



Clash of discourses: Discourse surrounding democratic values, equality and discrimination in official documents of Estonia and the National Curriculum in relation to queer students

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Thesis for B.A. degree
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Abstract

Estonia is a country with a complicated history, where democratic values and individual rights are held in high regards. However, these rights are not always extended to minority groups. This research analyses and documents the discrepancy between what is written in the official discourse about democratic values, discrimination, and equality, how these same notions are discussed in the educational discourse, and how that applies to and affects queer students. I apply a critical discourse analysis method to analyse the Estonian Constitution, Declaration of Human Rights, and European Union base documents in comparison to the Nation Curriculum of Estonia and a textbook of a Family Studies course. I use queer theory to analyse how these discourses relate to and affect queer students. The findings show that topics related to queer people are excluded from the curriculum revealing a discourse of heteronormativity, exclusion, and invisibility of queer students.

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Preface

This research is by far the most personal piece of work I have ever written. I come from a country where the majority of people think homosexuality is something wrong and unnatural. Even though I have always felt accepted and loved by my friends, there are still so many important people in my life to whom I have not and will probably never come out to just because I fear it will ruin our relationship. Living in a society like that for almost twenty years can make a person feel disheartened, alone and invisible. So when I first came to Iceland and started studying in the International Studies in Education program, I was shocked and incredibly excited when I realised that I could share and discuss parts of my identity that were important to me without feeling like I am constantly defending myself.

So firstly, I would like to thank all the teachers I have had at the University of Iceland for letting me be myself and explore my interests in class discussions and assignments which all lead me to writing this research.

Secondly, I would like to thank my advisor Jón Ingvar Kjaran for answering all my questions and his excellent guidance through this whole process.

Thirdly, I would like to thank my best friend and classmate Rosana for helping me keep my anxiety in check and always being there with helpful advice and my friend Luis for making my work sound less like rambling and more like academic writing.

This thesis was written solely by me, the undersigned. I have read and understand the university code of conduct and have followed them to the best of my knowledge. I have correctly cited to all other works or previous work of my own, including, but not limited to, written works, figures, data or tables. I thank all who have worked with me and take full responsibility for any mistakes contained in this work.

Reykjavik, May 8th, 2018

Eva Marta Sokk

1 Introduction

Estonia's history is one of constant change and turbulence. My grandfather was born during the first independence period, both my parents grew up in Soviet Estonia, and I was born and grew up in the re-independent Estonia, all of us from the same country, but all growing up under a different form of governing with a different world view. With every new governing power came new morals and values that are held in high importance by the government and its officials. As Estonia spent 47 years under totalitarian rule (and previously hundreds of years before that), democracy and its values have always been a way for politicians and thinkers to separate Estonian people from whatever power ruled them. However, even though these values are important to people and to the newly democratic free Estonia on paper, their sentiments do not always extend to everyone.

LGBT rights are a fairly new concept in Estonia. Although there have been some small unofficial organisations since the 1990s, the first organisation to explicitly deal with legal rights of LGBT people was founded in 2007 and the first umbrella organisation for LGBT people founded in 2008 (Davidjants, 2010). With LGBT organisations being founded only ten years ago, queer people have not been a part of the discourse surrounding democracy, diversity or tolerance for very long. This is why it is important to analyse just how these notions of 'democratic values' that Estonian people hold so dear, extend to queer people in today's Estonia.

This thesis paper is a critical discourse analysis on two levels. Firstly, it is looking at the official discourse of Estonia on the values that are represented in official documents and 'marketing' of the country globally. Looking at the Estonian Constitution and the documents it is based on, such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the base documents of the European Union, the following research will analyse how these documents deal with the notions of democracy, diversity and tolerance. Secondly, this thesis looks at the Estonian National Curriculum in terms of these same values and how these are represented in the Curriculum for Upper Secondary School for sexual education. For this reason, a book for the sexual education course will also be analysed. These values and concepts are discussed through the prism of inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and all queer topics and students. The question to be answered is as follows: How does the official discourse in Estonian Constitution with its supporting documents, the discourse in the National Curriculum, and the book for sexual education clash, and what does that

mean for LGBTQ+ students? My hypothesis is that there is a disparity between the two discourses which is critically harmful for LGBTQ+ students.

This research aims to document the differences between what is written in the Constitution and the values of the Curriculum and the Curriculum for sexual education and its treatment of LGBTQ+ students. Moreover, I aim to bring light to an issue that is not discussed in Estonia, and increase awareness of the situation of LGBTQ+ students in the current education system to ideally improve it.

This research is significant in Estonia, because research about LGBTQ+ people in Estonia is scarce, and research about LGBTQ+ youth is effectively non-existent. This is why I think research in this field is necessary: to bring light to issues the queer community in Estonia faces and how to best further equality in Estonia.

2 Methodology

In this thesis, I apply critical discourse analysis as a method of analysing and understanding the data. This method is a way of analysing different discourses in society, where language is viewed as a form of social practice and power (Fairclough, 1995). This approach combines social theory and linguistics in analysing the ideologies and power relations present in discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Social practices such as use of language are tied to power relations and ideology, which often goes unnoticed, perpetuating the unequal power relations. This is why critical discourse analysis tries to interpret the meaning behind this use of language (Toolan, 1997). As this requires interpretation of discourse by the researcher, CDA (critical discourse analysis) does not shy away from the fact that it can be subjective and political at times, rather than objective, removed from the subject matter and apolitical (Toolan, 1997). CDA researchers are 'critical agents who query the underlying assumptions of structures in our society and equip them with the linguistic tools for demystifying power relationships and de-harmonizing pseudo-harmony' (Wodak, 1996). This is the reason I chose this method to conduct my research: I wanted to be critical of the political and educational discourse in Estonia today. I often hear praise of the educational system in Estonia for doing so well in PISA and other international tests. However, identifying as a queer student who went through the education system in Estonia, I know it is lacking in terms of equality. That is why I wanted to critically examine it through the lens of equality in the curriculum. In other words to see if the education system is as good as it is told to be and what still needs improvement.

