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Language-based discrimination in schools: Intersections of gender and sexuality

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Introduction

Historically, feminist struggles have been focused on challenging forms of male domination. Whilst this continues, feminist activism has increasingly incorporated broader objectives around increasing acceptance of gender and sexual diversity and challenging hetero-normative practices. Schools have been identified as places where gender variant and LGBT+- identifying young people report routinely experiencing discrimination through discursive practices in schools. They are a key site for the enactment of the linguistically mediated violence explored throughout various chapters of this book. In the UK, research over the past few years has consistently shown that homophobia, biphobia and heterosexism are prevalent in UK schools (Bradlow *et al* 2017; Sauntson, 2018). This has also been found to be the case in a range of international contexts such as Poland (Pakula *et al*, 2015), Australia (Nelson, 2012), the United States (Bryan, 2012), Brazil (Moita-Lopes, 2006), and South Africa (Francis and Msibi, 2011). There is much evidence to suggest that when students feel excluded from lessons because of their sexual orientation, this can have a negative impact on their school engagement and levels of attainment (Pearson *et al*, 2007; Bradlow *et al*, 2017).

However, most of this existing research does not question how gender and sexuality- based discriminatory discourse operates in differing ways for young women and men, and tends to implicitly assume that homophobia is the only manifestation of sexuality-based discrimination and is experienced in a similar way. More attention has also generally been paid to the experiences of gay men and boys (McCormack and Anderson, 2010). Given the particularly detrimental effects of bi/homophobic discourse on girls (Bradlow *et al*, 2017), a more nuanced analysis of the gendered aspects of sexuality-based discriminatory discourse in schools is needed. Sauntson (2019) goes some way to redressing this balance by exploring young gay and bisexual women's experiences.

Formby (2015) is also critical of school-based research which places too much emphasis on sexuality in terms of 'bullying' and which consequently emphasises suffering and the portrayal of LGBT+ young people as 'victims'. Glazzard (2018) also notes that the casting of LGBT+ young people as victims can have a pathologising effect which

subsequently neglects the roles that wider structural forces play in reinforcing marginalised and stigmatised identities). In previous research (Sauntson, 2018), I have argued that gender and sexuality-based discrimination often does not happen through overt bullying, but operates at a more discursive level which is difficult to challenge.

To explore these issues further, this chapter examines some of the ways that language can play a role in constructions of gender and sexual identities in school contexts. It focuses on exploring linguistic representations of sexism, homophobia and heteronormativity in extracts of classroom interaction. In a development of an earlier study which examined discursive constructions of gender and sexuality in RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) guidance documents and in focus group interviews with young women (Sundaram and Sauntson, 2015), the current chapter focuses on the analysis of spoken interactional data taken from RSE lessons in two UK secondary schools[i]. The interactional classroom data consists of transcribed recordings of RSE lessons where the topic of the lesson is expected to address issues around gender and sexuality, to varying degrees. A further reason for focusing on this aspect of school experience is that, in previous research (Sauntson, 2018), in which LGBT+-identified young people were interviewed about their school experiences, RSE featured highly amongst the phenomena which are negatively valued by the young people.

Such negative valuations were often realised as students commenting on their experience of RSE as irrelevant and meaningless due to its exclusive focus on binary gender and heterosexuality. Even within the discourses of heterosexuality, the students perceived these to be restrictive in only focusing on physiology, pregnancy and contraception and not on topics such as pleasure and consent. They also commented on how these discourses are seen to be particularly detrimental to girls, an issue which is explored further throughout this chapter.

My analysis mainly focuses on uncovering manifestations of the interrelated concepts of sexism, homophobia and heteronormativity in language. A key premise of queer theory-informed approaches to any form of linguistic analysis is that 'heteronormativity' is the main object of critical investigation. Heteronormativity is defined by Cameron (2005: 489) as 'the system which prescribes, enjoins, rewards, and naturalises a particular kind of heterosexuality – monogamous, reproductive, and based on conventionally complementary gender roles – as the norm on which social arrangements should be based.' In this definition, gender and sexuality are interrelated, meaning that sexism and homophobia are also

interrelated. Cameron and Kulick (2003) assert, importantly, that linguistic analysis can focus on the critical investigation of heterosexual identities and desires as well as those that are sexually marginalised. They note that research on language and sexual minorities tends to focus on analysing linguistic manifestations of homophobia and other kinds of sexuality-based discrimination, whilst queer linguistics more broadly encompasses an analysis of discursive formations of all sexual identities, including heterosexualities. Part of this analysis involves exploring the linguistic means by which heterosexuality comes to be seen as the assumed default sexuality, whilst other sexualities are marked as 'non- normative'. Furthermore, it is certain kinds of heterosexualities that are privileged and this is also a concern of queer linguistics so that heteronormativity can be problematic for some heterosexual-identified women and men, as well as for LGBT+ populations. Arguably, the perpetuation of heteronormativity can be particularly problematic for some women/girls in school contexts and these are key issues which are explored throughout this chapter.

