



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL  
STUDIES, CULTURE AND  
IDENTITY

**Degree Project with Specialisation in Psychology in  
Education**

15 Credits, Second Cycle

**Left out: Exclusionary gender discourses  
in Swedish high school psychology  
textbooks**

*Utanför: Exkluderande genusdiskurser i svenska läromedel för  
psykologi på gymnasienivå*

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Supplementary Programme in Education, 90  
Credits) Psychology Studies in Education  
1 June 2020

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# Thanks

I would like to thank a number of people who made this thesis possible. Thanks to my two supervisors, Urban Nilsson and Tullia Jack, for your professional help, without which I would have been lost. Thanks to Maria and Arvid Wennergren for your invaluable feedback and proofreading. Thanks to Laurie Pennington and Naomi Gruszka for continuous support, and for reminding me to take breaks. Thanks to my work colleagues for easing my burdens on the job. Finally, I offer undying thanks to Rob Arias, for endless support, countless hours of taking dictation when the pain of typing was too great, and for always making dinner.

# Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to identify discursive representations of gender in three different learning materials used in an introductory course to psychology on the high school level in Sweden. Methodology and theory come primarily from discourse analytical traditions and have also been informed by certain feminist theories. A systematic reading and coding of the text and images present in the materials led to the emergence of three themes: pronouns, norms, and difference. The thesis is a part of a degree in pedagogy, and the intended result of the analysis was to aid myself and other teachers of psychology, my specialisation, in the development of norm critical pedagogy and didactics which foster a better understanding of marginalized people in our students. The findings were that the two psychology textbooks *Psychology 1 + 2a* (Levander and Levander, 2012) and *Mänskligt* (“Human”) (Bernerson and Cronlund, 2017) have each addressed norms, including norms surrounding gender and sexual orientation, but have also acted to reify normative discourses in these areas. *Mänskligt* has done a somewhat better job of lifting and applying norm critique. The third material, *Bryt!* (“Break the Norm!”), is not a psychology textbook but a workbook in norm critique mostly consisting of exercises to be carried out in groups with the intention of facilitating understanding of norms and their consequences. My recommendation is to employ *Bryt!* as a supplement to the use of one or both of the analyzed textbooks in the classroom in order to offer our students a more thorough understanding of the ways in which norms, particularly the cis/heteronorm, act to negatively affect the mental health of marginalized populations such as members of the LGBTQIA+ population.

Keywords: Gender, sexuality, norms, discourse analysis, psychology didactics, transgender, nonbinary, intersex

Nyckelord: Genus, sexualitet, normer, diskursanalys, psykologi didaktik, transpersoner, ickebinär, intersex



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# Introduction and Purpose

One day while teaching a psychology class, I, a male teacher, made a passing reference to my husband. “Your WHAT?!?” exclaimed one of my students, incredulously. “My husband,” I replied. Some weeks later, the same student approached me after class and asked what I had meant when I said “my husband.” I explained that I was referring to the person to whom I am married. To this she replied that her best friend is also “like that.” Gender and sexuality norms are all around us. The world of education is no exception.

In making didactic choices, we as educators are faced with myriad challenges in our striving to present core content in ways which are accessible to all the students in our classrooms while encouraging them to approach the material in a critical way. Textbooks and supplemental learning materials can influence the ways in which we students interact with the content of the courses we teach, and the discourses present in those texts formulate some phenomena, including subject positions and identities, as possible, impossible, normative, or deviant. Because teachers and teaching materials are often afforded the status of besitting truth, students are likely to accept much of what is presented as true in the curriculum unless they are encouraged to think critically about the “facts” presented. Psychology as a school subject has the unique position of supposing to impart truths about how human beings function and what constitutes a healthy individual, and of impacting the way students understand their fellow human beings (Jägerskog, 2018). As gender is an important factor in the way people interact with each other, whether they be aware of it or not, my aim in undertaking this text analysis is to identify how gender is presented in learning materials for psychology at the high school level in Sweden, and what the consequences of those discourses might be.

Understandings of gender are a particularly interesting realm at this point in history in Sweden. As feminist and queer activists and theorists struggle to redefine meanings of the gendered, change is becoming possible and in some ways actualized (see for example Schmitt, Alm, Nord, & Bremer, 2016). One of the most apparent struggles for meaning is taking place around the use of personal pronouns. “Name and pronoun rounds,” in which the participants in, for example, a meeting take turns introducing themselves with their name and the personal pronouns they choose to use, have been common in queer spaces for quite some time. But the

free choice of personal pronouns, particularly gender-neutral ones, has been a hot topic in the public sphere in Sweden for years now (Eklund, 2013). The use of the gender-neutral pronoun “hen” has been the target of heated debate but seems to be on its way towards normalization, even if its use is far from uncontested (Magnusson, 2014). It is used in different ways, sometimes to refer to a general, unspecified person instead of using “he or she,” and sometimes to refer to a specific person, either when gender is unknown or when that person has stated that “hen” is their chosen pronoun. The reader will note that I use the pronoun “they” to refer to individuals in a non-gendered way, this being the most commonly used gender-neutral personal pronoun in the English speaking (especially queer/trans) world (It’s OK to use “they” to describe one person, n.d.).

The Swedish ministry of education, Skolverket, explicitly requires that schools actively combat and counteract discrimination on all bases covered by Swedish law, including sex and sexual orientation. Gender identity is not explicitly included but may nevertheless be indirectly referenced by way of its intrinsic link to the two previously mentioned identity categories. Teachers are also expected to foster in their students a sense of democracy and a critical stance in general, as well as actively prevent discrimination and exclusion of marginalized students in the classroom (Jämställdhet i skolan, Skolverket, 2020). Skolverket as an institution is aware of the clear link between the effect on learning which the interaction between teachers and students has, and highlights that, in that interaction, norms are communicated and power is therewith exercised (Sexuella trakasserier – regelverk och teori, 2020). We as teachers have the duty and the responsibility to create an environment in which all students can actively take part and enter into a critical dialogue with the subject material presented. Discourses surrounding gender and sexual orientation have very concrete consequences outside of the classroom (Ramirez, 2013). Not only do the ways in which learning materials present and criticise (or fail to criticize) norms affect the extent to which students are able to absorb and digest the course material, they can also have a direct impact on the ways in which students subsequently interact with other people in the real world (ibid.).

Many of the students I meet in my psychology courses are in programs preparing them for careers in the healthcare sector. Such careers carry with them extensive and sometimes intimate contact with other individuals in society who, just like my students, find themselves in a host of sociocultural positions, both normative and norm-breaking. People with non-normative



sexual orientations and especially gender identities are particularly vulnerable to a range of violence and social exclusion (Madrigal-Borloz, 2019, Takács, 2006). When these identity positions intersect with other forms of oppression, the results can be catastrophic. Trans women of color, for example, are subjected to violence, including murder, at an extremely disproportionate rate the world over (Human Rights Campaign, 2019). While statistics in Sweden are lacking, it is clear that LGBTQ people are disproportionately at risk for hate crimes including violence (Uppsala Universitet, n.d.). The mental health of sexual minorities and transpeople in Sweden is significantly worse than that of the general population (Folkhälsomyndigheten, 2014 & 2015). Given the sometimes dire consequences of norms surrounding gender and sexuality, it is of importance to critically examine which discourses are present in teaching materials so as to inform teachers' didactic choices and increase students' knowledge about vulnerable populations. The purpose, again, of this thesis is to inform and develop the pedagogical and didactic strategies used in teaching about gender in psychology courses.

