the fact that the proposed syllabus introduces the category “diverse forms of sexual behavior” (“peripheral” in Foucault’s words), in which “homosexuality, masochism, sadism, necrophilia, exhibitionism, transvestitism, voyeurism, fetishism, rape, incest, prostitution, pedophilia, sodomy, pornography” are classified together. What do all these “diverse forms of sexual behavior” have in common? That they are “unnatural”? “Abnormal”? “Immoral”? That they are not “normal heterosexual” practices? What, for example, does homosexuality, in contrast to heterosexuality (which this list does not explicitly mention), have in common with pedophilia and rape, i.e. with behaviors that involve the abuse of power, the use of force, bodily assault, coercion? Instead of categorizing sexual behavior and sexual practices based on criteria such as the abuse of power and use of force, the syllabus proposal assumes a norm which seems to be so self-evident and unambiguous as to not need a definition: “normal” is whatever is not included in “diverse forms of sexual behavior”. Choices, acts, and practices in the area of sexuality are really not absolute rights, but their boundaries should not be set by preconceived notions about the naturalness of sexual behavior, lofty goals relating to the preservation of the nation, etc. The acts and practices which are excluded from these rights are acts of violence and exploitation, acts in which there is an asymmetry in “maturity, behavior, and power” (Primorac, 2002, p. 209-210).

The categorization used in this syllabus proposal is all the more surprising given that one of the fundamental objectives cited in the program is respect for diversity. Thus its general premises do not reduce sexuality to biology, sexuality is not considered taboo, and sexual pleasure is affirmed. However, due to the categorization of sexual behaviors described, the liberal and alternative nature of this proposal is unconvincing: the proposal in fact endorses “self-evident” sexual norms, and in this way legitimizes stigma and

maintains the distance between “us”, the “normals”, and those whose sexual habits, pleasures, and behaviors are implicitly labeled as morally questionable and even criminal when they are placed in the same category as acts involving the abuse of power.

Another possibility exists that enables teachers and school authorities in Slovenia to open up the school space to emancipatory educational projects, thereby demonstrating their openness while at the same time at least partly protecting themselves against attacks by advocates of strict heteronormativity: cooperation with external educational organizations and societies. In Slovenia these are usually educational programs carried out by nongovernmental organizations in the form of workshops, which students attend voluntarily and free of charge. However, the response of schools is low: of 100 schools which were offered free workshops by Legebitra, a gay-lesbian nongovernmental, nonprofit organization, only eight accepted (Maljevac & Magić, 2009). The Association for Nonviolent Communication (2001) reports a similar experience: the administration of one of the Slovenian secondary schools for which the organization offers workshops on violence, discrimination, communication, and conflict resolution demanded that the Association cancel a two-hour workshop on homosexuality. The goal of this workshop was the deconstruction of myths about homosexuality, gender dichotomy, “natural”/“unnatural” sexuality, recognition of discrimination and exclusion, including their most hidden and invisible forms; the creation of safe places in school, the strengthening of a support network, and so on. The school administration required the Association to cancel the workshop on the grounds that parents would complain “that the school “encourages” homosexuality” (see the letter by the Association for Nonviolent Communication, 2001). In protest the Association terminated cooperation with this school.

Cautions about the ideological bias of silence and the medicalization of sexuality strongly relativize the seemingly convincing arguments in favor of silence and apparent neutrality: that sexuality is a personal matter; that outside school and school curricula there is an adequate supply of information on sexuality; that opening up a discussion about the problem of sexual norms will also open up the unambiguous and explicit expression of aversion to all those who “violate” the norms of “normal”, “natural”, “healthy”; the risk of transferring political struggles to the school arena. It seems reasonable to draw attention to the rational core of this last argument: it finds strong support in the harsh responses from defenders of strict heteronormativity to the political initiatives for legislation that would consistently uphold the principle of equality regardless of sexual orientation that we wrote about at the beginning of this article. A typical example of how political

conflicts are transferred to the school space is the response to the mentioned workshops on human rights conducted by Amnesty International and Legebitra in secondary schools (or rather the ones that used to be conducted). At the height of the political debates on the proposed Family Code the strongest organization opposing equal treatment for gays and lesbians in the Family Code (Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children, closely linked to the Roman Catholic Church) launched a massive campaign against both organizations, claiming that they were conducting “a campaign for homosexuality among children”, that “homosexual activists are trying to encourage schoolchildren to discover their homosexual inclinations”, that “they teach them that there are no differences between women and men and they spread the intolerant belief that anyone who disagrees with them is a homophobe who should be criminally prosecuted” (Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children, 2011).