To gather my data, I initially looked through the Estonian Constitution and assessed which international documents are most closely linked to it. Following that, I read different articles about the Estonian identity and how it has been constructed through the years. After reading the documents, I identified the points of discussion that are similar in these documents and relevant to my research, which turned out to be the discourse around concepts such as tolerance, diversity and equality.

After analysing how these concepts were discussed in the legal documents, I turned to the curriculum to see if or how these same ideas were present, as well as the discourse around these concepts. I then focused more specifically on LGBTQ+ students and analysed if or how concepts such as tolerance, diversity and equality were related to and applied to this demographic in the curriculum. This led to a comparison of the official discourse in the Constitution, its supporting documents and the first pillars of the

curriculum and the education of, for and about queer students; that is- if the ideas of tolerance, diversity, and equality are extended to queer students in the education system or not.

In my research I mostly use three terms interchangeably: LGBTQ+, queer and non-heterosexual. Specifically, LGBTQ+ is an inclusive acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning plus other sexualities or genders that are not heterosexual or cisgender (LGBTQIA+ info, 2018). Queer is an umbrella term for people outside of the heterosexual norm (Barker; Scheele, 2016).

2.1 Queer theory

In this research, I use queer theory as the theoretical perspective. Queer theory emerged in the early 1990s (Milton, 1997). Its essence comes from the fact that 'queer' used to be a slur word used against sexual minorities but by reclaiming this word and turning it into something positive, this word has become a source of transformation, change, and a challenge to heterosexual hegemony and heteronormativity (Milton, 1997).

Heteronormativity is a concept in queer theory formed by Michael Warner (1991) in his essay *Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet* in. In his essay, he argues that many social theorists have so far marginalised other sexualities than heterosexuality. Warner (1991) writes in his essay: "Social theory, moreover, must begin to do more than occasionally acknowledge the gay movement because so much of heterosexual privilege lies in heterosexual culture's exclusive ability to interpret itself as society." In many ways, heterosexuality is still seen as the 'norm' and the obvious way a society should work. On the one hand, heteronormativity links directly to sexuality and sexual behaviour (Warner, 1991). Queer people have been oppressed throughout history because their sexual behaviour has been deemed unnatural and perverse (Warner, 1991). This is a direct oppression where heterosexuals are viewed as normal and homosexual people as not normal, unnatural. On the other hand, heteronormativity is the social exclusion of non-heterosexual people.

This social exclusion can also be defined as heterosexism. Heterosexism is the concept of non-heterosexual people being discriminated against or excluded from societal institutions such as government, family, religion or media because of their sexual identity (Adam, 2015). While the concept of homophobia focuses on an individual's prejudices and how that derives from their personal experience in life, through the concept of heterosexism, queer theorists look at how society as an institution continuously discriminates against non-heterosexual people (Adam, 2015).

Queer theorists emphasize the importance of transgressing the heteronormative society (Watson, 2005). This is done by celebrating the 'anti-normal' and highlighting and undermining the normativity of heterosexual and gender binary identity (Watson, 2005). For example, in the nineties, queer organisation engaged in political activity with 'kiss-ins' (displaying same-sex affection in ordinary places such as malls) to turn the neutralised heterosexual spaces into legitimate queer spaces (Watson, 2005). 'Queering' can also be done by analysing texts that are not explicitly talking about sexuality or gender from a queer perspective (Watson, 2005).

To understand why talking about sexuality is important to diversity, it needs to be understood what sexuality means to people in terms of their identity. Sexuality is often described as a feeling that motivates us to do things. For example, sexuality is talked about in terms of different attitudes towards sexual intercourse or something that is a part of a marriage or a relationship between two people. However, for many queer people, sexuality can be understood as one of the factors contributing to a person's identity. In queer theory, sexual identity is not a clear-cut concept (Watson, 2005). On one hand, many queer theorists see sexual identity as concept that reinforces the binary heterosexual-homosexual scale, and as queerness is seen as a form of transformation and change, they argue that we should move past these binary concepts (Watson, 2005). On the other hand, sexual identity is still often discussed, because it is important to understand the history, oppression and power relations of queer people. The writings by Michel Foucault, which were a big influence on the emergence of queer theory, examine the discourse of sexuality through history: sexuality has always been a point of power, and people who are not heterosexual have been historically repressed and thought of as perverse, sick or just as 'the other' (Foucault, 1978). This has created a power dynamic between heterosexual people, who are the 'norm' and non-heterosexual, queer people who are the 'other'. Queerness is an identity, because it has been historically, culturally and socially formed as opposed to heterosexuality, which is seen as 'human nature' and ahistorical (Watson, 2005). Queer people have had to fight for their right to be viewed by society as equal to heterosexual people and to have the same rights, which they largely still do not. As it is related to power dynamics in society and not just which gender a person is attracted to, it is a definite part of the queer identity. For example, the fact that in many countries, including Estonia, same sex marriage is still illegal, speaks of how the government views queer people: as a group that does not deserve the same treatment or rights as heterosexual people. The fact that heterosexual couples have more rights than non-heterosexual couples speaks of two things: heteronormativity and heterosexism.

3 The official discourse on values and equality of all

Estonia has endured many hardships through most of its existence. Its longest lasting streak of independence is currently ongoing, yet this only started in 1991. With different governing powers and authoritarian leaders such as kings of Sweden and Denmark, and tsars of Russia and USSR leadership, democracy has never been taken for granted by this country and its people. For Estonians, the freedom to express one's thoughts and opinions, to move, educate yourself, make art, science or literature- this all is something that has been recently gained, not had for hundreds of years. This is why freedom, independence, democracy, and democratic values are consistently a core component of the societal discourse in Estonia. In the following sections, I will discuss what kind of identity Estonia has as a country, the values represented in the constitution of Estonia, and international documents Estonia has signed.