# Research Question

In this thesis I intend to explore how discourses present in two textbooks in the courses Psychology 1 and 2 at the secondary school level in Sweden, as well as a third teaching material, *Bryt!* (“Break the Norm!”) which I have used in Psychology 1, can affect students’ learning in the area of sex, gender, and sexuality. Skolverket’s (Sweden’s National Agency for Education) “core content” for Psychology 1 does not specifically require that sex and gender be discussed in these courses (Skolverket, 2011). However, psychology is arguably the study of how humans function, and gender is inevitably implied. Despite sex and gender not being required as part of the Psychology 1 course, both of the two textbooks I have used during my apprenticeship as a student teacher have chosen to include this topic, albeit in different ways. I have, as previously mentioned, also used a third teaching material in my Psychology 1 classes, namely a workbook called *Bryt!* This workbook is about norms in general but primarily focuses on the heteronorm, that is, the assumption that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual. Sex and gender as a subject matter is often taught in connection with the unit on social psychology and identity, but is also relevant in many other areas of psychology including developmental psychology and as a perspective with which to critique various traditions within the field. Sex and gender as an object of study is also relevant given Skolverket’s emphasis on a critical stance which teachers are to foster in their students within psychology as a subject as well as in all other school subjects (Skolverket, 2011). My research question is: How is gender discursively represented in teaching materials for secondary school level psychology courses in Sweden?

# Theoretical framework and previous research

The current thesis will consist of a discourse analysis of the three previously mentioned teaching materials. There are three main types of discourse analysis: discourse theory, mainly associated with Laclau and Mouffe; critical discourse analysis (CDA), associated with Fairclough; and discourse psychology (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). To carry out a discourse analysis, regardless of which of the three branches one chooses to employ, requires a social constructivist theoretical ground, according to (ibid.). Langemar (2008) diverges on this point, maintaining that not all discourse analysts are social constructivists, which may be true, whilst all of the major strands of discourse analysis are in fact based on social constructivism. Langemar notes that some discourse analysts adhere to critical realism, a point to which I will return later in this section.

Social constructivism has a long history within the disciplines of philosophy and sociology that can be traced back to Emanuel Kant in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and is visible in the theories of other well-known thinkers such as Marx, Weber, Piaget, and Vygotskij (Brinkkjær and Høyen, 2011). Social constructivism is not only relevant within philosophy and sociology but also within the field of pedagogy as this theory sheds light upon the ways in which individuals make sense of concepts. Our job as pedagogs is precisely to guide students in integrating new ideas with their existing knowledge (Säljö, 2014). Social constructivism argues that there is no objective truth outside of the meanings we make by way of language and the social interactions which frame our lives, and stresses that the world as we understand it is shaped through language (Brinkkjær and Høyen, 2011). I build my arguments on social constructivist theories (for example Foucault, 1981), including a synthesis of the theories upon which discourse analysis traditions are based. Some of the questions important to those who follow in Foucault's philosophical footsteps are largely epistemological and historical in nature, such as how knowledge has been framed in various time periods and what the consequences for that knowledge has been for society (Brinkkjær and Høyen, 2011, p. 94). Discourse analysis draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of structuralism and post-structuralism, specifically "that language is a dynamic form of social practice which shapes the social world including identities, social relations and understandings of the world" (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002, p. 96).

Discourse theories posit that meaning is always contingent – that is, humans fill words and concepts with meaning through competing discourses, and these meanings could have been something other than they are and are subject to change through discursive struggle to fix the meanings of said concepts (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). The employment of discourse analysis can also be found within the field of pedagogy. Gerd Christensen’s work follows in Foucault’s footsteps and aims to understand how popular takes on learning have changed over time (Brinkkjær and Høyen, 2011). I will be drawing upon parts of these three branches of discourse analysis as both theory and methodology, inspired by Jørgensen and Phillips’ recommendation (2002). That which I will be utilizing the least is discourse psychology, in that this type of analysis generally focuses on naturally occurring speech and not official texts, and is more interested in how individuals flexibly draw on discourses in social interaction with one another (ibid).

As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) point out, discourse analytical theories all treat discourses as having real effects and therefore existing in reality. This, to my mind, is a kind of contradiction in terms in that, at least for Laclau and Mouffe, no reality exists outside of discourse. Jørgensen and Phillips tackle this ontological problem by suggesting that researchers themselves decide what discourses exist within their empirical material and where to draw the line between one discourse and another, in line with the research question at hand. As the aforementioned authors point out, discourse analysis carried out on empirical material (in this case, teaching materials) can shed light on how the various discourses contribute to, reproduce, and/or challenge the existing social order (ibid, 2002, p. 163). Discourse theory (primarily based on Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe) seeks to identify which subject positions are made possible by the discourses at hand, and that is precisely what I intend to do with my exploration of the discourses present in these three teaching materials.

Critical realism, based largely on Marxist theories, understands the social realm such that “reality” is distorted by hegemonic language which naturalizes existing conditions of unequal power relations (see for example Bhaskar, 1986 and 1993). The aim of critical research then is to reveal the taken-for-granted understanding of the world by making visible the social reality “as it is,” in order that the understanding of a more objective reality can lead to positive change. This is problematic from a social constructivist epistemological standpoint: if there is no way to understand “reality” outside of social constructs, how, then, can the researcher ever succeed in

seeing anything other than that which other members of the same society see? The danger that arises from this epistemological stance is that of relativism, where no researcher dares to take a political stance – which is staunchly against the very aim of social constructivism of rectifying injustice – because they do not wish to claim a false authority (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). A number of feminist theorists critical of hegemonic discourses dominant in the hard sciences, amongst others Haraway (1988) and Harding (1993), have grappled with the conundrum which arises when the relativity of all knowledge threatens to undermine any possibility of knowing (see also Hekman, 2010).

Different types of discourse analysis tackle the problem of relativity destroying the possibility of producing knowledge in different ways. Critical discourse analysis (often abbreviated CDA) argues for a modified version of critical ideology research and posits that there are certain discourses which are ideological, those which mask or distort social reality and work to reproduce inequality, and that the researcher both can and should unmask these distortions, which is the primary element I take from this theoretical branch as I ultimately wish to change the oppressive power relations currently surrounding gender and sexuality. CDA proposes that research can contribute to social change by introducing research findings as a part of a public debate and upset hegemonic infrastructures. Research is privileged, but does not exclude the everyday understandings of social reality as lived by non-scientists (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory approaches the epistemological difficulty of relativity in another way. While maintaining that our understandings of reality are always both contingent and distorted and that the aim of social constructivist research should be to unmask the naturalized, hegemonic ideologies which are the source of distortion, they also recognize that, in order to say anything meaningful, one must take a stance and reduce the possibilities of meanings in the words and concepts used, as well as treating objects such as society as if they "actually" existed as a topic of discussion (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). They also combat the critique that criticism without ideology breaks down into an unfruitful situation in which all ways of seeing are deemed equally good or bad and nothing useful can be gained by critical research by introducing the goal of "radical democracy." Radical democracy entails freedom for all people, and, while this may not be a realistic future, it can be something which social constructivist research strives for. This is, to my mind, and for the purposes of my analysis, very

much in line with CDA's goal of social change. Nevertheless, the fact that Laclau and Mouffe do not provide any clear guidelines regarding precisely which ideologies need to be critiqued or changed leaves it up to the individual researcher to make these aims clear in their research projects (ibid). With the assumption that citizens who are well-informed have an important role to play in the aim of radical democracy, my aim in conducting this analysis is ultimately to aid psychology teachers in approaching the topic of gender and sexuality in norm critical ways, including both ideologies and materialities, which, in keeping with Skolverket's directives, foster equality and democracy (2011).

