

Lunds Universitet  
Centrum för genusvetenskap  
GNV 103  
HT03

## **Can Queer Theory be useful for a feminist agenda?**

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**Abstract:**

Queer theory has in recent years become popular within most academic disciplines. Its aim is to problematise, denaturalise and denormalise heterosexuality to dissolve the heteronormative. The concept of heteronormativity draws upon Foucault's theory of normative judgment and refers to heterosexuality as a social institution with particular forms of practices that divide the 'normal' from 'abnormal'.

Within feminist theory there is also a tradition of problematise heterosexuality which began with the radical feminists in the 60's but the aim of radical feminist was different than the one queer theory has. They saw it as an oppressive institution which sustains the subordination of women. Now 40 years later, there is a renewed interest in sexuality within feminist theory that have brought us Judith Butler's work on gender and sexuality.

Within feminism there has been a debate about the usefulness of queer theory for the feminist fight for equality. In this paper this question will be examined through theories of sexuality and space from a queer perspective to see if it is useful from a feminist point of view which leads to the conclusion that a successful feminist critique of heterosexuality must contain two elements: a critique of heterosexuality's normative status in society and of its gender relations.

**Keywords:**

Judith Butler

Feminism

Normativity

Heteronormativity

Heterosexuality

Sexuality

Queer Theory

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## 1. Introduction:

When I first started reading about queer theory I noticed that heterosexuality was a central concept. The objective of queer theory is to problematise, denaturalise and denormalise heterosexuality to dissolve heteronormativity. This has been done by drawing attention to ways of life that break up the ‘natural order of things’ where biological sex, gender and sexual desires do not float in a coherent way from each other. The normative status of heterosexuality creates these queers that are being analysed and theorised but is itself often left in the background and usually only mentioned on the way through the theoretical introduction.

Through the process of understanding what the meaning of queer and queer theory I started to realise how important the concept of heterosexuality is. I first saw it discussed in Diana Richardson’s book *Rethinking Sexuality*, where she explores how heterosexuality is a part of how we define who is a normal citizen of our society and who is excluded from it. When I was reading this text I realised that heterosexuality is one of the fundamental institutions of our western society, imbedded in the discourse of every day life and something that is so normal that we don’t even doubt its naturalness. The conviction of its rightfulness can be so strong that people are ready to exclude others from participating in social life, use violence and even ignore all rules of human rights to express their dislike of others’ behaviour. I began to see it everywhere, the most recent example is an article about prostitution in the Icelandic newspaper, *Morgunblaðið*, where the author says that “Everyone can agree that the purpose of sex is an investment in the

future...” (Kjarval, 27.des’03, my translation). It is not hard to see that the author of this article thinks it is evident that procreation is the purpose of sex even though most sex does not lead to a pregnancy, even though we would only count heterosexual penetrative sexual acts. The pleasure of sex, which is a big part of the existence of prostitution, does not even enter the discussion. Statements like this one is not hard to find and they illustrate the core ideology of heteronormativity and makes it visible for analyse and critique.

As a feminist I realised that heteronormativity as it was presented by Richardson was yet another institution in our society that sustains inequality. Even though I had been participating in feminist activism for several years and studied gender studies for a year it had never occurred to me. I was seeing the world from a new perspective and it seemed so clear that I wondered why I had not realised this before. This was a queer perspective and I started to wonder if it could also be useful from a feminist point of view. A feminist perspective is not only a critical social analyse of women’s status in society, gender and gender relations but is also committed to use those analysis to fight inequality.

In order to see if this queer perspective is useful for a feminist purpose I will first examine what the concept of heteronormativity means and where it comes from. It has come into being through different theoretical approaches. The problematisation of heterosexuality began with the radical feminists and Foucault discourse theory upon which later ideas build. Among those theorists that have used this work and are thought of as bringing problematisation of heterosexuality in to postmodernism is the feminist and queer theorist Judith Butler. Her theory of performativity is partly built on what she calls the heterosexual matrix. The queer as well as feminist perspectives that she use in her analyse of the heterosexual matrix can be useful to shed a light on if this two can be used together.