3.1 Estonian Identity

Estonia is a small nation, next to a massive country with a considerable history of violence, thus it has always been important for Estonian politicians to emphasize its shared values with European countries, and to stress the political importance of being a part of Europe. One of the most famous Estonian quotes comes from a young writer Gustav Suits (1905), which said "Olgem eestlased, aga saagem ka eurooplasteks!" translating to "Let us be Estonians, but let us also become Europeans!" This was important to distinguish the Estonian identity from the Russian Empire's in 1905 and still remains important today in presenting Estonia as a European country rather than a Post-Soviet one.

Historically, talk of Estonians as Europeans, started in the late 19th/early 20th century with the cultural awakening that was transpiring in the ranks of poets, writers, philosophers, and other important cultural figures in Estonia (Karjahärm, 2001). This was an important effort in gaining our independence because identifying with French, German and Scandinavian culture meant distancing the Estonian culture from Russian Eastern culture (Karjahärm, 2001). At the turn of the century, Estonian thinkers saw Western Europe as a place of intellectuality- where thinking and logicity were considered important values. Europe was seen as a place where laws were accepted and respected, the free market flourished and state was separate from church (Kirch, 2002). Furthermore, European culture was seen as one where human rights and individuality

was cherished and promoted as opposed to the Russian Empire, which was seen as a culture of oppression for Estonian people (Karjahärm, 2001).

Estonian identity has always aligned with European one, because it has always differed from the Russian orthodox ways of thinking about religion, family, democracy, philosophy (Kirch, 2002). During the soviet time, the Baltic countries were referred to as 'The West of the Soviet Union' because our identities never fully aligned with the soviet one, but were always more attached to European values and ways of thinking (Kirch, 2002). Even though geographically and politically Estonia has always been in between the east and the west, Estonian people have for a long time self identified as Western Europeans (Kirch, 2002).

This desire to align Estonia with European values is also prevalent and noticeable in the branding of Estonia by the leaders of the country. For example, going through the last four speeches Estonian presidents have given on February 24th (the Independence Day speech, most listened to speech of the year by Estonian people), I found all of them to contain at least some talk of the European Union and the importance of that unity to Estonia (Ilves, 2015; Ilves 2016; Kaljulaid, 2017; Kaljulaid, 2018). In 2015, president Ilves talked about the importance of the solidarity of the European Union and how sharing values and beliefs is key to the integrity of the union as Russia had just annexed Crimea in 2014 (Ilves, 2015). In 2016 Ilves talked about constitutional values of Estonia being those of democracy and tolerance, and in light of the refugee crisis, how these values should be upheld so that Estonia would be a strong part of the European Union (Ilves, 2016). In 2017, the president's speech focused on international relations and how Estonia, as a nation in such a geopolitically tense place, must always internally hold in high regard democratic values (Kaljulaid, 2017). These democratic values are based on human rights, which apply to everyone and are a part of the nation's constitution (Kaljulaid, 2017). In the speech given on the 100th birthday of Estonia, the president mentioned that in order to have allies and be a great strong nation, we need to continue on the course of European democratic values and freedoms that we have been on for the last 26 years (Kaljulaid, 2018).

3.2 Constitution of Estonia

The Constitution of the Republic of Estonia was adopted in 1992, after the regaining of the country's independence. A Constitutional Assembly was gathered, who drafted the document of the constitution after which it was adopted by a referendum where in all Estonian citizens could vote (Madise et al., 2017). The constitution was decided to be based on the principles of balanced parliamentary democracy (Madise et al., 2017). The

first provision of The Constitution of Estonia states: § 1. Estonia is an independent and sovereign democratic republic wherein supreme political authority is vested in the people. The independence and sovereignty of Estonia are timeless and inalienable. With this come values, rights, freedoms, and duties which are fundamental to a democratic society. Under The Constitution of Estonia everyone is protected by law. No one can be discriminated against based on their nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, religion, political or other views, property or social status, or on other grounds. Incitement of violence, hatred, or discrimination against anyone based on their religion, race, ethnicity or social class is prohibited and punishable by law. This was established on the grounds of the Constitution of the European Union, and the United Nations Human Rights Declaration (Madise et al., 2017). Every person is entitled to their opinions and beliefs, although these are not a defence for violating the law (The Constitution of Estonia). There is freedom of religion and no official church in Estonia. Additionally, every person in Estonia has the right to self-realisation with respects to the rights of others and the law. Each person in Estonia also has a right to health care and to the protection of their health (The Constitution of Estonia). This entails that the government is required to give people the information they need, to make informed decisions regarding their health (Madise et al., 2017). Lastly, all people in Estonia have a right to education (The Constitution of Estonia). This is based on The Declaration of Human Rights (Madise et al., 2017). The societal aspect of education relies in the country producing citizens who share similar values and thus further democracy while avoiding indoctrination, and providing education in a pluralistic, critical and objective manner (Madise et al., 2017).

As a country that was rebuilding its identity from the ground, Estonia had an opportunity to create a constitution that was inclusive and democratic. At the time of its conception, the Constitution was rooted in the legal thinking prevalent in mainland Europe (Madise et al., 2017). This legal thinking had become increasingly value-based after World War II, and that is shown in the preamble of The Constitution of Estonia (Madise et al., 2017). All the rights mentioned above are based on certain values: independence of a person, the right to identity, freedom to live freely, and identify as you wish without being discriminated against or mocked because of it. The Constitution also entails the right to make informed decisions about one's life, through education. This all shows that in theory, equality, fairness and self actualisation are an important part of the Estonian Constitution.