Social constructivist theory holds that all research is political in that research results contribute to the formation of our social world. In order to avoid total relativism in which the political no longer has a clear trajectory, one can apply social or cultural theories which do have a clear political agenda as a supplement to discourse analysis. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) suggest the employment of various approaches of feminist theories (namely those of Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Donna Haraway) which attempt to identify and criticize naturalized assumptions which are oppressive in nature. I am particularly inspired and guided by the principles espoused by Haraway (1988) and her concept of situated knowledge as well as Sandra Harding's (1993) related ideas on standpoint theory and objectivism. Haraway believes that knowledge is always situated – that is, it comes from a particular social, cultural, and historical position, which is in line with social constructivism in general – and that some forms of knowledge are privileged because the people in possession of that knowledge have a perspective which those in dominant groups lack (1993). Harding claims that “strong objectivism” is born of strong reflexivity: we as researchers are at our most “objective” when we reflect upon and make clear in our research from which social positions we are approaching the issue at hand (1993). Therefore, I will later in this text make clear some of the specific standpoints from which I am positioned socially which are relevant in terms of this analysis so as to maintain reflexivity in considering how my position contributes to my findings.

In terms of previous research, I have found a number of related analyses, primarily of teaching materials, conducted both in Sweden and abroad, all of which have identified strong heteronormative and binary gender discourses in these materials. Johansson (2013), a discourse analysis of university-level psychology teaching materials, uses feminist and science theoretical critiques and finds that these psychology textbooks create normative discourses surrounding

what is masculine and feminine, cementing gender differences as something natural rather than socially constructed. Svedman (2017) is a discourse analysis of textbooks used in religion courses in middle school classes. The analysis was conducted based on Foucault's theories of discourses as something which controls people by way of various forms of exclusion, and investigates which discourses the teaching materials use regarding homosexuality, finding that heteronormativity dominates. A third thesis of use for the purposes of this analysis is Eklund and Lindberg (2019), a gender theoretical discourse analysis of textbooks in Swedish courses which finds that these texts put forth normative, dichotomous understandings of gender. "Rethink, think queer! (Ceder & Elmsäter, 2007) is a discourse analysis of textbooks in Swedish language courses in which the authors find that although homosexuality is brought up, bisexual and transgender people are discursively excluded and the heteronorm is heavily relied upon. "The Sound of Silence: talking about sexual orientation and schooling" (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006) is an article presenting findings of an online survey of students and teachers at a British University on the topic of teaching sexual orientation in the primary and secondary school system. The study showed that homosexuality is difficult or taboo to discuss for teachers, creating a silence which strengthens heteronormativity and the heterosexual matrix. Namatende-Sakwa (2018), a discourse analysis of gender in Ugandan English textbooks, finds these textbooks to be permeated by normative, dichotomous, and stereotypical discourses around gender.

To summarize, my theoretical point of departure is a combination of elements of both Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and critical discourse analysis informed by critical realism. From the former I take the concept of subject positions being made possible or impossible by discourses as well as the aim of effecting social change through radical democracy. From the latter I take the belief that there are elements of existence outside of discourse (even if they can only be understood discursively) and that power relations, often oppressive ones, are created by hegemonic ideologies or discourses. Both of these theories are based on social constructivism. Other influences on the analysis are a number of feminist and queer theories, including Harding (1993), Haraway (1988), and Butler (1995).

# Methodology

Following my social constructivist approach I have chosen to focus on the ways in which we talk about the world and its phenomena, as it shapes and delimits the ways in which we understand and interact with all that surrounds us. This includes the field of gender and sexuality. For the purposes of this thesis, I have chosen to employ parts of the methodologies associated with the various strands of discourse analysis. Because discourse analysis is both methodology and theory, I will, as previously mentioned, be drawing on both aspects of the field. I do not intend to limit this research to just one particular branch of discourse analysis, but will be using a hybrid form which takes inspiration from different aspects of the three branches, as suggested by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). I will also, as the reader has probably already noted, be using the first person where appropriate, in keeping with the concept of reflexivity suggested by some types of discourse analysis, particularly discourse psychology (*ibid.*). Reflexivity is, to briefly recapitulate, a method of applying the same social constructivist view of knowledge - as always partial and contingent - to one's own research. That is, discourse analysis, as much of social constructivist research, asserts that meaning is always open to change, even if it is often resistant to change, and that same principal means that no researcher has the final word on what their empirical material means. To put this into terms of ontology and epistemology, discourse analytical traditions, along with all social constructivist methods and theories, claim that, although "reality" exists, it is a social construct, and knowledge about the world around us is always only partial. We as researchers can never be neutral observers. On the contrary, the researcher is in carrying out research not only aiming for a representation of what they are researching but is also productive in the sense that their presence (in this case, my part in interpreting the texts I analyze) affects the phenomena being observed (*ibid.*, see also Barad, 2003).

My standpoint as a researcher (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993) is as a person with a marginalized identity in terms of gender and sexuality which gives me special insight not readily available to heterosexual cispeople (cispeople are, in short, people who are not transgender). I am an immigrant to Sweden and learned Swedish as a foreign language as an adult. This may entail both advantages and disadvantages to how I approach the (Swedish language) texts which



I will be examining; there are no doubt aspects of language which I will miss as a non-native speaker, and, at the same time, aspects which will be apparent to me that would not have caught the attention of a native speaker, who may have become “blind” to their own mother tongue and its conventions. There are, of course, almost innumerable other positions of which I could give an account, but the aforementioned positions are those I deem to be most relevant to this research project.

To make clear precisely what steps I am taking methodologically to carry out this discourse analysis of the teaching materials at hand, I will turn to Langemar’s (2008, p. 139-140) interpretation of Willig (2001) and the most to my current purposes relevant of the main steps involved in carrying out a discourse analysis. The first question to be answered is how discursive objects are constructed within the text, that is any “thing” that the discourse deems to be “something.” The second question to be posed regards the way in which discourses distinguish between different constructions. This will be particularly useful when comparing the three materials with one another as they likely contain a number of discourses within themselves and different discourses from one another. The third, and for the purpose of this thesis one of the most interesting, question is that of which subject positions the text includes. The final point of analysis cannot be answered by thesis due to limits of time and scope, but is of particular interest to future research which I discuss in my conclusion, and that is the question of how the subjects’ subjectivity is affected by these discourses. Subjectivity, in this account, is defined as “how one experiences reality and oneself in relation to it and is something one cannot articulate directly but rather must attempt to imagine” (p. 140, translation mine).

What, then, am I specifically looking at when I analyze these texts? I will be studying the material at hand using a thematic analysis. While the findings I make as I go about these analyses will likely inform the themes around which I organized the results, there are some points from which I will be looking at the material. These themes are: the ways in which pronouns are used, the ways in which families are portrayed, how gender and sexuality themselves are conveyed as a subject in themselves, and what types of (norm) critique are directed towards the various psychology perspectives presented in the texts. The supplemental material, *Bryt!*, is an exception on the final point as it is not directly linked to psychology as a school subject. Both text and images are subject matter for analysis.

# Method

## Sample

The first text analyzed, *Psykologi 1 + 2a (Psychology 1 + 2a)*, third edition, by Martin Levander and Cornelia Sabelström Levander, is a textbook created specifically for the courses Psychology 1 and 2a, as its name indicates. This edition was copyrighted in 2012 and published by Natur & Kultur, a publishing house which prints a great deal of the textbooks used at the high school level in Swedish schools. The first edition was published in the early 1990s. In order to avoid confusion between the course and the textbook of the same name, this material will henceforth be referred to as “Levander.”