To take a look at how heteronormativity has been taken into account in queer social theory I have chosen to examine the discussions about space. The idea of space has to do with the way humans inhabit space and alter it. Space can both be a geographic location in a landscape or an environment and a social space which can not be defended by borders or locations. (Csordas, 1999, 190). The concept of space as a social

construction has recently become an area of debate within social sciences, especially in geography, feminism, lesbian/gay studies as well as in queer theory. The idea that it is possible to document the geography of sexuality was not widely shared until the 1990's but now there exists a variety of work demonstrating that space is gendered in multiple ways. Even though research has concluded that there may be significant variations in the way sex is represented, perceived and understood in different cultural contexts it also concludes that the organisation of space in western societies serves to naturalise heterosexuality. Feminist analyses have examined the relationship between the social nature of space and the construction of gender as well as gender relations. They have as well, along with some queer and gay theorists, examined the interactions between sexuality and public/private space.

Heteronormativity has been analysed by queer theorists to shed a light on how it maintains its normative status in society and how it can be dissolved. The social geographer and queer theorist Phil Hubbard has examined how public spaces are constructed around particular notions of appropriate sexual behaviour and how the transgression of those that do not behave appropriately can challenge the naturalisation of heteronormativity. The queer theorists Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have in a similar way discussed how sex is mediated by publics and how the idea of privacy is used to cloak the sexualisation of citizenship. I will examine these theories with a feminist perspective to see if this discussion of sexuality and space from a queer perspective is useful from a feminist point of view and can be used to make a successful feminist critic of heterosexuality.

## 2. What is heterosexuality?

Heterosexuality, what do we think when we hear that word? We think of a person that is sexually attracted to a person or persons of the opposite sex and/or gender. We see it all around us, in the movies, advertisement and literature, we here about it in love songs and we see it on the streets and in the park, we see it at home within our families. It is what we expect, without thinking about it, until we are given an indication or told otherwise.

The sociologist and feminist Diane Richardson has defined heterosexuality like this:

*“Heterosexuality is institutionalised as a particular form of practice and relationships, of family structure, and identity. It is constructed as a coherent, natural, fixed and stable category; as universal and monolithic.”* (1998, 2 and 2000, 20).

This definition implies that heterosexuality “is constructed” and is not as “coherent, natural, fixed and stable category; as universal and monolithic” as we are made to believe. Even though it appears that way heterosexuality is not a specific thing; it does not have a single ideology or a unified set of shared beliefs. It has a variety of different practices, believes, norms and institutions. Even though it is commonly represented as a unified whole, there exists a diversity of meanings and social arrangements within the category of heterosexuality. Likewise there does not exist a unitary heterosexual subject or a distinct heterosexual community. (Richardson, 2000, 19-20). Heterosexuality is made to look natural by emphasizing the reproductive function of heterosexuality, which is thought of as the bedrock of social relation, without that society would not function nor exist. It promotes lifelong, monogamous, cohabiting relationships, legally sanctioned through marriage and producing children as the only natural way of life.

Despite that heterosexuality is deeply embedded in our social world it is rarely acknowledged, it is ignored or hidden from view and treated as an unquestioned and unproblematised paradigm. Sexuality on the other hand has been acknowledged as a category of social analysis but that has been done by examining the ‘sexual other’ defined by its opposition to the normal heterosexuality. (Richardson, 2000, 19).

It is not heterosexuality as a sexual orientation that is the problem it is the normative position that it has in society that is the problem. Heterosexuality has a sense of rightness and normality, not just around when it comes to sexual practice; that is what we call heteronormativity.

The queer theorists Berlant and Warner define heteronormativity as:

*“... the institutions, structures of understanding and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent – that is, organised as a sexuality – but also privileged.”* (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 355).