3.3 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

Like the constitution, the values that the Estonian government holds can be seen through the international documents that have been signed over the years. There are also

international documents that are mentioned in The Constitution as being a basis for it. I will discuss a few of them: the Declaration of Human Rights and the base documents of the European Union, to see what kind of values these documents hold, and how it shapes the values of Estonian government.

The first international document that shaped European legal thinking, and therefore the Estonian Constitution is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (from here on referred to as UDHR) (1948) states that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”. This document consists of the most basic human rights everyone has. Firstly, everyone is born free and equal, and these rights apply to everyone without distinction of any kind such as, but not limited to, race, sex, religion, political opinion, nation, social, or other status. (UN General Assembly, 1948). Furthermore, among other things, UDHR (1948) claims that every person is entitled to education. Education in UN countries should be free, at least on a basic level and should promote tolerance, understanding, and human rights, and should aide in the development of a student’s personality. Additionally, all people have the right to realization of themselves and information on their views (UN General Assembly, 1948). These human rights mentioned in the documents should be promoted in all member states of the United Nations through education and teaching on all societal levels (UN General Assembly, 1948). Although this document was drafted seventy years ago, it remains just as relevant today. This document is a basis for the values that societies hold today. Firstly, it is important that this document is called The *Universal* Declaration of Human Rights because this really emphasizes the facts that this document applies to everyone everywhere no matter their nationality, gender, race and so on - absolutely everyone is protected and equal in this document. Secondly, although this document was drafted after World War II, it does not only try to prevent war; it was a completely new way of thinking (Krapf, 2013). This was a document, that for the first time, promoted countries working together towards a better understanding and upholding of human rights, rather than separately (Krapf, 2013). Not only does this document promote equality in front of the law, but it also emphasizes that people have the right to self realization and receiving information about their beliefs, opinions, or identity so they have the chance to live to their fullest potential. All of what is written in The Universal Declaration of Human Rights should encourage countries to keep working towards the most equal, tolerant, and peaceful society possible.

3.4 European Union

Estonia has been a part of the European Union since 2004 (European Union, 2018). Since then, it has been legally abided to follow certain documents, rules, and guidelines that the European Union incites. The two core European Union treaties are the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which were amended and consolidated with the Treaty of Lisbon (European Union, 2012). These documents set out the guidelines for all EU countries and encompass the values they all should hold. In the following section, I will look at the articles in these documents that talk about issues relevant to this research such as equality, discrimination and education.

Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union states: “The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.” (European Union, 2012). This clearly states the values that EU countries should promote, especially through institutions belonging to the public sector such as education. Furthermore, article 8 and 10 state that the aim of the EU is to promote equality between men and women and combat discrimination based on “sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.” (European Union, 2012). Article 21 of Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union also prohibits the discrimination of people based on different factors with sexual orientation being one of them (European Union, 2012). The EU is currently working on a strategic framework that not only improves educational quality, but also the applicability of that very education to the European job market (European Commission, 2018). The bulk of it focuses on how to develop skills such as problem solving and creative thinking to fasten the economic growth in Europe, and make it easier for people to move between countries and work places on a global scale (European Commission, 2018). However, it is also brought out in several documents that to give quality education, it is important to have equality (European Commission, 2018; European Council, 2009). Through its curriculums, the education in EU countries should promote democratic values such as equity, tolerance, and personal and social fulfilment for the students (European Commission, 2018). Equality in education is important to combat discrimination, through students having positive interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. This way, students who belong to a minority group do not feel left out, but feel inspired to be active citizens in a community (European Council, 2018). The Estonian government’s European Union Policy concerning education also points out that it is important to reduce inequality in education so everyone can access equally good,

quality education, no matter their background (Government of the Republic of Estonia, 2019). Promoting equality, tolerance, non-discrimination and democracy, the European Union base documents align with what is said both in the Human Rights Declaration and the Constitution of Estonia.

3.5 Discussion

Undoubtedly, Estonia and its people have a strong identity connection to Europe. It has been the basis of the country's differentiation from Russia for over a century. Estonian people identify strongly with what are believed to be European values such as individuality, democracy, and equality. These values are also represented in documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and European Constitution, which are the basis for European legal thinking. The documents have had a huge influence on the re-independent Estonia's constitution.

A discourse that is heavily prevalent in the international documents and Estonian Constitution is one of equality. All these documents state clearly that no one should be discriminated against based on their identity. This idea of equality carries on throughout the documents. Some parts of identity are well protected, such as nationality, race, and sex. But, in terms of sexuality, equality in Estonia is still lacking. While incitement of hate or violence against people based on their religion, race, ethnicity or social class is prohibited, the constitution does not explicitly say anything about queer people. Moreover, marriage is still defined in Estonian law as a union between a man and a woman, and same sex couples cannot jointly adopt children (Family Law Act, 2009).

The main discourse in these documents is one of democracy. As both the European Union and the United Nations were organizations that started as a response to World War II, democracy and democratic values are a key to their functioning. This is also something that is constantly talked about in Estonia, since for most of the country's recent history, it has been governed by totalitarian regimes. This is shown in the Constitution of Estonia and in many of the important speeches by the leaders of the country. These democratic values ideally include valuing equality, diversity, liberty, justice, and pursuit of happiness (Quigley, 1991).

As being European is so important to Estonia and these documents are essential to the functioning of European countries, the values they hold should be represented heavily in all governmental actions. If it is the desire of Estonian people to be an integral part of the European Union, it is essential that values like equality and tolerance are being carried onto the next generations. The only way to do this is through teaching these

values to students in schools, both explicitly in the curriculum, and implicitly in the hidden curriculum.