This edition of Levander is divided up into units that more or less correspond to the “core contents” and “knowledge requirements” dictated by Sweden’s National Agency for Education (“Skolverket”), which largely guide what students are taught in their respective courses. The units of the Psychology 1 section of the book include: perspectives in psychology; feeling, thinking, and remembering; being shaped as a human; and, finally, good and poor health.

The primary reason I have chosen this textbook as a part of my discourse analysis is pragmatic: it is the first textbook I used as a teacher of psychology in Sweden, and has been used by my colleagues for many years, up until the very recent change to the textbook *Mänskligt (Human)*. My colleagues, who made the decision to switch textbooks to the newer *Mänskligt*, did so partially out of a frustration over what they saw as limitations of Levander. However, while to my mind *Mänskligt* has done a better job in the treatment of norms and representations of minorities and women, we have subsequently found this textbook lacking compared to Levander’s more thorough treatment of the core content and theories within the field of psychology. I will return to this point in my conclusion.

*Mänskligt*, written by Gabriella Bernerson and Katri Cronlund, is, like Levander, specifically designed to be used in the courses Psychology 1 and 2. The first and only edition was published in 2017 by Sanoma, a company which focuses on textbooks for every form of Swedish education, from preschool up to the university level. Sanoma specifically aims a portion of their learning materials to adult education and to students in programs focusing on healthcare and social services (“vård och omsorg”). Among those are my psychology students. One of the

aspects of this textbook which is of help in my teaching of these particular students is the book's attempts to place the material into contexts in which these students are likely to find themselves in their professional lives. Much as the Levander textbook does, *Mänskligt* divides its contents into units following Skolverket's guidelines, and each chapter begins with a list of which of these guidelines are covered. Again, I have chosen to analyze this book because my colleagues and I currently use it as the primary learning material for the students in our psychology courses.

The third material analyzed is *Break the Norm!* (hereafter *Bryt!*), a workbook written and published by the Forum for Living History ("Forum för levande historia") and the youth division of the Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex rights ("RFSL Ungdom"). Analyzed here is the third and most recent edition, published in 2011. The material consists of descriptions of how norms behave in society (primarily in Sweden, but relevant for most Western societies) followed by group exercises designed to help participants understand the ways norms affect all of our lives. Many of them are based on images (mostly photos of individual people) which are included in the material. Although there is an English language version, I have chosen to analyze the Swedish original because it is what I have used with my classes.

### Coding and organization of empirical material

In order to carry out this discourse analysis, I systematically read the chapters in Levander and *Mänskligt* which correspond to the core content of Psychology 1 as defined by Skolverket, as well as the forewords to those two books. Because the course Psychology 2 has many fewer students (and is not even offered every semester at the school at which I work, as opposed to Psychology 1), and in order to delimit the scope of the study, material aimed at the Psychology 2 course was excluded from my analysis. Images were also systematically observed and coded but, because those images only related to gender or other topics of analysis to a limited extent, they serve primarily as a complement to the text rather than constituting a major focus in and of themselves. That which I coded from the text and images were any statements having to do with sex, gender, sexual orientation, identity, difference, family, and norms. All pronouns were coded and organized according to the ways in which they did or did not gender individuals in order to identify discursive uses of pronouns in acknowledging or disregarding certain gendered subject positions. Moreover, the entire text of *Bryt!* was systematically read and coded in the same way.

As the discursive themes emerged, I selected some of the examples of text and images most illustrative of my analysis in each thematic area.

# Results and Analysis

The main themes which crystallized as a result of my analysis are pronouns, norms, difference, and, as a kind of subtheme of difference, diagnoses. In the following section, I compare the three texts organized by these themes.

## Pronouns

Before continuing with an analysis of the way the empirical material handles the use of pronouns, it is worth noting that for the purposes of this thesis, the gender-neutral pronouns “they/them/their” are used when not referring specifically to a person with he or she pronouns. This can lead to constructions which may be somewhat unfamiliar, such as “themselves,” when referring to a single person.

### Levander

The three learning materials I have analyzed for the purposes of this thesis handle the use of personal pronouns rather differently from one another. Levander uses personal pronouns in a normative and binary fashion. This textbook never uses the Swedish gender neutral personal pronoun “hen.” The authors often employ various forms of “he,” “she,” and combinations of the two (20 times) when referring to unnamed people. “She” is used several times to refer to an unspecified person (7 times), to an unnamed woman (once), or to people in general (12 times), which is not unusual in Swedish. Interestingly, “he” is used three times to refer to unnamed people: a leader, a teacher, and a soldier.

Otherwise, gendered pronouns are avoided in different ways when referring to unspecified people. In some cases, the authors avoid pronouns altogether by using the definite form (for example, “the child,” p. 20-22) along with passive verbs, and through the use of plurals (7 times). In other instances, the gender neutral pronoun “den” is used. “Den” is interesting as a linguistic phenomenon in Swedish. There are quite a number of gender-nonconforming or non-binary people who use “den” as their personal pronoun, and for some Swedish-speaking people (primarily cispeople), this is uncomfortable to use for a human, as it is often associated with inanimate objects. However, there is a long-standing linguistic tradition in Swedish of using

“den” for an unspecified person, much in the way “he” traditionally has been used in English in adages often beginning with “he who...” The Swedish phrase “den som...” is very much the equivalent of that English construction, but is not gendered. This construction is used in Levander 13 times, in phrases such as “the person you are in love with,” and “the person you are angry at” (p. 132). Of interest is that “den” is used both times the authors specifically refer to norm-breaking individuals and no gendered pronouns are used in subsequent references to those people (pp. 180, 182).

The text speaks directly to the reader using forms of the pronoun “you” seventeen times (of which 6 in the foreword), and uses the general “you” once when discussing professional roles. The authors use “you and I” (once) or “we” (54 times) to refer to people in general and twice when the authors refer to themselves. Twice, “my” fears are compared with “yours” (p. 120). Finally, first person pronouns are used a handful of times, perhaps the most notable example being “If I am a man who longs for a man...” (p. 52) as an illustration of how interests affect our attention and perception.

Pronouns referring to specific people with gender-coded names are always gender congruent. That is to say, if a person named Maria is used as an example, then “she” pronouns are used, and vice versa. This occurs thirty-nine times. The only possible exception is a figure called Robin who is never gendered (p. 75).

## Mänskligt

*Mänskligt*, in contrast to Levander, relies heavily on the Swedish gender neutral pronoun “hen” to avoid gendering individuals, be they specified and named or not. The authors avoid pronouns altogether 27 times, use the phrase “that person” 27 times, and “hen” is used to refer to unspecified persons 26 times. People in general are referred to once as “she” (in the same way Levander does) and once as “they.” There is one instance of the use of “hen” referring to transgender people in general (p. 164). “Hen” is used once to refer to an unnamed child in school (p. 124), and once to refer to a teacher without a name or specified gender (p. 114).

In the foreword, the textbook directly addresses the reader with the use of “our” (“own and other people’s thoughts, actions, and feelings”) and second person singular pronouns (11 times). This first page of the book is designed to give the reader information about how the textbook is organized and also how the student can relate to it. The authors point out that the

knowledge requirements of the course are made more visible and easily attainable by a number of features in the book. The student/reader is also encouraged to approach the text with a curiosity for what is “human” (page 3). This exemplifies what Jägerskog describes as “warm meeting cold” in the field of psychology as a school subject (2018).

Just as in Levander, there is complete congruence between gendered names and gendered personal pronouns in *Mänskligt*. This occurs 20 times with no exceptions. The single transperson in the textbook who is given a name is referred to alternatively as Daniel/he and Daniela/she.