This coherence is always temporary and the privilege can take many forms, it can even be contradictory. Heteronormativity has little visible relation to sexual practices, things as life narratives or family relations, can be heteronormative, while in other contexts sexual acts between men and women do not necessary have to be heteronormative. Heteronormativity is therefore a concept distinct from heterosexuality. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 355).

Heteronormativity is more than ideology, prejudice or homophobia. It is produced and reproduces itself in almost every aspect of society, in nationality, the law, the state, in business, medicine and education, even in romance and family life to name but a few. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 359-361). Heterosexuality involves so many practices that are not sexual that it becomes hard to see, it is there as part of the whole, that is society and culture.

## ***2.1 Foucault:***

The theoretical ground for the term heteronormativity is Foucault's theory of discourse, which is also a theory of knowledge and power as well as his ideas about normative judgements. He first published this theory in his book *The Archaeology of knowledge* in the year 1972. There he discusses how specific discourses have evolved around different disciplines. He begins his coverage by taking an example of a book, which could be any book, is much more than the words that is in it. It does not matter whether it is a fiction or non-fiction, it is a part of a much bigger continuum, which is



variable and relative. This continuum is the discourse. We use it to put the things around us in context but we do not realise where the context comes from. (Foucault, 2002, 7-8).

It is through the discourse that society's institutions get their power, through a process of definitions and exclusions. It fabricates a wholeness of unwritten rules about how we are supposed to understand things, what we can do, say and think and what not, in different contexts.

This theory is the base of all Foucault's later writings and he uses it to look at different things within the discourse. One of those things is how the discourse on sex has produced categories of sexual practices and sexual identity by which we are marked as particular kinds of subjects. In the introduction to *The History of Sexuality* he discusses how our ideas about ourselves are partly built on what type of body we possess. Visible characteristics like, young, old, beautiful, ugly, masculine and feminine makes us a particular kind of individuals, desirable, invisible, disgusting, normal or deviant. The way we inhabit our bodies and live out our (sexual) identities, shapes the type of life we can expect to live and the relationships we engage in. Even though ethical and social rules about sexual conduct may differ through history and between societies it still is the sexual discourse that defines what is right and wrong. It is through this sexual discourse that forms a set of practices, behaviours, rules and knowledge by which we produce ourselves and are produced as knowing, ethical, social subjects. (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000, 133-36).

A part of Foucault's theory is the idea of normative judgements, which is a theory about a type of operation of power that establishes and promotes a set of norms. Normative judgements are used to monitor and judge people's actions and attitudes according to a notion of a norm. Such judgements work throughout various institutions, as well as throughout the social body as a whole, to divide the 'normal' from the 'abnormal'. (Danaher, Schirato and Webb, 2000, xiii). Heterosexuality might be normal in statistical terms but the normativity of the understanding of sex gives it a status of a norm, defined as opposite to abnormal practices and desires. It is from this theory that heteronormativity gets its name.

## ***2.2 Radical feminism:***

An interest to research heterosexuality has existed within feminist theory since the late 60's and early 70's. The sexual revolution with feminists' demand for new understandings of the female heterosexual body where women can be sexually active and able to enjoy sex was the beginning of the many important debates. Some criticised the centrality of intercourse in (hetero)sex and the impotents of the clitoris for women's sexual pleasure. Other began asking questions which challenged the dominant understandings of sexuality.

Radical feminists are the ones that began the problematisation heterosexuality and examined it as an institution of society. They focused on why and how men oppress women and wanted to revolutionise the social, economic, legal and political systems and practices that privilege and benefit men. The issues they prioritised were male violence, reproduction and (hetero)sexuality. (Richardson, 2000, 52).

Radical feminists viewed heterosexuality not only as an individual preference but also as a socially constructed institution which maintains male domination and is therefore viewed as oppressive institution for women. Some even thought that heterosexuality was the source of male dominance and that feminists should reject all sexual relations with men. In the Radicalesians paper *Woman-Identified Woman*, from 1970, it was emphasised that lesbianism was the political strategy for women's liberation and the end of male dominance. The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, which published their paper *Political lesbianism*, in 1979, went even further. Any women participating in a heterosexual couple helps to sustain male dominance and makes its foundations stronger. (Richardson, 1997, 163).