4 Education in Estonia

Estonia has a long, complex history with many different governing powers, and the same can be said about its education. While forms of education have existed since the beginning of settlement in modern Estonia, formal schooling emerged in the 17th century, under the rule of the Kingdom of Sweden and in the light of the Lutheran reformation (Eesti Instituut, 2018). In 1632 the first university in Estonia, University of Tartu was established by the Swedish king (Tamul, 2018). In the 18th century, under the rule of empress Catherine II and in the spirit of enlightened absolutism, a network of education was established, wherein Estonian peasants (mostly boys) started being mass educated in formal schooling (Eesti Instituut, 2018). In parishes, more than half of the peasant population was literate, and in towns that number was even higher, which shows a high level of literacy for its time (Eesti instituut, 2018).

While the 18th century was a time of war and poverty in Estonia that closed down schools and reduced literacy levels (in contrast to the rest of Europe, where philosophy and education was thriving), the 19th century brought with it a resurgence of education in Estonia (Eesti instituut, 2018). This was a time when serfdom was abolished and the maintenance of schools fell into the responsibilities of landless peasants. In the middle of 19th century, there was a time of national awakening, when people first started referring to themselves as Estonians and the cultural value of the Estonian identity started to be talked about within the Estonian intelligentsia and the standard written language, and national journalism started developing (Eesti Instituut, 2018). At the end of the 19th century, 94% of the population could read and 48% could read and write, on account of the teachers who read and wrote a lot in newspapers. They were active members of choirs and shared all their knowledge with their students, leading to a strong national identity and setting the groundwork for an independent country (Eesti Instituut, 2018). In the brief time of Estonia's first independent period from 1918 to 1940, a strong culture of education was established, where all primary and secondary education could be received in Estonian language. This was guided by Western ideas of democracy and made education a blend of Estonian culture and values and Western philosophy, as well as several new universities being established (Eesti Instituut, 2018). The second World War brought with it the occupation of Estonia by Soviet Russia, until 1991 (Eesti Instituut, 2018). In the Soviet era, while growing in egalitarianism and accessibility, the standard of education lowered in Estonia (Eesti Instituut, 2018). Education was guarded by soviet

principles, and while some textbooks were translated from Russian and some written by Estonian teachers, they were all ideologically influenced and the main goal of education was to further the communist ideology (Eesti Instituut, 2018). As this was a very long part of our history (the millennial generation being only the first who were born and grew up in free Estonia), many teachers still went through their education and their teacher training under in the soviet era. The 1990s brought with it a time of change - the new education law, established when independence was regained in 1992, outlined a new system of education where Western ideals were adapted and school went from learning facts and figures to intellectual skills (Krull; Trasberg, 2006). This change in government brought with it the biggest difficulty of Estonian education that has carried to this day - integrating Russian schools into Estonian society (Krull; Trasberg, 2006). Although there are still many difficulties Estonian education faces, it is now considered internationally well built, ranking third in the 2015 PISA results, with stress and anxiety levels of students being below average (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2017).

The education system in Estonia is divided as follows: basic school, which consists of three stages: first to third, fourth to sixth, and seventh to ninth grade, after which a students can choose to go to secondary school if they wish to do so (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). At the end of ninth grade, a students has to complete three exams, one in Estonian as a native or secondary language, one in mathematics, and an exam of their choice (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). After that, people can either choose to not continue with school, go to vocational school, or to an upper secondary school. At the end of the three years of upper secondary school, students are required to have done a research project and do exams in Estonian as a native or second language, foreign language (mostly English), and Mathematics (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017).

Even though Estonian education has improved vastly in the last 30 years and is a part of the top education systems in the world, from personal experience, it is still very traditional. In upper secondary schools, there is little chance for a student to choose their preferred subjects. For example, I had to do ten courses of Math, four courses of Chemistry, and five courses of Physics even though I was sub par at all of these subjects and had no interest in them or ever continuing my studies in any of those fields. Even though I believe it is important to have a base knowledge of all subjects, forcing students to study subjects that they have no interest in so extensively hinders learner autonomy, and may not be the best use of the short valuable time a person spends in upper secondary school. Standardised testing is very common in Estonia, with students having to do the first standardised test in third grade, and highly demanding tests at the end of

the third unit of school (with most schools having additional school exams). As such, it is the goal of many teachers to prepare students for tests rather than give them an education that is holistic and value based.

4.1 National Curriculum

The Estonian National Curriculum (2011) establishes the national standard for upper secondary schools in Estonia and applies to all upper secondary schools in the Republic of Estonia. This document is divided into six parts: core values of upper secondary education, learning and educational objectives, concept of learning and the learning environment, organization of studies, assessment, and graduation from upper secondary school and the school curriculum. This is followed by appendixes that set out the curriculum for all of the mandatory and voluntary subjects in upper secondary school (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

The National Curriculum (2011) is based on the values present in the following documents: the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the base documents of European Union. The core values preserved in the curriculum are individual values such as honesty, compassion, dignity, self-respect, and social values such as liberty, democracy, patriotism, cultural diversity, and tolerance (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011).

The first general provision of the National Curriculum (2011) states that “upper secondary education provides equal support to students’ mental, physical, moral, social and emotional development and to satisfying their educational needs arising from individual particularities and personal interests”. Taking into account students’ different identities, world views, and opinions, upper secondary school should help them attain emotional, social, and moral maturity. This is also done to make sure students have a harmonious relationship between society and personal life in order to educate them into adults that take an active part in developing a well functioning community (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). The primary objectives of the curriculum (2011) are to shape students into independent thinkers with a clear world view. They should be able to frame their self-esteem and develop their skills to learn independently, cooperate, and make educated choices in choosing a career. The curriculum should also shape students’ civic skills, activity, and responsibility. Many competences are mentioned as being important to achieve. One relevant part for this research is cultural and value competence: to value human, cultural, and societal diversity and to be tolerant and cooperative. The other part is social and citizenship competence: to be an active member of society, understand diversity, human rights, differences in people, global problems,

and be capable of dialogue in terms of Estonia or Europe (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). When searching through the general curriculum, there were no mentions of the words 'homosexuality', 'LGBT', 'sexuality' or 'sexual education.' However, the core values of the curriculum do include diversity and tolerance and as stated, Upper Secondary education is supposed to support the students' emotional, mental development and their self-esteem. As there are queer students in the education system, this should also apply to them.