## Bryt!

In a somewhat similar way, *Bryt!* avoids the use of gendered personal pronouns, but the avoidance here is total. The authors use formulations like “someone” or “that person,” and “den” is employed in the same way it is in the other two learning materials, to refer to an unspecified person. The Swedish pronoun “man” (“one” or the general “you” in English) is also used frequently. “She” is used once (p. 112) to refer to an unspecified human being in the same way as in the two textbooks. Because *Bryt!* is meant to be a handbook for leading workshops, the intended participants are generally referred to using plurals and passive forms, and the reader (assumed to be the workshop leader) is referred to as “you.” The many pictures of people in the material are designed to be used in the various group exercises, but they are not people who are ever named, gendered, or referred to with specific personal pronouns.

*Bryt!* is unique among these three texts in that it specifically deals with the subject of pronouns as such. Fairly early on in the material (p. 18), pronouns as linguistic terms are defined and the examples he, she, and “hen” are given. “Den” is not produced as an option.

*Mänskligt*, then, uses “hen” in the same way that Levander uses “he or she” to refer back to an unspecified individual. In turn, *Bryt!* makes almost exclusive use of “den” to refer to unspecified individuals. While *Bryt!* makes explicit that “hen” can be used as a personal pronoun for real individuals, *Mänskligt* neither uses nor acknowledges the use of the pronoun in this way, and Levander leaves the pronoun out altogether. I argue that this total lack of gender neutral pronouns being utilized for specific individuals with names constitutes a discursive exclusion of non-binary as a liveable gender identity and subject position. “Hen” effectively becomes simply a short form for “he or she.” Levander and *Mänskligt*, in contrast to *Bryt!*, are both making use of hegemonic or ideological discourses which serve to erase the identity of marginalized people and

uphold an oppressive binary gender norm maintaining that people can only fall into the dichotomous categories of male or female (Butler, 1990 & 2004).

## Norms

Norms are one of the primary focuses of this analysis. Here follows a description of how norms in general and more specific norms surrounding gender, sexuality, and family are depicted in the learning materials presented.

### Levander

Levander deals rather extensively with norms as such in its unit on social psychology, and points out that one of the consequences of norms is the stigmatisation of those who break them. It points out that there are gains to be made on an individual level from stigmatising others (lifting the status of ones own group), but also raises the fact that there are also gains to be made from taking on an identity as stigmatised (pride). Levander brings up gender as a possible source of social stigma and notes that there is a tendency to use men as a norm when we study humans (not least in the field of psychology), a perspective that gender studies tries to lift and critique. In discussing both norms in general and gender more specifically, Levander highlights the ways that expectations and unspoken rules surrounding masculinity and femininity affect and delimit a person's agency, but does not extend this to the negative effects on the health of people on the losing end of these norms. While the book does emphasize that norms are changeable over time and different cultures, and even asks the student to reflect upon how demands rules and expectations vary depend on the person's sex, it never mentions norm critique specifically.

Levander makes a rather odd connection between sexuality, gender, and violence in a section about evil. Here, the book brings up criminals who had a history of violence and were "clearly masculinely oriented in their sexuality" (p. 94). The same page describes other criminals as being perceived as more gentle and having a more feminine or androgenous sexual identity. What is meant by masculine vs feminine/androgenous sexual identity is never explained. My best guess is that the former is meant to refer to heterosexual men and the latter to homo- or bisexual men. It could be interpreted to refer to whether or not the men in question were more "active" or "passive" in their sexual roles. In either case, I find this to be highly problematic in



that normative sexual orientations or sex roles are conflated with normative gender roles or expression, including violence in masculine men.

In a chapter on health the book stresses the importance of weighing in social factors such as “norms, peer pressure, values...” (p. 217) but mentions nothing about how those who break norms are affected health wise. So-called “minority stress,” which refers to the negative impacts on mental and physical health of oppressed people, is an important factor in understanding the challenges faced by different vulnerable populations in society (Minority stress, 2020, 24 May; see also Bränström, 2017 for an example of how minority stress negatively affects the health of sexual minorities in Sweden). However, this concept is not mentioned in Levander, a point to which I will return.

In the introduction to the chapter on sex and gender, the book brings up popular opinions on what makes a person a woman or a man but ignores the possibility of anything existing outside those two categories. The authors do bring up the gender dichotomy and that people in general want to be able to determine at first glance whether someone is male or female. It is pointed out that those who do not immediately fit into these categories are dismissed or perceived as strange. While the authors manage to both look at gender norms critically and hint at the negative consequences of them here, the textbook often reproduces the same binary thinking which it critiques.

The book claims that the reference to an individual’s sex is traditionally a reference to biological sex. I question whether this is always the case. It is unusual for any of us to know much about the primary sex organs or chromosomes of the vast majority of people with whom we come in contact. We generally rely on things like names, pronouns, or, if we are face to face with another person, secondary sex characteristics. It is extremely cisnormative to assume that, for example, all people who are socially read as men also have a y-chromosome and a penis. This assumption effectively erases transpeople. The book states that women’s and men’s bodies look different “of course” (p. 200). Here, the book is obviously referring to cis-people without lifting that norm. Intersex people are entirely excluded. The book goes on to say that they are referring to people’s gender identity and not their biological sex, but clearly in the above the authors have conflated the two. In employing a hegemonic, ideological discourse in which biological sex and gender identity are conflated, and in which sex (and therefore gender) are assumed to be binary, the authors have erased the existence of vulnerable populations such as

intersex and non-binary people, once again strengthening the power systems which privilege cispeople and those without intersex variations. Although the text makes an attempt to point out the existence of an assumption of dichotomous gender, they have neither clearly identified this as a norm nor have they followed through by actually critiquing the said norm or explicating its harmful consequences.

One of the most provocative statements in this chapter is the claim that mascara once was gendered but no longer is (p. 208). I maintain (along with everyone I have spoken to about this statement) that this is utter nonsense. One need only look at advertisements for mascara to see that 99% of them feature only female-coded faces. This naïvete plays into the hands of hegemonic discourses that aim to dismiss gender norms as a thing of the past.

Besides the fact that Levander's chapter on sex and gender leaves no room for anyone but women and men, it is also one of the very few chapters that does not give a single personal story to exemplify the material. This may further serve to dehumanize people already excluded from a cisnormative society in which they have no given place, and, pertinent to this analysis, acts to preclude awareness in students of people outside the gender dichotomy, which can contribute to continued sexism, transphobia, and damaging ignorance about intersex people.

In addition to explicitly discussing norms as a phenomenon in and of themselves, the psychology textbooks in question have numerous opportunities to adopt a norm critical stance towards the various psychological perspectives presented in the different units. On the final pages of Levander's section on the psychodynamic perspective, the book lifts various criticisms of Freud. This would be an excellent opportunity to bring up the extreme heteronormativity and cisnormativity on which Freud's theories, for example penis envy, are based. Instead, the book leaves it up to the student to critically evaluate the power that patriarchal structures afford to men and how concepts fundamental to psychoanalysis mirror these oppressive power structures. This is typical of the book's lack of an explicit gender perspective outside of the chapter on sex and gender. Levander informs the student in that chapter that a critical gender perspective can be applied to all research within the fields of psychology while ironically failing to do so in the rest of the book.

Family is another subject area related to gender and sexuality in which both norm critical and hegemonic discourses come into play in all of these materials. In the beginning of the textbook, Levander and Levander mention Freud's stress on the child's relationship to the mother

without questioning whether the female parent would necessarily be the primary love object. While a subsequent exercise poses the question of whether it is possible to apply Freud's thinking to the various family constellations of today, the book again leaves it up to the student to think critically about the heteronormativity of Freud's theories of psychosexual development. The authors fail to explicate heteronormativity and oppressive power structures in general and, given the fact that many Swedish teenage students may not have received previous education in these matters, this results in a failure to provide the students with a discourse which would allow them to understand gender and sexuality from a norm critical point of view. This translates into a failure to live up to Skolverkets requirement to foster critical thinking and democracy in students.