Adrienne Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality is one of the important work of problematising heterosexuality and see it as something else than a natural phenomenon. She examined the institutionalisation of heterosexuality and suggests that it may not be preferences at all but rather something that "has had to be imposed, managed, organised, propagandised and maintained by force". (Rich, 1980, 20).

She goes on to describe some of the factors that force women into sexual relationships with men. For example the ideology that presents heterosexuality as normal and lesbianism as deviant, the idealisation of romance and marriage to name but a few.

It is not strange that heterosexual feminist felt the need to defend themselves and criticise, even reject these ideas. Arguing that they demanded the right to a self-defined sexuality and that the category of lesbian was not as accessible for all women but by doing so they were missing the point; it is the institution of heterosexuality not the praxis as such that is being criticised. Heterosexuality as it is currently constructed restricts all women's lives, to varying extents. Despite heterosexual feminist critic on heterosexuality almost all feminist analysis of heterosexuality was for a long time only written by lesbians. It is not until recently that this changed with a growth in feminist writing on this subject. (Richardson, 1997, 165).

Rich's theory of compulsory heterosexuality is often looked at as the beginning of the problematisation of heterosexuality within feminist theory. Her idea of the connection between heterosexuality and the subordination of women is still at the centre of feminist writing. Her work is widely quoted and the concept of compulsory heterosexuality is often used because of how well it describes the phenomenon even though the authors do not necessary agree with the theory as a whole.

### ***2.3 Judith Butler:***

Butler's theory of gender as a performance proposes segregation between sex, gender and desire to disturb the normative relations that naturalise heterosexuality in a way that disrupt the naturalness and coheres of these categories. In her book *Gender Trouble*, first published in 1990 she establishes her theory which has been called the beginning of queer theory and has been highly influential. Here I will take a look at how she problematises heterosexuality.

Butler uses the concept of heterosexual matrix to describe what I have called heteronormativity. She uses "... the term throughout the text to designate that grid of

cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized.” (Butler, 1999, 194, n.6). She draws from her reading of the radical lesbians, Monique Wittig’s ‘heterosexual contract’ and Adrienne Rich’s ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ as well as Foucault’s discourse theory.

When Butler starts her discussion of heterosexual matrix she has already placed heterosexuality within a discursive framework. It is clear that she sees it as more than sexual relations. She builds on Foucault which proposes sexuality as an open and complex historical system of discourse and power. Butler takes up this understanding of sexuality and says that the discourse produces a misunderstanding of sex, as part of a strategy to conceal and preserve continual power relations. Sex must not only be understood within the terms of sexuality but also as a construction produced by a generative power which conceals the mechanism of its own productivity. This means that to be a person of a particular sex is to be subjected to a set of social regulations and any analysis that does not take that in to consideration uncritically extends and further legitimates that regulative strategy. (Butler, 1999, 121-123).

In Butlers theory heterosexuality and its normative status is a central issue. She rereads and criticises the big names of structuralism and psychoanalysis and argues in a convincing way that “the naturalization of both heterosexuality and masculine sexual agency are discursive constructions nowhere accounted for but everywhere assumed within [the] founding structuralist frame.” (Butler, 1999, 55). What she is saying is that Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, Lacan, Freud and others working with their theories actually have heteronormativity built in to them but at the same time they are ideal to take a closer look at how it works and reproduces itself constantly.