It is indicative that these workshops had been taking place for some years at some schools (workshops by Amnesty International for 12 years, but a year and a half before the attacks by opponents the workshops on homosexuality and gender constructions had ceased to be carried out), and there had been no complaints. Experience in Slovenia confirms Apple’s thesis on the great effectiveness of (political) organization of (neo)conservative movements in the field of education (Apple, 2004): proponents of the reproduction of heteronormativity in school, in defense of a heteronormative social order organize and mobilize much more quickly and effectively than their critics have been able to. In polemics about the treatment of sexuality in schools the advocates of “natural sexuality”, family values, and traditional gender roles in Slovenia have successfully adopted the (liberal) discourse of human rights. Namely, they usually appeal to the rights of parents to provide their children with the religious and moral upbringing of their choice, in keeping with their convictions (Article 41 of the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia); the appropriateness of lesson content for children’s developmental level (developmental psychological and pedagogical doctrines), and even nondiscrimination (Article 14 of the Constitution). It is indicative that there has not (yet) been a case recorded of parents’ objecting to educational programs which impose heteronormativity.

Emancipation Education Projects and their (controversial and limited) Effects

Outside contractors (and their potential “clients”) thus also confront the question of how to justify educational content which deconstructs dominant gender and sexual norms (i.e. heteronormativity) in educational curricula.

Their projects are usually subjected to a rigorous substantiation and proof of legitimacy, and a common strategy for defending the victims of prejudices is to focus on the psychological effects of rejection. This strategy may be just a pragmatic move which opens up the space of educational institutions for the problematization / deconstruction of the dichotomy of natural “normal” (hetero) sexuality vs. “deviant” (homo) sexuality; it can be a compassionate, paternalistic reaction to the distress of victims; it can be part of the image of the enlightened cosmopolitan. The problem with this strategy is that it unintentionally additionally victimizes individuals who are in a vulnerable position due to dominant gender and sexual norms. Above all, the effects of appealing to the conscience of the “normal” majority usually does not extend beyond compassion and tolerance. In fact, compassion and tolerance do have short-term mitigating effects on the stigmatized; they can be powerful motivators for the responsible use of the power and influence of individuals and institutions. Nevertheless, the problem is that they preserve the domination of those who have the possibility to choose to tolerate (or not). Drawing attention to the mental distress of those who are excluded and discriminated against often sounds like an apology for the appeal to political correctness, i.e. to that pleasant but hardly binding substitute for equality. This strategy implicitly gives assent to the psychologization and even medicalization of phenomena which are in fact ideological or political at their origin (and in their effects), and also to the individualization of responsibility for stigmatization. We should certainly not underestimate the psychological effects of exclusion or the responsibility of individuals who spread hate or at least assent to it. However, limiting the treatment of the issue to the psychological conditions and effects of stigmatization obscures the social and political origins and functions of hatred, and implicitly supports the hierarchy of relations between “natural” / “moral” / “normal” and “unnatural” / “immoral” / “abnormal”.

Another set of dilemmas faced by these programs that break a safe silence is how to direct a complex educational process in such a way that school becomes a safe space, and education plays a visible role in establishing political equality. Educational emancipation projects in Slovenia (as elsewhere) usually stem from an “enlightened” position. Their goal is the deconstruction of heteronormativity (including gender dichotomy), of the myth of “normal” and “natural” gendered roles and sexualities; the elimination of discrimination and consistent application of the principle of equality regardless of sexual orientation. The first step in the process of deconstruction of heteronormativity is an analysis of the representation of gays and lesbians in school textbooks and readers, the articulation of demands for recognition and positive representation, the construction and enforcement of positive

representations of individuals who diverge from the dominant gender and sexual norms. Prevailing among the specific strategies is the identification of homophobia and prejudices, the transmission of information and dissemination of knowledge, and practical advice to teachers (and students) on how to introduce a topic relating to the exclusion of gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites; how to recognize subtle forms of heterosexism and how to respond to them.