Because the analysis focuses on the discourses of both gender and sexuality, the research is also informed by elements of intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989) in which language, gender, sexuality, race, age, class, nationality and a range of other facets of 'identity' intersect to produce particular identifications and linguistic practices. In fact, much gender theory beyond the discipline of linguistics holds this view of gender intersecting with other aspects of a person's identity. The concept of intersectionality, then, disrupts the notion of a singular and coherent 'identity' in relation to gender and sexuality. It recognizes that there is no one way to be a woman, man, gay, straight, and so on. Furthermore, intersectionality theory does not simply view other identity categories as 'add-ons' to gender. Rather, as Levon (2015: 298) explains, categories not only intersect, but they mutually constitute each other. Lazar (2017) highlights that this concept of intersectionality is particularly important in contemporary language, gender and sexuality research because it encourages researchers to view identities as plural, intersecting and mutually constitutive, rather than as isolated categories. Levon (2015) also points out that another crucial principle of intersectionality theory is that intersecting and mutually constituted identities are dynamic in nature, that is, they emerge in specific social and interactional configurations and therefore are not stable over time or context.

Some studies cited earlier reveal important intersectional dimensions of gender and sexuality-related violence and discrimination. For example, the 2017 Stonewall survey (Bradlow *et al*) of LGBT hate crime and discrimination in Britain found that young people

are at greater risk with 33% of LGB young people (aged 18 to 24) and 56% of trans young people having experienced a hate crime or incident in the twelve months preceding the survey. The study also found that black, Asian and ethnic minority LGBT people, LGBT people who belong to non-Christian faiths, and disabled LGBT people were all more likely to have experienced gender and/or sexuality-based hate crimes or incidents.

It is this approach to intersectionality which is adopted in this chapter as a means of making sense of how people use language to mutually constitute multiple identities which include gender and sexuality. Within this approach, I deploy the specific linguistic analytical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) which is explained in the next section.

Data and analytical frameworks

Three RSE lessons (each 1 hour and 10 minutes in length) were recorded and transcribed in full. Two lessons were recorded in 'School A' and one in 'School B'. Both schools were located in the York area of the UK over a period of three months. School B is located in York itself and has an intake of predominantly white, middle-class students from the urban area of York. School A is located outside York and has a more diverse intake of students from a wider range of urban/rural locations, and ethnic and social class backgrounds. These schools were chosen because of these different locations and student populations, even though they are located in the same part of the UK. Teachers and students at the schools were all used to having observers, in the form of parents, inspectors and researchers, and the schools as a whole had a positive attitude towards educational research being carried out. This meant that neither the teachers nor the students felt uncomfortable about having a researcher present during their lessons. Consent was gained from the students' parents, via their teacher, to use the recordings in this research. Names of all participants involved in this part of the research have been changed or removed in all transcriptions.

The topics covered in the lessons are shown in Table 1. In School A, the two lessons were part of a series of four RSE lessons. The other topics covered were an introduction to relationships and a 'summing up' lesson in which students designed a poster explaining what they had learnt about RSE and what other topics they still wanted to learn more about. This final lesson was observed and recorded but, as it yielded very little interactional data (as students were mostly working in silence), it is not included in the data-set. In School B, the

recorded lesson was one in a series of three. The other two were focused on building relationships and I was not able to gain access to record them.

