

Gunn, A. C. (2009, May) If you say it three ways... Presentation to School of Education Colloquium, University of Waikato.

If you say it three ways, it still doesn't mean it's true.

The pervasiveness of heteronormativity in early childhood education.

The broad aim

- How are people's actions and activity in every-day settings coordinated with 'the relations that rule them'?

This particular study:

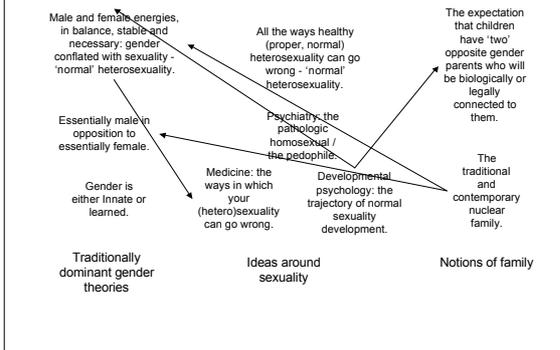
- An exploration of the discursive production of heteronormativity in NZ early childhood education.
- Historical and present day components.
- How is heteronormativity held firm in early childhood education?
- Is, and if so, why is, heteronormativity a problem worth trying to unsettle?

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Heteronormativity

- Heterosexual sexuality - institutionalised norm, and a superior and privileged standard.
- Heterosexual sexuality is seen as normal other forms of sexuality are seen as not (binary thinking).
- Heterosexual presumption - obscures valid alternative options.
- The repeated constitution of heterosexual sexuality as normal shows how we impose heterosexuality.

Heteronormativity being played out in (early childhood) education.



“Boys and men wear kilts in Scotland”

Rose: ...There [is] one boy child, 4 years old, always dresses in pink dresses and comes in his pink dresses from home with his handbags and his high shoes... we think the parents are brave to allow this.... They all love it when the boy has a kilt on because then all of the teachers can safely say, 'what a wonderful kilt, boys and men wear kilts in Scotland'...

Dan: ... I've heard this, there's a child coming to the centre in women's clothing and they dress, yeah, so I've heard the same thing, they dress him in a kilt, yeah...

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“All they hear is sexual, sexual, sexual”

Pat: When you talk to parents about sexual play or sexual curiosity I try to find other words because as soon as you say sexual they just,

Rona: it freaks them out

Pat: they freak out. They're feeling like something's going wrong..., we have the resources that have the little thing that talks about norms and what children may do at certain ages, and you provide them with that, and when you first discuss it... they're not hearing you, all they're hearing is sexual, sexual, sexual, and then they take these two pieces of paper away and come back and go, 'oh wow, it was quite reassuring to know that this and this and this occurs'...

“My mummy said it doesn't matter...”

Andy: Two girls were playing and there was a boy as well, and they were wanting to do dress ups and have a wedding. The boy thought that he was getting married but it was going to be just the two girls and he got quite upset and threw a bit of a hissy-fit about the fact that the two girls were going to be getting married together, and told them that they couldn't.. One of the girls... went on to say, 'my mummy said it doesn't matter whether it's two boys or two girls, just as long as you love each other...'

How is *the statement* distributed?

- In the ways we intervene and transform gender performances that contravene traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity
- In the ways we impose heterosexuality on children (through teaching their parents about so called 'normal' trajectories of development)
- In the ways we fail to open up conceptualisations of family beyond nuclear family norms.
- This is an insight into pervasiveness of heteronormativity in early childhood education - but why should we take note?

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Why are norms worth questioning?

- Norms are evident in the ways power is exercised on and in people's bodies.
- They are linked to positive techniques of intervention and transformation.
- They define how one may have a hold over others' bodies and how one may work to perfect his / her own.

In whose interests are such interventions designed?

- What happens if you're a child of same-gender parents?
- What happens if you're a parent of a child not biologically or legally related to you?
- What happens if you're a teacher whose significant relationships are with people of the same gender as you?

This work is principally about recognition

- Recognising the norms we adhere to
- Recognising who they include / exclude
- Recognising that teachers can do much to challenge the inequities and power relations in the (hetero)norm.
- Recognising that our practices at the local level are almost always, inevitably entangled with those that sit elsewhere.