In discussing developmental psychology's explanation of gender differences, Levander brings up how children are affected by their mothers and fathers. This section is concluded with the observation that this family image is based on "[w]hat gender roles look like in a traditional Western nuclear family, and can therefore be called into question" (p. 207). On the other hand, in discussing Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the authors depict security and contact with drawings of a heterosexual nuclear family and a heterosexual romantic couple respectively. In reference to a heterosexual romantic couple, the book remarks that the two lovers fulfilled the other's demands of how a man and a woman should be and that it is therefore not strange that they fell in love. Here are several examples of uncritical normalization of the essentialist, binary nature of sex and gender, intertwined in the heterosexual matrix which ironically is brought up in the chapter "Sex and Gender." Once again, Levander has made an attempt to raise critical questions of sex, gender, and sexuality in certain parts of the book (mostly in the aforementioned chapter) but has fallen into the very same traps of hegemonic discourses which serve to make the status quo (in this case, heterosexuality and the traditional nuclear family) appear natural and universal.

## Mänskligt

*Mänskligt*, in contrast to Levander, defines norm critique explicitly in the chapter on identity. While the authors do not connect norms to power structures here, they do bring up power and its relationship to stereotypes and prejudice in a discussion of ingroups and outgroups. A number of identity categories subjected to unbalanced power relations are mentioned, such as gender,

immigration status, and sexual orientation. Racism, sexism, and “sexual prejudice” (an interesting way of expressing heterosexism) are all named specifically as types of oppression. This section explains that attitudes and stereotypes fill a cognitive function in helping people to organize their knowledge about the world, and, like Levander, mentions that there are individual advantages to belonging to a group with power. However, *Mänskligt* does not approach this with the same nuance that Levander does, and says nothing about possible advantages of belonging to a marginalized group. In this case, *Mänskligt* has produced a more one-dimensional, hegemonic discourse about normative and marginalized groups, namely that the oppressed have little power and no pride in their group identity. The book does, however, succeed in disrupting the idea that minorities are in fact oppressed by norms in society.

The authors of *Mänskligt* seem eager not to further entrench gender norms through their retelling of the various psychological perspectives. In discussing Freud’s theories, the chapter briefly touches upon the sexual repression of women at the time in Austria in which he lived. The authors also bring up feminist critique of the concept of penis envy as well as the fact that our ideas of what is masculine and feminine differ significantly from those which influenced Freud. This chapter uses homosexual relationships as a means to question Freud’s views of children’s psychosexual development, but without explicitly naming them as heteronormative.

It is suggested in the chapter on the biological perspective in psychology that while differences between the sexes in behaviour and cognition do exist, these might be due to “nurture” rather than “nature.” Further, it is confirmed that there are in fact differences between men and women as groups, but not as individuals. However, the authors do not sufficiently explain what that differentiation entails, leaving the gendered dichotomy effectively unchallenged. The point of departure for this discussion of differences between the sexes is based on the cisnorm and thereby discursively excludes both trans and intersex people.

Heterosexuality is given as an example of a norm, highlighting the necessity to “come out” for homosexuals. While this is important, the book’s treatment of sexual orientation has a tendency to be fairly binary. When the authors give examples of sexual orientations, homo-, hetero-, and bisexuality are named, but there is no mention of asexuality/queer/pansexuality etc. Even in exploring marginalized subjectivities, the hegemonic binary gender discourse is employed.

There is one point at which I find the authors do a good job of encouraging students to reflect on conditions (in their school) for LGBT people without presupposing a hetero/cis identity for the student reading the book. A group of exercises call for the reader to reflect upon the heteronorms present in for example romantic comedies, as well as to look up the equality plan for their school and see what it says about gender and sexuality and reflect upon whether there is anything the student would add or change. Here we can see a discourse which is both norm critical and inclusive of a wide range of subject positions. More generally, the authors assure the reader in the chapter on identity and the humanistic perspective that it is “normal to be abnormal” (p. 161), and explain that what is considered normal is historically and culturally dependent. Further, they point out the fact that everyone is unique and has some aspect of themselves that deviates from the norm. Finally, they stress the importance of developing empathy and tolerance in society as a whole by learning more about other people. The discursive approach to normality as being contingent is subversive. Moreover, the focus on effecting change through knowledge and empathy is not only in keeping with the humanistic perspective, as the book points out, but is also very much in line with Skolverket’s directives to aid students in becoming responsible, active members of a free and democratic society.

In the way of discursive representations of family, *Mänskligt* has several examples of families with non-normative constellations, such as same-sex parents. However, the heterosexual couple referenced twice previously in the book as examples are also used to exemplify a family, and in a very normative way. The way in which *Mänskligt* frames this is that the couple comes home from the hospital with a child, “for the first time as a family” (p. 162). Here the authors have uncritically applied the hegemonic discourse that a mother, a father, and a baby are what define a family. This discourse discounts the possibility for the couple to have constituted a family prior to having a child.

## **Bryt!**

The focus of *Bryt!* is norm critique, and more or less all the subjects upon which the material touches are dealt with from that perspective. The text is intersectional in nature, and touches upon norms surrounding sexual orientation, gender, and, unlike the two psychology textbooks, physical function, whiteness, and the binary sex norm. A connection between norms and power is made early on and, while the text does not use the term “minority stress,” it points

out that norms delimit who has the possibility to influence society and their own situation. Further, norms are connected to injustice, discrimination and oppression, and norm critique is defined as an approach to illuminate how norms affect our values and everyday life, instead of focusing on norm breakers. Important from a pedagogical point of view, *Bryt!* warns that participants in the exercises may struggle with the realisation that they are benefiting from normative power structures, a point which neither of the textbooks approach explicitly. Of further use in the application of this material in the classroom is that participants are encouraged to “connect...the exercises to the state of things in [their] own...school” (p. 14). This text illuminates the fact that we have few words for the norm and that it is rare for cis or hetero to be named as such. Here we can see an active unveiling of ideological (cis- and heteronormative) discourses as being contingent, rather than natural.

On the topic of gender, the authors raise the fact that although many gender norms have changed, there still exists a great deal of gendered inequality, such as the fact that Sweden has never had a female prime minister and that women statistically take out more parental leave than men. *Bryt!* explores the power intrinsic in social norms and therefore connects gender norms with the oppressive power structures which they uphold. However, while the material rightly lifts the fact that “that which is interpreted as masculine/manly is valued more highly” (p. 24), it does not problematize the fact that masculinity is only given unequivocally higher status if it is found in someone who is read as a cis-man. By missing this point, the material also misses the complex interplay of perceived biological sex and other social factors surrounding the interpretation of one’s gender identity or expression. Otherwise, as mentioned, *Bryt!* has an intersectional perspective throughout, and points out that norms surrounding what is masculine or feminine also intersect with for example, age, class, ethnicity, functionality, and gender expression. Connecting gender norms with heteronormativity, the material also brings that “manly men and feminine women are assumed to be heterosexual in our society” (p. 25-27).

In stark contrast to Levander and *Mänskligt*, *Bryt!* has a decidedly norm critical take on the subject of family. Not only does it call into question monogamy norms, it also has an exercise focusing on right-wing campaigns in Sweden calling upon citizens to protest the proposal of same sex marriage laws, and connecting non-heterosexuals to paedophilia. If the two psychology textbooks have subtly and uncritically upheld the heterosexual nuclear family as the norm, *Bryt!* has made it very clear that this one-sided picture of what a family is or should be is

in fact a part of a hegemonic, oppressive discourse which has direct and harmful consequences for marginalized people.