Under the social studies component, there is a mandatory course of personal, social, and health education. The general principles of social studies subjects in the curriculum are to develop students who have a respect for human rights, democracy, respect cultural differences and diversity and be an active and responsible citizen. Students should also have a positive attitude towards themselves and others around them and value social justice and equality. The subject of personal, social, and health education takes place for one semester and aims to teach students to have respect for people around them and their individuality, make them understand differences between people, value family and supportive relationships, and be competent and active citizens (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). The course under this subject is specifically called Family Studies and it aims to teach students how society changes the values and traditions of family, what the different forms of cohabitation and their pros and cons are, the connection between love and sexuality, and how society changes how people view sexuality and sexual relations (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). This course also analyzes the advantages and disadvantages of marriage, responsibility of parenthood, and value of close family relations (Ministry of Education and Research, 2011). In this document, the word 'sexuality' is mentioned twice, with no mentions of 'homosexuality,' 'LGBT,' or 'sexual education.'

It is also notable that although this course is in the curriculum under the mandatory courses, in upper secondary school, I never received this course. This was instead substituted with a course on the history of psychology and different psychological schools of thought. The only education on sexuality I received in upper secondary school were a few classes in a biology course on effective contraceptive methods and sexually transmitted diseases.

4.2 Family Studies Textbook (Perekonnaõpetuse õpik)

It is apparent that although diversity and understanding of different identities seems to be a key part in the general provisions of the curriculum, sexuality or different sexual identities are not mentioned much if at all in the curriculum, with only one subject that

lasts one course (35 lessons) devoted to anything remotely related to this topic. In my search, I found only one textbook for this course, being from 2007.

Written by Kagadze, Kraav, and Kullasepp, this sheds light on how sexuality is discussed in education in Estonia. The book starts with talking about family, how the notion of family has changed, and what the purposes of it are nowadays. While it does say that the term 'family' no longer exclusively means nuclear families (families where all members are all directly related to each other through blood), the book still writes that the bonds between people in families where people have remarried and where family members are not biologically related are weaker than a traditional nuclear family, indicating that the traditional mother, father, two kids model is somehow superior to other forms of family ties. As a purpose of the family, the first things that are listed are to have children and to start an active sexual life for the purpose of reproduction. The book also closely links family and marriage and while they state that a family can be two adults who are not married, the implications of all the purposes of the family (such as having legitimate children, a sexual life, sharing economic income etc) show marriage and children as being an obvious part of a family. Let it be known that in Estonia, marriage is defined as a contract between a man and a woman, and same sex couples cannot jointly adopt children (Family Law Act, 2009). When talking about the concept of family in Estonia in the 21st century, the textbook mentions different types of marriage, what age people get married, and when they decide to have children as well as people who decide to have a child by themselves, but there is no mention of same-sex families.

The fourth and part of the book focuses specifically on sexuality. It talks about the different ways that sexuality and sexual relations are viewed - absolutist, where sexuality is talked about only in the context of marriage and procreation, relativist, where the decision is made on the spot depending on the situation, and hedonist, that seeks the most amount of pleasure. This chapter also discusses how gender identity forms in a person's childhood and how in teenage years, people can feel intense emotions because of their hormones and how this is normal and not final. This chapter mentions in passing that there are three sexualities (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) but does not delve into any of them on a deeper level than just mentioning them or talk about any other sexual identities. The last sentence of the chapter (and the whole book) says that during puberty, people can experience affection and desire towards both the opposite and people of the same sex, from which one cannot conclude their sexuality. In the section discussing gender identity, the book mentions that some people do not psychologically align with their biological gender and refers to these people as transsexuals.

When searching for specific words, the word 'homosexuality' comes up three times: firstly in discussing the history of sexuality and how homosexuality was allowed in brothels in Ancient Rome, secondly in a paragraph talking about research of Estonian people's attitudes towards sexuality, and thirdly in a task where students have to agree or disagree with sentences and discuss them, the sentence being "Homosexual couples should have the right to adopt." Words or phrases such as 'lesbian' 'gay' 'queer' 'sexual minority' or 'LGBT' were not mentioned in the book.

4.3 Heteronormativity in education

Heteronormativity is heavily present in the Estonian education system. For example, in the curriculum and the book discussed beforehand, there is no mention of sexual education for LGBTQ+ students. In this way, queer students are being rendered invisible and marginalised, treated as people who do not need education. This is hurting queer students when they do not get the education they need to have sex safely, and puts them in danger. Queer youth already are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behavior, which leads to more STDs (Hafeez, et al., 2017) so queer students need especially informative sexual education. However, the sexual education they are currently getting in Estonia could be compared to the abstinence-only education that is prevalent in some states of the United States. This is a way of teaching sexual education where the only thing taught to students is to abstain from sexual relations until marriage with minimal information given to students about safe sex, sexuality, STD prevention, etc (Social Security Act, 1982). This has proven to be an ineffective method, which does not combat STD rates among young people or high rates of teen pregnancy (Kirby, 2007). In other words, problems that arise from young people starting to be sexually active are not combatted effectively by not informing students about these topics. Similarly in Estonia, there is an inequality between queer and heterosexual students, because they are given less information on how to practice safe sex.