Butler begins by examining Lévi-Strauss’s theory of exchange. The exchange of women in marriage, given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another, is the form of exchange that structures all other exchange. The structural system of kinship relations is seen as a universal logic or law that structure all other human relations. (Butler, 1999, 49-50). Part of this universal law is the rule of exogamy as well as the incest taboo. The law provides a relationship or bonds between men that are secured though the heterosexual exchange of women and therefore maintains the system. (Butler, 1999, 52). Butler

proposes a rereading of this theory with Foucault's discourse theory in mind. The laws that are being described here are in fact, part of the discourse and are describing the heterosexual matrix. She says that "for Lévi-Strauss, the taboo against the act of heterosexual incest... as well as [the] incestuous fantasy is instated as universal truths of culture." but are in fact socially constructed as such. (Butler, 1999, 54).

Butler goes from Lévi-Strauss to Lacan, from Lacan to Freud rereading their texts as describing the discourse of sexuality. She is not saying that their theories and analyses were wrong. What she is saying is that they are describing a socially constructed reality but not universal facts as they claim. The law is presented as universal facts by the discourse so it will be able to hold its position as natural and normal. It is complex and deceiving and managed to hold that position in these analyses. According to Butler we have to expose these discursive constructions in order to denaturalise and denormalise heteronormativity.

In Butler's theory gender identity is a part of the discourse. Genders are collections of repeated actions that have got strict rules and have coagulated with time and do therefore look like they are natural entities. By seeing gender and its construction as part of the discourse it becomes open for interference and reconstructions.

Even though Butler proposes segregation between sex, gender and desire to disturb the normative relations that naturalise heterosexuality in a way that disrupt the naturalness and coheres of these categories she is not saying that we supposed to do this segregation analytically. According to Butler's theory we have to take in to consideration how sex, gender and desire work together and are made to look natural and coherent by the discourse. To problematise or analyse only one of these categories will not give us a right understanding of what is going on. We therefore have to analyse how these categories work together within the discourse to be able to find ways to disrupt the coherence.

### **3. Heteronormativity and Theories of Space:**

In recent years the concept of space as a social construction has emerged as a key area of debate in social sciences, especially in geography, feminism, lesbian/gay studies as well as in queer theory. The idea of space has to do with the way humans inhabit space and alter it. Space can both be a geographic location in a landscape or an environment and a social space which can not be defended by borders or locations. (Csordas, 1999, 190).

Feminist analyses on space have mostly been concerned with the relationship between social space and the construction of gender and gender relations as well as the theorising of the public and private. They identified and criticised public space as masculine and private space as feminine and wanted to disrupt the ways certain issues are considered to belong to one or the other. This work parallels with lesbian/gay studies concern with space and how people are excluded from social and cultural spaces and how we can create safe spaces for lesbians and gays. A concern with space is also associated with queer sexual politics which wants to increase visibility and expose the straightness of public spaces. (Richardson, 2000, 46-49).

Queer theorists have been active in figuring out how ways that notions of space can be used to problematise heterosexuality in order to dissolve heteronormativity. Now there exists a variety of work that demonstrates that space is sexed in multiple ways and that the organisation of space in western culture serves to naturalise and normalise heterosexuality. (Hubbard, 2001, 54).

To see if this discussion of sexuality and space from a queer perspective is useful from a feminist point of view I will discuss Hubbard's analysis of heteronormativity as it is represented in his article *Sex Zones*. I will also take a look at how Berlant and Warner's theory in their article *Sex in Public*. A feminist perspective is not only a critical social analyse of women's status in society, gender and gender relations but is also committed to use those analysis to fight inequality.

### **3.1 Hubbard:**

The social geographer Phil Hubbard has looked at how public spaces are constructed around particular notions of appropriate sexual behaviour which exclude those whose lives do not centre on monogamous, heterosexual, procreative sex. Hubbard also explores how the transgression of sexual ‘dissidents’ into public space can challenge the naturalisation of heterosexual norms. In his article *Sex Zones: Intimacy, Citizenship and Public Space*, he discusses this in context with ideas about citizenship. (Hubbard, 2001, 51 and 54-55).

For Hubbard heterosexuality

*“...is something that is produced (and made to appear natural) through repeated spatial performances and flows of desire. These occur within different contexts of legal and moral regulation which serve to define what sexual identities and practices are permissible or acceptable in public and private space.”* (Hubbard, 2001, 59).