## Difference

### Levander

Levander includes a number of mentions of homosexuality and homosexual people/relationships. In one chapter, the book focuses on Carl Rogers' personality theory and offers the following example: "If I am a man who longs for a man..." then I would be more likely to direct my attention towards the men at a party (p. 52). This could easily have been made fairly neutral by simply not specifying the gender of the person in question. I therefore interpret this example as a very conscious choice to include homosexual desire. By not drawing attention to the homosexual nature of this desire, the marginalized is discursively normalized. Furthermore, in discussing norms and group identities, the authors use a homosexual who has come out as an example of a "stranger." In the same section, "heterosexual" is mentioned as a normative group identity, and, in exploring the cognitive component of an attitude, knowledge about other ways of living than heterosexual is brought up.

In the chapter on social psychology the book fails to mention the fact that all of the subjects in the Stanford prison experiment, of which half quickly became violently abusive towards the other half, were men. Oddly, in the next paragraph the authors point out that one of the two American soldiers who tortured their captives in Abu Ghraib was a woman. In the chapter on sex and gender, an interesting case of children read as girls who "became men" at puberty is not mentioned as a type of intersex. Rather it is framed in a cis-normative binary understanding of gender. The majority of these people shifted to a male social gender role in adulthood. The authors reason that "[l]iving with a psychological identity that does not match outer sex characteristics (deep voice and penis) and thereby with the expectations of those surrounding, perhaps was too difficult" (p. 205). While this may be a valid point, there are several puzzle pieces that are missing. In addition to not mentioning this phenomenon as a type of intersex variation, the book also fails to connect this to experiences of transpeople. Neither do they mention that all of us grow up with knowledge about norms for both boys and girls. Suddenly being perceived as a member of a different sex, perhaps it is not so strange that one would adjust

their behaviour to fit with norms to which they themselves had not previously been subjected, but of which they have extensive knowledge.

In continuation, the authors enter the realm of queer theory, writing that “people who fall outside of the classic categorisation by being drag queens, transsexuals or masculine women and feminine men, are doing something important” (p. 210). Although it is clear that this is a reference to Butler’s theory of performativity (1990), it is nevertheless problematic that the book frames these people as existing only to bring to light to and destabilize gender norms. There is no explanation about what transgender means, and nothing defining or even mentioning intersex. The cis-norm, while regularly employed, is not mentioned at all, adding to the hegemonic or ideological effect of this discourse. The chapter brings up the heterosexual matrix and points out that we for the most part do not differentiate between sex and gender. However, as previously stated, the book follows the cis-norm to a tee. An explanation of the heterosexual matrix brings up the requirement to have a “woman’s” body in order to be socially read as female. This is as cisnormative as it gets. There are many ways that this presupposition could have been avoided by the use of alternative formulations. For example, one could write “a certain kind of body” instead of “a woman’s body” or one could have specified “a body with breasts, a vagina, and no Adam's apple”.

In all of this, the phrase LGBT is given one short sentence. There is no discussion of homophobia, etc., or the psychological consequences that follow from these forms of oppression. In fact, in one exercise the student is asked whether or not a heterosexual norm exists. As *Bryt!* points out, those who benefit from oppressive, unbalanced power structures by their membership in normative groups have the power to define those oppressed by those structures, and to choose whether or not to accept the existence of the marginalized. The very fact that the authors believe that the existence of the heteronorm is up for debate is heteronormative and oppressive in itself.

## Mänskligt

This textbook handles sexuality, sexual orientation, and non-normative sex/gender identity and expression in various ways. A heterosexual couple who has already been used as an example of the use of defense mechanisms is brought up a second time in an anecdote about the two watching a movie. The male partner, we know, previously had an affair with another man. While



watching, he expresses disgust at seeing two men kissing in a movie. This is most likely meant to be an example of reaction formation, in which strong, forbidden feelings are transformed into opposite, more acceptable feelings. Homophobia is a necessary but implicit component in this reaction formation, as it is the only potential source we know of which would make his homosexual desire unacceptable. Stereotypically for the West (perhaps especially for Sweden) in the modern day, the man starts out by qualifying his expression of disgust with “Not that I have anything against homosexuals” (p. 33). This illustration reflects and reinforces stereotypes that many men who harbor same-sex desires are both closeted and ashamed of that attraction, in this case resulting in a defence mechanism employed by the person in question’s subconscious in order to ease the discomfort of being faced with forbidden feelings. Interestingly, the caveat that the man “has nothing against homosexuals” actually allows him to position himself as what might be considered the ideal man in modern mainstream Swedish society: not homophobic, but decidedly heterosexual.

*Mänskligt* points out that we are gendered from the very beginning of our lives. Transperson and cisperson are correctly defined, but there is only one brief mention of intersex people. Intersex is not given a particularly sufficient definition, and nothing is said about genitals, chromosomes, hormones, etc. Given the widespread ignorance about intersex variations, it is unfortunate that this opportunity for a teaching moment is missed. The authors do succeed in noting that transpeople are especially vulnerable to mistreatment by society at large and intimate loved ones. They stress the importance of respecting other people, but, strangely, write that “[s]tudies show that there is a strong wish among trans people to be treated like others,” as if that is somehow different from any other group of people (164). This seems to me a completely unnecessary othering of transpeople in that it is implied that them wanting respect is something that needs to be noted. Nothing at all is written about non-binary people, or the fact that their mental health tends to be worst of all transpeople (Orre, 2017). Again, given the ignorance about non-binary people in the population at large, the dangerously high prevalence of mental illness among this population is an important piece of information to include in a psychology course book.

The book does give an example case of a transfeminine person, referred to as both Daniel and Daniella, who is probably a cross-dresser, though this is not made totally clear. The illustration box is called “Example – Daniella’s and Michelle’s love.” A somewhat stereotypical

image of this person is presented: they are married to a woman who is presumably cis, and the transfeminine person hides their trans identity from their partner until “caught” wearing a secret stash of feminine-coded clothes. The example includes a happy ending where Daniel/la’s partner accepts “all of her/him,” and the wife offers to go shopping and buy new clothes for Daniella (p. 165). Most problematic in my view is that Daniel/la is portrayed as being very fixated on their appearance, which has become an extreme stereotype about transfeminine people in the media (see, for example critique of *The Danish Girl*, Grant, 2015, 3 Dec.). Adding to the stereotype is that the transperson is portrayed as not being dressed very attractively and that the wife, a ciswoman, has better taste in feminine-coded attire and has to help Daniella improve their look. I do find it positive that the authors include both the structural problems that transpeople face (albeit in an incomplete way) but also a personal story of acceptance and love. This serves to both humanize transpeople and educate the student about the consequences of transphobia, a combination which makes positive action more likely in the reader.

In the way of assumptions about group identities of the intended reader, the authors seem to assume a reader who is not a Muslim woman. The text in a box labeled “Reflect” asks the student how they would feel if they were forced to dress in a way that was incongruent with their self image and identity, in the way that Muslim women in France were forbidden from wearing burkinis on the beach. This formulation assumes that none of the textbook readers have had this experience, but rather must *imagine* themselves in a similar situation. The authors, then, have discursively precluded the possibility of simultaneous identities as psychology student and Muslim woman.