However, these programs mainly problematize the marginalization of gays, lesbians, and less frequently bisexuals and transgendered, and even less frequently same sex/gender/sexuality binaries and the social order which is based on these binaries. There are some exceptions, of which we have already noted two, i.e. the projects of the Association for Nonviolent Communication and Amnesty International (for more see Pan, 2011). Critical theoreticians caution about the limited effects of these emancipation projects (and these are the most numerous), which are restricted to expanding the definition of normality to include gays and lesbians. This goal is too narrow, all the more so when they are satisfied with the recognition and legitimization of difference and when this “expanded normality” includes, as Lipkin (1999, p. 232) emphasizes, only gays “who are just like every morally superior one else” and for the sake of a propaganda campaign, “homosexual people would be held to a higher standard”. As Kirsch (2006, p. 33) states, the “process of legitimization does not create equality: dominance still exists; ideals still rule the day”. The proliferation of alternative, non-stereotypical representations does not automatically lead to a change in sexual prejudices and identification with alternative, positive norms. As Luhmann (1998, p. 143) notes, it is an illusion that “with representation comes knowledge, with learning about lesbian and gays comes the realization of the latter’s normalcy, and finally a happy end to discrimination”. Prejudices as implicit or explicit moral judgments (in)directly supported by ideology, legislation, and even by unquestioned assumptions of scientific concepts and practices, unfortunately operate as performatives; they construct subject positions that we must face even if we keep a rational distance towards them. Due to the function of prejudices in the political economy (and in maintaining power relations), the dissolving of prejudices and elimination of discrimination cannot be accomplished merely through the production and reinforcement of positive images of the stigmatized (e.g. Adorno et al., 1950; Oakes, Hasalm & Turner, 1994; Aboud & Levy, 2000). Hatred, exclusion, and rejection are not feelings and practices which can be eliminated merely through the dissemination of positive images and information which confronts prejudice with the power of argument. The distress and low self-esteem caused by open or tacit exclusion, stigmatization, and discrimination, “felt and internalized stigma” (He-

rek, 2007, p. 909-911) cannot be solved only through positive images of gays and lesbians who are intended to serve as a positive point of identification. A rational deconstruction of stigma and prejudice does not guarantee any changes in negative viewpoints and even less in the negative feelings that are characteristic for deep-seated prejudices about sexual minorities.

We are not claiming that the dissemination of information which tries to deconstruct myths about gays and lesbians is a mistaken strategy. Together with “popular support for striking down policies that perpetuate sexual stigma” (Herek, 2007, p. 915) and liberal legislation it can have an impact at least on enacted stigma, which according to Herek (2007, p. 908) “refers to the overt behavioral expression of sexual stigma”. In the short term, it can even contribute to the deconstruction and reduction of prejudices. However, these positive effects are limited primarily to cases when people oppose discrimination and exclusion but lack arguments for effectively combating prejudice, and in cases where they do not have a lot invested in prejudices (e.g. Aboud & Levy, 2000); positive effects are strongly limited especially in cases of hidden or open hatred, hostility, and prejudices in which, due to their specific roles in our mental economy, we invest a lot: rationalization, negation, and avoidance (e.g. Adorno et al., 1950; Oakes, Hasalm & Turner, 1994). Hatred can even be deepened in the face of counterarguments, since a person who has allowed hatred entry into manifest thought constantly justifies their hatred due to the norms of tolerance, which succeeds temporarily only by even more radically indicting the victim of their hatred (Adorno et al., 1950). In such circumstances individuals avoid information which threatens to upset the temporary equilibrium and apparent order and security. “A lack of information” in this case is not the result of objective circumstances, for example the inaccessibility of information, but rather a consequence of motivation: we prefer to avoid information which threatens the (apparent) congruence of attitudes, emotions, behavior, and/or which wounds our narcissism, or interpret it in such a way that we prevent dissonances and discontent and preserve the fragile equilibrium in the construction of reality and self/identity-construction (e.g. Luhman, 1998). Motivated ignorance is thus one of the reasons why information regarding the baselessness and irrationality of prejudice still cannot solve the problem of prejudice, and the practices which prejudice justifies: discrimination, stigmatization, violence, and so on.