In another way, heterosexism is seen in society through a power structure: which kind of families are seen as important for society, and what kind of privileges do married people have over people who are not or can not marry. Heterosexual people in today's society possess cultural hegemony (Warner, 1991). What is seen as the perfect, most well functioning family is the nuclear family, representing the heteronormative view society has on family. In the book discussed in the last segment, different types of family relationships were discussed. Although different ones were mentioned, the book still said that nuclear families have the strongest family bonds and therefore should be the desired state. Truthfully, the percentage of nuclear families has drastically declined in the last decades and more people choose to remarry other people, not have children, have a child

on their own, or with their partner through adoption or other means (Cohen, 2015). Presenting the nuclear family as the best model of a family not only eliminates all the queer people from the conversation, but also excludes all of the other students, whose family situations might differ from what is considered the norm in education. In education, families and marriage are also often talked about as means of sexual reproduction (Warner, 1991). In the book mentioned in the last chapter, we can see that sexuality is very much linked to reproduction, having children seen as the ultimate goal of sexuality, marriage and family. This is an example of heteronormativity, because for many queer people, sexuality has nothing to do with reproduction. Same sex couples cannot marry in Estonia or reproduce and by linking these things, it eliminates the same sex family model, and makes it marginalised and unimportant.

4.4 Education, young people and sexuality issues

Heteronormativity through the invisibility of queer people in the curriculum harms queer students in the long run, including their life in school. School climate is something that affects how LGBTQ+ students feel about themselves (Pearce et al., 2016). Already in 1951, Arnold Rose wrote: “Prejudice is nearly always accompanied by incorrect or ill-informed opinions regarding the people against whom it is felt.”

According to a survey by the Human Rights Center in 2017 in Estonia, young people ages 15-19 were the group who got the majority of their information on LGBT subjects from the internet as well as being the biggest group, 40%, who had been exposed to campaigns inciting intolerance towards LGBT people. Only 26% of 15-19 year old people have actually met a homosexual person, so there is a gap of people who have never been exposed to homosexual people, but have been exposed to campaigns inciting hate against them. When the only information students have on LGBTQ+ topics comes from questionable websites and hateful campaigns, prejudices are going to occur and queer students are going to be in danger in schools.

Although no information on this topic is available regarding Estonia, a study done by GLSEN in The US in 2015 revealed that more than half of LGBTQ students felt unsafe at schools, 27% of students were physically harassed, 13% physically assaulted, almost half experienced online harassment and almost 60% were sexually harassed. When queer students clearly still suffer under great amount of harassment, the education system should do its part to end it. The study done by the Human Rights Centre in Estonia in 2015 also showed that 34% of 15-19 year olds thought homosexuality was totally unacceptable to them, the most common reasons being that homosexuality is either abnormal, unnatural, against nature, or untraditional. None of these are things based on logic or

merit and could be changed if the education system provided students with information that is true, logical and inclusive, not biased, and incited intolerance. Additionally, 31.8% of students missed one day and 1/10 more than four days of school in the last month because of bullying.

This shows that queer students are not equal to straight students in two ways. Firstly, because of heteronormative attitudes in the education system, they are not getting the education that is relevant to their own life. Secondly, queer students are more prone to missing school days because they feel unsafe. This victimization leads to a lower GPA among queer students, showing that this invisibility in the curriculum directly affects the overall quality of education for queer students (Wernicke et al., 2013). Positive discussion of LGBTQ people, history, and events is linked with a safer, more accepting school climate for LGBTQ youth. This way, including discussion of LGBTQ identity in discussions about sexuality would have a positive effect on the school experience of queer students (Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2013).

It is clear to see that through the heteronormativity in the Estonian curriculum, heterosexual students possess clear cultural hegemony in education: the queer experience only has a part in the null curriculum. The null curriculum refers to the things that are left out of the curriculum (Flinders et al., 1986). As curriculum makers have a limited amount of hours in the classroom to work with, they need to leave some topics out and this sheds light as to what is considered important and unimportant (Flinders et al., 1986). This aspect of the curriculum is important because it shows what kind of perspective students will never have or concepts that will not be a part of their understanding, because they are left out of the curriculum (Flinders et al., 1986). Thus, it is an unequal situation where heterosexual students get a well rounded sexual education and queer students do not get an education that caters to their needs or makes them feel included in the education system. This creates oppression of queer students for three reasons. Firstly, they are left to fend for themselves and there is no guarantee that they ever get true and necessary information regarding their sexuality and sexual health. Secondly, it distances queer students from the education system in general, because they are invisible in the curriculum and the heteronormative education system treats the heterosexual family model as the norm, making queer people feel as outsiders in this system. Thirdly, not talking about sexuality and queer issues in the education system directly affects the safety of queer students, because violence and bullying from their peers, which queer students experience in high frequency, comes often from students not knowing anything about queerness or sexuality, beyond what is read on the internet. Positive discussion LGBTQ

experiences will reduce bullying (Wernicke et al., 2013). This all shows a direct inequality in the education system in Estonia.

Throughout history, education has been of high quality and importance in Estonia. Students are rigorously tested to ensure the quality of education and to continue giving students the means to higher education and personal development. However, this quality only seems to apply to students who fit the heteronormative education system. Queer students in the Estonian education system are marginalised, rendered invisible, and not given the information they need for the healthy development of their identity.

5 Discussion and analysis

When reading the Estonian Constitution, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and the base documents for the European Union, there are clear values that run through it: diversity, tolerance, resistance against discrimination, an individual's right to self-actualisation, and freedom on information. These same values are also discussed in the first provisions of the National Curriculum of Estonia. However, these values, even though talked about in the general provisions, are not seen in the curriculum for sexual and family education and thus are not implemented when it comes to the education of sexual minority students.

Firstly, it is important to talk about diversity, tolerance, and resistance against discrimination. All the documents discussed in this paper mention these as being key parts of democracy and how to further it in a society. The constitution of Estonia, the Human Rights Declaration and the EU documents all say that there is no place for discrimination in a democracy. The education policy for EU countries mentions that tolerance and understanding should be promoted through education in EU countries. Everyone should have access to quality education no matter their identity or background. This also correlates to the first provisions of education in the National Curriculum, where, under the competences that should be achieved in Upper Secondary School, it mentions competences such as understanding diversity, human rights, and being tolerant.