Table 1: Data-set information

	Year/age of students	*Topic of lesson*	*Lesson duration*
School A lesson 1	Year 9 (age 13-14)	'Choices that affect your future' (delivered by class teacher)	70 minutes
School A lesson 2	Year 9 (age 13-14)	'Future goals' (delivered by class teacher)	70 minutes
School B lesson 1	Year 9 (age 13-14)	'Safer sex' (delivered by school nurse)	70 minutes

To analyse the data, I use some tools of CDA to investigate how the classroom is a site for the negotiation and enactment of intersectional gender and sexuality identities and power relations. The application of CDA to specific sequences of classroom dialogue can reveal how discursive features contribute to the construction and/or subversion of gender and sexuality ideologies. CDA is concerned with social injustice, power struggles and in/equalities and with examining the role that discourse plays in constructing, reifying and contesting these issues. This makes it a particularly relevant approach for investigating gender and sexuality in relation to language.

In Fairclough's (2001) often cited CDA framework, the analysis focuses on the realisation of three kinds of value in texts. These values drawn from systemic functional linguistics, are *experiential*, *relational* and *expressive*. Fairclough defines experiential values as being concerned with the content of a text, and the kind of knowledge and beliefs that are subsequently presented as an effect of a text's (selective) content. Relational values refer to social relationships and the ways in which those relationships are inscribed in the text.

Finally, expressive values refer to textual enactments of particular kinds of social subjects and social identities. These values are realised through three sets of formal features in any text – vocabulary, grammar and textual structures. In this chapter, I mainly focus on the linguistic realisation of experiential and relational values in the vocabulary of the classroom interaction data.

Various types of linguistic analysis are used, and there are various formal

linguistic features which can be focused on in applying CDA, such as (but not limited to): lexical items; metaphors; evaluative language (e.g. semantic fields and adjectives); intertextual references; grammatical and syntactic structures. Fairclough (2001) offers a detailed and lengthy list of the specific linguistic features which may be examined, but the analysis in this chapter mainly focuses on the way ideologies are conveyed through *lexical* choices. More specifically, in the present study, I focus mainly on lexical items which Pakula *et al* (2015) have identified as 'gender-triggered points'.

Pakula *et al*'s (2015) notion of identifying 'gender triggered points' (GTPs) in classroom interaction to examine the discursive construction of gender and sexuality is based on an earlier CDA approach to analyzing gender developed by Sunderland *et al* (2002). In developing a CDA framework specifically designed for investigating how gender discourses manifest in language, Sunderland *et al* propose that particular lexical items and phrases can function as 'gender critical points' in classroom interaction in which explicit reference is made to male and female humans as a way of drawing attention to gender and making it relevant in some way to the lesson. A 'gender triggered point', according to Pakula *et al*'s development of this concept, happens when gender is negotiated into relevance through the spoken interaction that takes place around a particular text being used for teaching.

> Extending Sunderland *et al*'s (2002) concept of the 'gender critical point' to the notion of the 'gender triggered point' we believe enriches the analytical apparatus by highlighting the dynamic character of classroom interaction and in particular the central role of teachers' (Pakula *et al*, 2015: 58)

In other words, GTPs occur when teachers 'gender' the texts they are using in the classroom. GTPs therefore do not reside in teaching materials themselves, but in interactional elaborations of them. Typical examples identified by the authors might include: gender roles being ascribed to characters or social actors; explicit linguistic instantiations of heterosexuality or heteronormativity; stereotypical or non-stereotypical representations of femininity and masculinity. In the studies by both Sunderland *et al* and Pakula *et al*, the focus of analysis is on written textbooks used for language teaching, and the classroom interaction which takes place around the teaching of these texts. I added 'sexuality' into this framework so that GTPs become GSTPs ('gender and sexuality

triggered points') in the current analysis. In this chapter, I develop the concept of GTPs by proposing that they do not have to be triggered by written material (as is the focus of Pakula *et al*'s work), but by any stimulus used in the classroom, including student or teacher-initiated talk. GSTPs can occur, therefore, as soon as any participant in the interaction makes gender and/or sexuality 'relevant' through the use of a particular word, phrase or other discursive meaning-making practice. These GSTP words and phrases, then, are the focus of linguistic analysis within the CDA framework used throughout the chapter.

Analysis and findings

By focusing on GSTPs, this aspect of the analysis critically examines the ideologies which are constructed in sections of the discourse where gender and sexuality are 'made relevant'. Given that the subject is RSE, this does occur frequently. What is interesting for this chapter is that the predominant ideologies which are identified through critical analysis of the GSTPs are both sexist and heterosexist. Other discourses do sometimes emerge (discussed below) but these are rarer and therefore more marginal.