## Bryt!

In the final section of *Bryt!*, there is a list of terms that are defined. One of these terms is *transperson* and it is defined thus: "a person whose gender identity and or gender expression is not the same as the biological and or legal sex [den] was assigned at birth" (p. 115). *Mänskligt* also discusses and defines the term in a similar if somewhat broader and more nuanced way, as "an umbrella term which can for example be used by [den] who does not identify with the sex [hen] has been assigned at birth or who in other ways breaks the boundaries of norms around sex and gender identity" (p. 164). Levander does not define transgender at all, and it is only

referenced in a brief statement about “drag queens, transsexuals...masculine women and feminine men” (p. 210).

## Diagnoses & norms

### Levander

In its treatment of the diagnosis ADHD, Levander cements gender stereotypes in several ways, for example through the statement that “not all disruptive boys in the first grade class have ADHD” (p. 88). This suggests that boys are the ones who are disruptive, rather than girls (or anyone else), without factoring in anything to do with how boys and girls are socialized. It also ignores the gender bias implicit in the disproportionate diagnosis of boys and girls with ADHD symptoms. However, on the same page, the book brings up an example of a female author who has written about her experiences of living with autism, a narrative which goes against gender stereotypes.

On the subject of aggression, Levander both does and does not reinforce gender norms. In reference to evolutionary psychology, the authors refer specifically to male aggression rather than to human aggression, as if genes were passed down unilaterally according to sex. However, in the next section, they talk about aggression as a human trait not connected to gender specifically. The textbook, like *Mänskligt*, brings up the Stanford prison experiment when dealing with the subject of social psychology. The two books are similar in that Levander also refers to the subjects in the Stanford prison experiment as “young people” and does not bring up the fact that they were all men.

Despite focusing on socialisation elsewhere, there are some instances in the book in which gender differences in diagnoses are pointed out, but in no way problematized. For example, it is mentioned that borderline personality disorder most often affects women and girls. The text also lifts the fact that long-standing loneliness is particularly hard-hitting for adult single men. In neither of these examples do the authors attempt to contextualize the referenced gender differences in light of socialization or binary gender norms, which discursively cements the essentialist idea that gender differences are innate rather than socially constructed.

## Mänskligt

*Mänskligt* also brings up ADHD diagnoses, and a gendered stereotype comes to the forefront. An illustrative anecdote about a boy having a difficult time concentrating in class is used. The male student in question disturbs a female classmate by poking her with his pencil. She reacts by ignoring him. This scenario reflects a narrative of a disruptive boy bothering a well-behaved girl who is encouraged not to react to his bad behavior. Similarly to Levander, *Mänskligt* draws upon stereotypes based on dichotomous discourses about gender without problematizing or contextualizing them.

## Bryt!

While I have used *Bryt!* as a supplemental material in my psychology courses, it is not designed for that subject. No mention is made of psychological diagnoses which is why the material does not feature in this subtheme.

# Concluding discussion

I set out at the beginning of this research process with the intention to explore how gender is represented in psychology teaching materials used in Swedish secondary schools. The following is a summation of the findings of my analysis as well as a look ahead to future research which could deepen and expand upon my results.

The three materials subject to discourse analysis for the purposes of this thesis, Levander, *Mänskligt*, and *Bryt!*, all have a good deal to say about gender. All three texts deal with norms to varying extents. Levander and *Mänskligt* focus on them primarily in chapters on social psychology and identity, while *Bryt!* is focused on norms throughout, and, in all of them, gender is exemplified as being subjected to many norms. The analysis was expanded to include more subtle aspects of gender such as norms surrounding sexual orientation and family. While both Levander and *Mänskligt* make attempts to critique these and other related norms, they do so with varying results, sometimes acting to further cement for example heteronormative discourses. Both textbooks uphold the binary gender norm throughout, contributing to the widespread ignorance of non-binary and intersex people, extremely vulnerable populations. *Mänskligt*, unlike Levander, lifts and defines norm critique as important and succeeds to a greater extent in applying it consistently to the material, but does not give it nearly the same focus as *Bryt!*, which is the most explicit in linking norms to power imbalances and oppression. One of the intentions of *Bryt!* is to completely change society by spreading knowledge in order to facilitate the eradication of injustice, a goal in complete alignment with that of radical democracy discussed previously in this thesis. The workbook specifically brings up the importance of reflecting upon “[h]ow norms express themselves for example in school or in the workplace” (p. 9). Because we are pedagogs in relation to students and colleagues to our coworkers, this material is useful and important both for the purposes of teaching about norms and norm critique and to reflect upon our own positions (of power) in relation to the students and our organisation.

One important factor to lift here is that my colleagues and I are in agreement that Levander is more thorough in its treatment of many of the theoretical aspects of the core content of the psychology courses we teach. This, combined with the fact that Levander does an inferior job of applying norm critique compared to *Mänskligt*, poses a dilemma for us in deciding what teaching materials are best to use for our students. This creates stress for us as pedagogs who are

required both to teach the core content and to approach said content from a norm critical perspective in order to aid the students in developing a sense of democracy and freedom for all. My hope is that one or both of these textbooks will be revised and developed to create a more comprehensive teaching material which covers most of these pedagogical and didactic aspects of our teaching with a norm critical perspective, or that we can find another textbook which better succeeds in doing so. I also highly recommend the use of *Bryt!* as a supplement to the chapters in the textbooks on social psychology and identity.

## Future Research

The students I meet come from a variety of cultural backgrounds with different frames of reference in relation to gender, and there are of course various sexual orientations and gender identities present in the classroom. Due to constraints of time and scope, my focus here has not been on specific students' actual reactions to the material, but the discourses identified in this study certainly have the power to facilitate or preclude possible interpretations informed by the social positions of the reader. I would like to suggest future research to deepen and expand the findings of this analysis to include how the exclusion or inclusion of possible subject positions can affect the ability or willingness of individual students to take in and digest the subject matter. As an example, pronouns are an important part of how a text appeals to its readers, in both senses of the term. If a reader is unable to "find themselves" because their personal pronoun is never used to represent an individual brought up in that text, it may reasonably lead to a feeling of exclusion and a resulting lack of engagement with said text. This outcome can be a real problem when a student is expected to learn subject material from a textbook, although it is likely to be an unconscious disconnect which the student experiences.

Reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 1994) is helpful in the exploration of how pronouns might affect students' engagement with the core content by way of its focus precisely on how a text can be experienced by the reader, a focus shared by critical discourse analysis. I argue then that the individual student has the potential of meeting teaching materials' constructions of normative and norm-breaking gender identities/expressions in a specific way depending on the student's own identities, or subject positions. Margareta Serder's (2015) investigation of how students interpret images of scientists and, in the case of her studies, distance themselves from

these (to the students unattractive) images, is of relevance in extending the findings of this thesis to its consequences for concrete learning.

## A concluding note on validity

Because we as researchers can only give one of many possible accounts of what we perceive, it can be difficult to know how valid a given analysis is. One suggested measure of validity is coherence, which can be interpreted in different ways, one of them being a measure of how well the research results adhere to the questions posed and how well the theory, methodology, and results create a cohesive “package.” Another way of evaluating the validity of this qualitative research is by attempting to measure its “fruitfulness” – that is to say, by attempting to evaluate how much good the research does in its attempts to contribute, if only in a very small way, to the rectification of social injustice (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002).

The aim of rectifying social injustices is central to critical discourse theory, but is a shared aim of all of the three main branches of discourse analysis, and is one of the primary goals of the current research. By answering the question of which discourses these three materials present surrounding gender and related topics, identifying which subject positions are included and excluded, and reflecting upon the subsequent effects on the possibility of action in the reader, I hope that I have contributed to the development of my and my colleagues’ pedagogical and didactic choices in working towards a curriculum which guides our students in a norm critical stance and provides them with crucial knowledge about marginalized people and the challenges they face in our society.

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