However, these values are not seen in the curriculum for sexual and family education and the book for the course on this topic. There is no diversity in this course where same sex families are not mentioned, different sexual identities are not talked about thus rendered invisible, and heteronormative attitudes run through the whole book, praising marriage and nuclear families as the best way of living a life. Furthermore, this course does nothing to combat discrimination when clearly it is needed in Estonia - attitudes regarding homosexuality are still negative in large numbers and young people are exposed to incitement of hate and intolerance against homosexual people. LGBTQ+ people are mostly invisible in Estonia - there are no gay characters on television or anywhere in the media. The only visibility queer people have in the Estonian media sphere is when there is any debate about LGBTQ+ rights, which means that for young people there is no normalisation of being anything other than heterosexual, and any identity beyond that only exists as something political and polarising. In a situation like this, if the duty of an education system is to combat intolerance and further democracy, it

is clear that not talking about topics that people are misinformed about, does exactly the opposite. When students are left with the ideas they hear from the internet or other media that promote intolerance, they are not going to embrace diversity and be tolerant of other people. The education system has to be the one to provide them with information that is comprehensive and promotes tolerance in order for this to be the attitude of the general population in the future.

Furthermore, both the Estonian Constitution and the Declaration of Human Rights both talk about the right to self actualisation. Also, people should be able to receive information about their interests, beliefs and identity in order for them to live their life to the fullest potential. This is also mentioned in the National Curriculum, where it is mentioned that one of the goals of Upper Secondary school is for young people to realize their identity, be comfortable with themselves and respect themselves. This all leads to people being citizens who are interested in society around them and how to better it. When a person feels like they are valued by society, they are more likely to contribute to it. For example, voting rates are always highest among older, middle class people, because these are the people politicians constantly address in their speech and policies, thus making them interested in voting because they feel like politicians care about their problems (National Voter Corps, 2017).

Education should be the place that gives young queer people the tool to self actualization. As discussed before, when queer people are not talked about in classes and their hardships are ignored, prejudice against them remains and they get bullied and harassed in school. In an environment where a person is treated as a second class citizen and something abnormal, there is no room for self actualization. When queer people choose to skip school to avoid harassment, it is not helping them to be the best version of themselves. As a consequence of that, queer people feel like the education system does not care about them and thus are less likely to engage with it (Gowen & Winges-Yanez, 2013). This leads to disillusionment with society, because the societal organization students are most exposed to is the education system. In a situation like this, young queer people are less likely to become citizens who are engaged in political processes or societal discourse, if they feel societally discarded and bullied.

Moreover, what is mentioned as a human right, a right of every EU citizen and as a right in the Estonian constitution is the right to health care. Although this is not directly mentioned in the Constitution, the version of the Constitution with extensive commentary by Ülle Madise et al. (2017) notes that with the right to health care also comes the right to information about one's health care. Information about sexual health is more important than ever as Estonia has one of the highest rates of HIV in the

European Union and half of them have gotten the infection via sexual intercourse while most of these people are under the age of 35 (National Institute for Health Development, 2016; Terviseinfo, 2017).

This means that all young people should get information about their sexual health and on how to prevent contracting STDs, because this is a topic that directly affect many young people's health. However, when the only discussion of sexuality in classes is of heterosexual relationships, queer students do not get this information that they need to have a comprehensive knowledge of the risks to their health. This directly puts queer students in danger, because they are not given the tools to know how to protect themselves.

6 Conclusion

The discourse prevalent in the official documents of Estonia is one of diversity, democracy, and tolerance. The Constitution of Estonia and its supporting documents all speak of the protection of human rights. It is clear from these documents that discrimination is something that should be avoided and diversity is something to be celebrated. All these documents state that people have the right to be themselves and have the opportunity to self-actualisation and live to their fullest potential, which the government should support in order for democracy to flourish. When looking at the values important to Estonian people one can also tell that values as democracy and individuality are held in high regard for the people in Estonia. This translates to the general provisions of the Estonian Curriculum where it is stated that education should equip students with the tools to be themselves, have respect for themselves and for other people. It also aims to teach students about diversity, tolerance, individuality.

On the other hand, the values expressed in the Constitution and the Curriculum are limited in practice and not extended to LGBTQ+ youth in Estonia. Queer youth are marginalised in the curriculum, with hardly any mention of them or their identity. This speaks of a heteronormative system where heterosexuals are still seen as the standard and queer students are left to search for information themselves, outside of the education system. This creates a situation where queer students are not only deprived of vital information about their health and identity, but also mocked and bullied because their peers are misinformed about LGBTQ+ topics.

An education system that marginalises and erases a group of individuals from its curriculum is not one that promotes tolerance, diversity, and democracy. The reasons behind this are beyond the scope of this research, but it should be mentioned that the majority of law makers, curriculum developers and teachers in Estonia grew up in the Soviet Estonia where homosexual acts were criminalised and queer people were sent to psychiatric hospitals (Resource Information Centre, 1998). This is also supported by the statistic that the median age for Estonian teachers is 47.9 years and the average years of working experience is 21.6 years, which means that a bulk of teachers went to school and university in the Soviet era (OECD, 2013). This could mean that teachers themselves could be uninformed about queer subjects and uninformed teachers cannot make for informed students. However, this is something that needs to be researched more thoroughly.

Undoubtedly, having big words like 'democracy' and 'diversity' in official documents does not mean that this translates to people's personal lives. If Estonia wants to be a country that celebrates individuality and diversity - ideals that are prevalent in the official discourse of the Estonian government - this needs to translate to every level, where people, who need the most protection from their government, can actually feel it and benefit from it.

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