A first key finding which is *not* revealed through the corpus analysis alone was that there are in fact many tensions between the ideological assumptions regarding gender and sexuality in the interaction. For example, on the one hand, allusions are made to non-heterosexual relationships and identities by the teachers through the use of gender-neutral terms such as *partner*, as in the following example:

```
1   T: being put under pressure by partners boys and girls
2      not having planned or discussed it and feeling the lack
3      of control
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This suggests the possibility of RSE being framed in terms of sexual diversity. But, more frequently, there are ideological assumptions made about normative gender and (hetero)sexuality which marginalise sexual diversity and function to uphold normative heterosexuality. In the first example below, explicit reference is made by the teacher to 'mum and dad', thus inferring that a heterosexual two-parent family structure is the expected norm:

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1   T: you've got your mum and dad there and you're like
2      [singing noise] or your gran is even worse isn't it
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In other examples, the teacher makes reference to 'the guy' and 'the girl' when discussing 'relationships' in a general sense, thus reinforcing heterosexuality as the expected norm:

```
1   T: when we watched that 'A to Z of Love and Sex' there
2   was a guy on there that talked about his first intimate
3   relationship was with a girl it was her first time


1   T: glide it out don't just pull your penis out
2   because what happens is the condom will stay inside the
3   girl
```

The fact that there are numerous unquestioned implied references to heterosexuality produces a normative discourse which has the effect of excluding non-heterosexual identities, relationships and practices.

Another key finding is that restricted discourses of heterosexuality are (re)produced through the interaction as well as through the content of the lesson. This is again indicated through the occurrence of GSTPs in the interaction. In the examples above, GSTP references to 'the girl' and 'the guy' in their singular forms implies that a heterosexual relationship involving only two people is the assumed norm. Monogamous heterosexual relationships are ideologically afforded a high status and sexual activity which takes place within such relationships is prioritised. Other possible relationship and sexual activity options are notably absent from the discourse. This supports Motschenbacher's (2010; 2011) argument that heteronormativity is 'ubiquitous' and continually thriving in everyday talk. But there is also no diversity represented *within* heterosexuality – it is almost always constructed as two- person, monogamous and involving no physical sexual activity other than vaginal intercourse. Note how in the example below there is an implied focus on intercourse through focusing only on condom use as protection against STIs. This effectively precludes other forms of sexual activity (such as oral and manual sex) from the discussion and presents limited possibilities to the young people in the class. There is no discussion, for example, of how dental dams may be used to prevent STI transmission between girls engaging in oral sex.

```
1   T: we're going to use a condom that's the only thing the other
2   forms of contraception won't prevent an STI
3
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Arguably, this unquestioned presentation of a hegemonic version of heterosexuality functions to marginalise any identities, relationships and practices which sit outside of that normative discourse. And there is no scope for gender diversity within this restricted discourse of heterosexuality as it is manifested in the experientially-focused GSTPs.

RSE provision in England and Wales has recently been reviewed and modified following heavy criticism in recent years, as well as the need for RSE teaching to incorporate relevant legal changes in the UK such as the Same-Sex Marriage Act (2013) and the Equality Act (2010). RSE is also scheduled to be made compulsory in all secondary schools in England from 2020. Relationships education will also be statutory in all primary schools in England from this date. However, despite the introduction of statutory provision, individual schools can still decide on their own curriculum and how they practically teach RSE as long as their plans are approved by the school's governing body. This means that, although there is government- produced guidance for teaching statutory RSE in secondary schools, there is no set curriculum for teachers to follow, resulting in a high degree of variability of interpretation of the guidance as it is put into practice in classrooms. The guidance itself contains some welcome changes (including the inclusion of LGBT identities and relationships). Although much has been made of this in the media at the time of writing, it is actually a very small sub-section which focuses on LGBT inclusion. Much of the rest of the guidance is very similar to the guidance which has been available to schools since 2000. When the research was conducted, it may therefore be that the absence of explicit references to LGBT inclusion in the guidance was a factor in the representations of restricted discourses of heterosexuality and heteronormativity in the lessons. The 2000 guidance and the updated 2019 version still emphasise teaching about the health risks and 'dangers' of engaging in sexual activity which is another discourse which emerges in the classroom interaction analysed for this research.