Conclusion

Present analysis of syllabuses and textbooks for primary and secondary schools in social and political context in Slovenia confirms Foucault’s thesis (1978) about the importance of sexuality and sex for power relations. It ex-

poses three key indicators of that importance: social and political conflicts over sexual norms; pedagogization of (children's) sexuality, first of all through regulation of students' (children's) access to knowledge about sex and sexuality; prevailing heteronormativity; discomforts that accompany discourses on sex and sexuality in school. Teachers very quickly say "too much" or say something that could pose a threat to a belief in the naturalness and stability of gender dichotomy and the self-evidence of sexual norms; educational materials also show "too much", or show something that "should remain hidden from young eyes". Which kind of information are we to convey to children, how and at what age, in which subject or in the frameworks of what kind of learning content, which moral and social values and norms should such a lesson strengthen? Educators, educational authorities, and philosophers of education in the area of sexuality confront the question of how to avoid imposing normative standards on the one hand and a radical relativism on the other (e.g. McKay, 1998; Seidman, 1992; Smith, 1994; Weeks, 1995) – this is a question which as McKay (1998) for example concludes is avoided even by academic philosophers.

The analysis presented here focuses on some (mutually interconnected) origins of difficulties and limitations which attempts at the deconstruction of heteronormativity in school must confront. Crucial problems arise from deeply entrenched beliefs about the naturalness and normalcy of heterosexuality and gender dichotomy, or in other words, from ideological, normative, value-laden treatment of sexuality supported by scientific discourses on sex and sexuality. Heteronormativity is transmitted to the school space through explicit as well as implicit, frequently unconscious and unreflected valuation of gender and sexual behaviors, desires, etc. This also includes prejudices, with their complex role in the mental economy and the reproduction of relations of domination, due to which rational argumentation and deconstruction are frequently difficult to access. It seems that in such circumstances (apparent) silence about sexuality is the most that the legal norm of sexual orientation equality can achieve. Although, in common sense, this silence could be considered as neutral, it is actually a form of (at least implicit) normalizing judgement (e.g. Foucault, 1984).

Another problem, which is simultaneously also a condition for schools to become a place of emancipatory struggles, is connected with their role in enculturation processes. As a result of this role schools are the object of constant monitoring by political authorities, professional and the lay public, as well as a site of resistance and battles for control among competing interpretations of human existence. In these battles precisely because school is so important to *ideological state apparatuses*, it is frequently forgotten that school is not the only space where "truths" about gender, sex and sexuali-

ties are produced and stated, and where norms are defined and divergences from these norms evaluated. This leads to an oversimplification and a tendency to treat schools and relationships among the participants (pupils, their parents and teachers, school administration) as the source and the solution of all individual, political, and social problems.

In this article we also draw attention to the more effective organization of proponents of strict heteronormativity, who of course also have a more advantageous starting position thanks to the still deeply ingrained heteronormativity in the social environment. However, the impact on education and schools of those who are creating a moral panic due to the “destruction of family values” and concern for the “future of the Slovene nation” is not simply a consequence of (neo)conservative “public opinion” or even a (neo)conservative cultural consensus. It is more likely due to the fact that the “conservative alliance” is much more uniform, persistent, responsive, even aggressive, vocal, organized and less self-critical than the left and liberal one (e.g. Apple, 2004). Or, as Plummer (2003, p.18) points out, its strong positions are, ironically, a consequence of the “very fragility of these traditions”. In such a sensitive sphere of everyday life as school, the proponents of “postmodern” values prefer to withdraw rather than get involved in conflicts. For this reason as well, teachers who advocate for equality, freedom, and inclusion and who feel a sense of responsibility for the marginalization of pupils would have difficulty relying on the support of colleagues and pupils’ parents if they were to become the target of conservative attacks due to their ethical and political stance. This has proved for the time being to be a sufficiently effective safeguard of traditional values. In Slovenia teachers “assert” their autonomy in the area of sex education primarily through a strategy of “avoiding potential conflicts”: silence about sex and sexualities seems to be the safest educational strategy. They thereby continue a strategy used by educational authorities who shift the responsibility for teaching controversial content on to teachers. Autonomy which educational authorities grant to teachers thus appears more a reflection of pseudo-neutrality or a symptom of ambivalence and fear of conflicts with parents of differing ideological and political convictions on the part of school authorities than an expression of confidence in teachers. Even worse; in a mixture of neoliberal employment policy (e.g. temporary employment), great power of local education authorities, aggressiveness of neo-conservative common sense alliance, this autonomy could be the source of increased risk for teachers, mostly for those who are employed temporarily.