In the interaction analysed, sex is constructed as risky and dangerous, even the vaginal intercourse that is presented as the primary activity taking place within heterosexual relationships. This supports findings from other studies (Allen and Carmody, 2012). In the examples cited through the rest of this section, words such as *emergency*, *dilemma*, *unwanted*, *unfortunately* and *pressure* help to construct sex in negative terms, and always focusing on 'unwanted' outcomes, such as pregnancy and the transmission of STIs. In the specific example below, it is also interesting to note in line 2, an implicit gender construction of girls and women as the givers and exchangers of advice, thus placing responsibility for any negative outcomes of heterosexual activity with them.

1   T: right two things there
2   one was obviously giving advice to her mate
3   about the morning after remember we did that quick quiz

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 4   we did all about so we know that it's up to 72 hours
 5   afterwards that the morning after pill can be used it's
 6   now called the emergency contraceptive for that reason
 7   because it's not just the morning after and then
 8   obviously she went through that dilemma of obviously her
 9   periods were late that can be caused by anything but if
10   it's coincided with her having intercourse with somebody
11   then obviously she wants to get it tested

 1   T: a girl that I taught in my early teaching career who
 2   mistakenly took sex okay as feeling loved and feeling wanted
 3   and unfortunately she fell pregnant
```

These extracts echo findings presented elsewhere in this book (see chapters by Ribeiro & Bastos and McLeod in this volume) which report that a common 'message' received by girls is that they have to look after themselves – taking responsibility for problems within heterosexual relationships is women's/girls' responsibility rather than being a collaborative endeavour. In the data analysed in this chapter, the words and phrases used in the interaction indicate an implicit assumption that pregnancy is a 'problem for girls' but not for boys. Similar gender discourses, which are evidently sexist in their differential treatment of girls and boys, have been found by Dobson and Ringrose (2016) in their analysis of campaigns to protect young people from sexual exploitation. Dobson and Ringrose highlight the emphasis on girls to manage their behaviour so as not to become victimised, rather than focusing on teaching boys to take responsibility for their behaviour (i.e. not engaging in any sexually exploitative behaviour). Related to this is the persistent notion that girls and women are ultimately responsible for consent in sexual relationships and encounters. If consent is not communicated effectively, it is implied that this is the responsibility of girls and women.

Cameron (2007) and Ehrlich (2001) draw attention to problems associated with framing consent as being solely about communication. They all argue that a focus on consent as communication implies that sexual violence can be avoided by communicating differently, with an implication in many legal cases that it is the victim's responsibility for communicating consent effectively and unambiguously. This is problematic firstly because it places responsibility for consent on the victim (usually the woman) rather than the perpetrator and, secondly, because it fails to recognise the role that coercion often plays in sexual violence cases (see MacLeod's chapter in this volume).

This unequal treatment of boys and girls contributes towards the discriminatory/sexist discourses around gender which are reinforced throughout the

lessons. And, again, the examples only focus on girls giving advice to each other in relation to heterosexual encounters. It seems then that restrictive binary gender discourses and normative heterosexuality are mutually constituting and, therefore, have an intersectional relationship with each other that is particularly salient in this context. These sexist and heterosexist discourses could be challenged by incorporating other kinds of advice-giving into the lesson which are available to all genders and not just implicitly directed at girls. This might include advice on coming out and expressing gender and sexual diversity as well as advice focusing on intimate relationships.

The ideological sexist gendering of heterosexual activity also occurs in relation to constructions of boys and men and always wanting sex and putting pressure on girls and young women to engage in sexual activity with them. The possibility of girls putting pressureon boys is never raised, neither is the possibility that boys may want to engage in sexual activity for positive reasons such as being in love. This creates an ideological expectation that, within heterosexual encounters and relationships, boys will always put pressure on girls to have sex with them.

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1   T: I've had girls coming to me and talking about
2   they've been with older boyfriends they feel that
3   pressure
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1   T: some of the things we've just talked about
2   curiosity opportunity a real or imagined pressure you know she
3   talked about well she thought if she asked it would she would
4   he wouldn't put a condom on
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Heterosexual activity is almost always discussed in relation to negative reasons for starting to engage in it, such as pressure (from partners and peers) and being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Again, the possibility of sexual activity occurring because of positive reasons is notably marginalised. An emerging subtext involves giving greater agency to the adults who teach and define the subject area (in that they can decide when it is best for young people to start engaging in sexual activity), rather than bestowing agency on young people themselves.

Another key finding which emerged from the application of CDA to the data in terms of focusing on GSTPs was that 'gender' was frequently conflated with biological sex especially in sequences of interaction where physicality was being discussed. GSTPs which referenced 'girls', 'boys' and any other gender-related lexical items were examined as evidence of this discourse. 'Gender' is also constructed in binary terms and

transgender and gender variance issues are ignored. For example, there were frequent references to lexical items such as 'penis' (biological male) in relation to 'boys' (gender). References to male genitalia were also much more prevalent than references to female genitalia. In the whole data-set, there were only three references to female genitalia – *vulva*, *vagina*, *where you put your tampon* – and one reference to *periods* as signifying biological femaleness. There were no references to the clitoris and no references to female orgasm or the idea that girls could derive any sort of physical pleasure from sexual activity. This contrasts with a total of 19 references to male genitals – 14 occurrences of *penis* and five occurrences of *semen/sperm*. The reduction of gender to biological sex, and in turn, to biological body parts as shown through this lexical analysis, entirely removes the possibility of trans and gender variant bodies from the context.

Furthermore, talk about biological body parts in relation to sex almost always occurred in relation to the negative consequences of engaging in sexual activity, such as the transmission of STIs, as illustrated in these GSTP examples (indicated through the lexical item 'girl' in each case):

    1   T: this is thrush so this is what a discharge would look
    2   like boys the one below is what a thrush discharge would
    3   look like for a girl

    1   T: genital warts and you can see warts on a boy's
    2   penis and warts on a girl's vulval area

In examples such as these in which the teacher is discussing the negative consequences of engaging in heterosexual activity, there are more serious consequences for girls than for boys.

The negative consequences include infertility, pregnancy, STIs (there are more examples discussed of girls having STIs than boys), being labelled, and having regrets. Thus, this constitutes a further gendered dimension to discursive constructions of (hetero)sexual activity.

In all of the classroom interaction observed, the talk of the students is highly restricted. Talk is dominated by the teacher in each lesson and students say very little. However, there were a small number of GSTPs when the students do raise issues around gender and sexuality which challenge normative discourses in a positive way. It is interesting to focus on these sections of interaction to examine how the teacher and other

students respond and negotiate their way through such exchanges.

In the first example below, it is a student (S1) who introduces the possibility that not all young people are heterosexual. In doing so, this signals the possibility of a more inclusive discourse around sexuality. The class are being shown some statistics about the numbers of young people who report being sexually active before the age of 16. The numbers are higher for boys than for girls. In lines 6 and 8, the student suggests this difference may occur because some boys are engaging in sexual activity with each other ('they're gay').

```
 1   T: 67 percent of young people are not sexually active before
 2   the age of 16
 3   S1: how does that work out it says a quarter of girls and a
 4   third of boys so who are boys meant to have sex with I don't
 5   get that
 6   S4: they're gay
 7   S1: if there's more boys
 8   S3: they're gay
 9   S1: all right yeah
10   T: do you get it now
```

This is, in fact, the only time that non-heterosexual identities were referred to in the data and so is particularly salient and 'sexuality-triggering'. Notably, in what follows this extract, the teacher does not take up the topic of sexual diversity but steers the dialogue back towards the risks associated with early (hetero)sexual activity.

In the next example, another student (S2) challenges the gendered notion that boys put pressure on girls to engage in sexual activity. The student objects to the way the boy in the video they have been watching is 'demonised' in a way that the girl is not. The student raises an important critical point about gender here – boys are repeatedly constructed as coercive and their reasons for wanting to engage girls in sex is to do with power and dominance, rather than any positive feelings such as love. This is arguably another discriminatory discourse constructed around boys and heterosexual relationships.

```
 1   S2: don't you think they were being like a bit unfair
 2   on that video thing like that group of kids that like
 3   talked about it like they were saying like the guy the
 4   guy should do it but it should be the girl as well they
 5   were being really like thought about the guy but it
 6   should be the girl as well
 7   T: oh absolutely yeah you have a responsibility that it's
 8   two to tango as they used to say
 9   S2: yeah
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10  T: right yeah you have an ultimate it doesn't matter what
11  relationship or stage in the relationship
12  S2: like they were always talking about the guys
13  being the ones to form the relationship they weren't
14  talking about girls
15  T: yeah you're right
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Again, the teacher is supportive of the challenge (line 15) to the gender discourse previously constructed during the lesson, but does not pursue the topic any further, thus closing down the possibility of the class continuing to explore a more inclusive and diverse discourses around gender and sexuality.