For this reason expanding the definition of normality to include gays and lesbians to at least mitigate the damage caused by structural stigma is a relatively ambitious pedagogical goal in Slovenian circumstances: regardless of

the relevance of cautions about its assimilation effect (e.g. Luhman, 1998)⁴ and regardless of the fact that educational programs which are limited merely to positive representation and legitimization of differences are above all an expression of political correctness. Despite their limitations and reductions, educational strategies of confronting sexual stigma and prejudices nevertheless represent an alternative to the hegemonic discourse. They help shift the boundaries of “normality” and establish safe spaces by means of which at least over the long run they contribute to the deconstruction of criteria of normality in the area of sex/gender and sexuality. Often even in the pursuit of minimalistic goals we encounter resistance and difficulties, which is a sign that our endeavors confront the sore points of the social order.

The basic questions remain open: how to subvert the valuation of subjective positions and criteria of “ab/normality”, the idea of stable (gender and sexual) identities, how to liberate desires, how to come to terms with the complex problem of domination and subordination which includes all axes at once: “race”, ethnicity, sex/gender and sexuality, class, etc. (e.g. Foucault, 2007b; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000; Luhman, 1998). As Elia (2000) points out, it is important that sexuality education reflect the complexity and that - as a broad topic - it should be taught across the curriculum. Sexuality education is first of all a matter of political education, philosophy of human rights, and citizenship, freedom. As Primorac (2002, p. 209) points out, “choices, actions, and praxes in the field of sexuality” should be regarded as a right. And discourse about rights belongs in political (and not health!) education, as defined by Hahn: “a process in which individuals acquire knowledge about their rights and the volition and capability/ability to use them” (in Zgaga, 1991, p. 37). As Echeverria and Hannam (2013, p. 123-124) point out, education “must have a destabilizing action if it is to be pedagogy of praxis and be responsive to the needs of education in plural democracy”. Thus to the question of sexuality and construction of genders are also added concrete alternative educational programs based on the principle of equality regardless of gender and sexual orientation. Those programs in particular which manage to trigger ambiguities in connection with self-evident “truths” and norms can count on success in the process of deconstructing heteronormativity. They are a form of active resistance - resistance as, according to Foucault (1978), an inevitable and essential element within power relations. And they cause discomfort which has several faces: it is felt by those who would like to preserve traditional sex and gen-

⁴ Luhman notes that the “demand for equal cultural and political representation” is actually a form of “assimilation politics”, since we “expand the definition of *normal* to include lesbians and gays, rather than attacking and undermining the very processes by which (some) subjects become normalized and others marginalized” (1998, p. 143-144).

der morality, but at the same time they are clearly aware that silence about the ambiguities of sexualities and genders and the attack on alternative moralities are short-term strategies; it is felt by those who would otherwise like to participate actively in deconstruction processes for professional or ideological reasons; it is felt by those for whom the educational programs are intended. Perhaps it is not even that important whether the alternative practices and educational projects take place within the school or outside it. Their effects enter the school in a way that cannot be controlled: through beliefs (conscious or unconscious) of teachers, pupils, and their parents which are formed in a complex interaction of numerous agents of enculturation. And, first of all, through practices of freedom, as Foucault points out (2007a) and explains that freedom is more than getting rid of prohibitions. Namely, Foucault (ibid., p. 243) points out the ethical dimension of freedom: with regard to sexuality, liberating sexual desires is a condition to “learn to conduct ourselves ethically in pleasure relationships with others”.

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