All of these contributions by students to the interaction raise important issues. They show a great deal of awareness on the part of the students and perhaps a desire to know and understand more about these issues. The examples show that students are aware of same-sex relationships, gender and power issues, and the possibility of manipulation and coercion into sexual activity. But these issues are not explored much beyond the sections of interaction in which they are initiated by the students. These, I argue, are lost opportunities for educating the students about gender and sexuality in ways which are framed by pro-diversity and inclusive approaches.

Discussion

The analysis presented in this chapter shows how linguistic choices in the data works as a form of social practice which can include and exclude certain gender and sexual identities in classroom settings. It highlights how important it is for educational practitioners to think carefully and critically about how language use in lessons may exclude certain groups and may discourage thinking about diversity. These findings are particularly timely given the recent protests which took place in Birmingham against the revised RSE guidance for England which now includes a section on positively teaching about LGBT+ relationships and identities[ii]. The protests suggest that although there is support for the new guidance, including its section on LGBT+ identities, there are still groups in society who are opposed to teaching about this dimension of equality. Given these conflicting reactions to changes in RSE, it is particularly important that the language used in the RSE guidance is as positive and inclusive as possible – this chapter has shown that more can still be done to make the language of the guidance more effective in terms of advancing gender and sexuality equality in schools.

There are a number of discriminatory discourses of gender and sexuality that

emerge from the analysis presented in this paper. Firstly, a discourse of gender emerges that presents differential values for girls and boys which are usually negative and potentially harmful to both. Girls are responsible for their own behaviour and are more heavily judged (negatively) for their sexual behaviour. It is discursively implied that girls have a greater responsibility for safer sex than boys. Girls are also discursively constructed as having less sexual agency than boys. In fact, the only agency they are afforded is to do with ensuring that any sex that takes places is 'safe'. Unlike boys, girls have no agency in terms of initiating sexual activity or relationships. Boys, on the other hand, are discursively constructed as predatory (putting pressure on) and always 'ready for sex'. In these discursive formations, gender itself is presented as binary, static and conflated with biological sex. These inequities emphasise the importance of including a gender dimension to research on language and sexuality in schools.

Sex itself emerges as a practice that is risky, dangerous and something to be avoided and 'delayed'. Sex often has 'unwanted' outcomes and, in all of the lessons observed, there are no explicit mentions of any positive outcomes of sex. Boys are more active in terms of initiating sexual activity, whereas girls are presented as reflecting and talking about it, often in negative terms (indicated through words occurring in GSTPs such as *worry*, *pressure*, *concern*, *dilemma* and so on). Sex is presented as happening more often for negative, rather than positive, reasons such as being drunk, peer pressure and as a result of pressure from partners.

The student-initiated interaction in the lessons observed indicates a potential mismatch between what is taught in RSE and what students actually want to know. This supports the work of Hilton (2007) who notes a well-established gap between content of RSE delivered in schools and what young people want to know. There are significant absences revealed through the analysis. In the GSTPs, there are, for example, hardly any references to sexual and gender diversity, coercion and consent, gender issues and positive aspects of sexual relationships such as love and pleasure.

Finally, the main focus of all of the classes is on heterosexual reproduction and there is a continual reinforcement of heteronormativity. There is often an implicit, taken-for- granted assumption of heterosexuality, including in families as well as in the future sexual orientation of the students themselves. Furthermore, heterosexuality itself is represented in a very restricted way. It is constructed as always monogamous and, in terms of sexual activity, enacted through vaginal intercourse only. Other possibilities for

heterosexual desire, activity and identity are absent. This supports Allen and Carmody's (2012) argument that there is a need for an extended 'discourse of erotics' in RSE which acknowledges different forms of desire (and pleasure). This would not only be beneficial to LGBT+ students and teachers, but also to heterosexual-identifying individuals. Furthermore, the intersectional lens enables us to see how restrictive binary gender discourses and restrictive discourses of normative heterosexuality are mutually constituting. I would therefore add that an intersectional approach to gender and sexuality diversity would also enhance RSE provision in schools and would help to challenge discrimination and promote inclusion.

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[i] Some of this data also appears in: Sauntson, H. (2018) *Language, Sexuality and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[ii] See, for example, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/mayor-andy-street-demands-stop-to- birmingham-protests-over-gay-rights-lessons-xhr58bm9c and https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6854329/Dozens-parents-children-protest-outside-second-Birmingham-primary-school.html.