We can see on this definition that Hubbard sees heterosexuality as socially constructed thing which is a part of something bigger and is more than sexual orientation or actions.

Hubbard sees citizenship in its widest definition, as referring to the political and social recognition that is granted to those whose behaviour is acceptable and according to the moral values underpinning the construction of the nation-state. (Hubbard, 2001, 53). The idea of equal citizenship appears to be constructed around an idea that we are all prepared to accept certain norms and values and at the same time, be prepared to expel those who will not accept them and/or live by them. (Hubbard, 2001, 59). Hubbard therefore sees citizenship as one of society’s institutions that give heterosexuality its natural and normal status in society and forcing us to monitor our behaviour in line with what is thought of as acceptable for a ‘good citizen’.

In the urban West, where all individuals are supposed to be equal in the eyes of the law and state, but failure to match up to the dominant definition of sexual morality has resulted in the sexual ‘others’ being denied full citizenship in terms of state benefits and political recognition. This sexual ‘others’ may experience social stigmatisation for failing to match the ideas of how to be a ‘good citizen’ and become regarded as second-class or

partial citizens, sometimes called dissidents, not only by the state but also by the ‘decent’ and ‘respectable’ sexual subjects. Such ‘bad citizens’ can be a variety of things; single mothers, prostitutes, absent fathers, stalkers, spinsters, child molesters, pornographers and your basic ‘perverts’ such as lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites and all other gender benders and sexual identities that are not heterosexual. (Hubbard, 2001, 54-53).

Hubbard’s has extended the idea of heteronormativity and citizenship to explain the exclusion of undesirable heterosexual practices. If we take a look at prostitutes we can see that in many cities they are forced to work out of sight, in particular areas or off the street in brothels or private flats. Their ability to leave this confined space and enter the public realm as sex workers is highly restricted. The sight of the sexed body of prostitutes disturbs the idea of the feminine sexuality that should be domesticated in the monogamous reproductive relationship. The state and law, as well as the stigmatisation of other ‘good’ citizens, limit these spaces so that their immorality does not ‘leak out’ in to the public realm or interfere with right of the ‘normal’, ‘decent’ citizen to walk on the streets without offending their sense of decency. (Hubbard, 2001, 58).

The notion of community and belonging is inevitably based around erasure and exclusion of difference, rather than its celebration. The ‘good’ heterosexual citizen is rewarded by the state, for example through the welfare system but dissidents are invisible in terms of rights. Hubbard says that this visibility and invisibility is mirrored in the presence and absence of particular sexual identities in public space. He also says that even though this divides and confines sexual identities across public and private spaces and restricting certain groups to separate spaces, it also provides a space for the promotion of, for example homosexual values and lifestyles. Lesbian and gay ‘villages’ play a fundamental role in staking a visible claim to full sexual citizenship specially in the beginning of the gay rights movement. Through the visibility and how lesbians and gay men have been able to make their presence known in such spaces have led some people to believe that it is possible to use public space as a point of departure for new sexual and moral orders. (Hubbard, 2001, 60-62).



Hubbard is very critical of the idea that sexual dissidents can redefine themselves as sexual citizens by occupying public space in their own terms and by doing that oppose oppressive aspects of heteronormativity. By doing this he is not trying to downplay the very important work that has been made to publicize the rights of sexual minority groups but is offering an alternative reading of the importance of space in the debate about sexual citizenship and the idea that free access to public space is represents the achievement of full citizenship. (Hubbard, 2001, 63).

He points out that even to minority groups may occupy and use the streets that exclude them in order to represent themselves; they usually do so in public spaces which do not match their needs and requirements. It might make some acts acceptable in public but it also means that dissidents must surrender certain level of control over their bodies, feelings and identities to the wider community, which they claim to be a part of. For example gay couples kissing in the street becomes not only a right but also an obligation. They must also accept certain compromises because only some groups or some actions become acceptable in the wider public. We must also bear in mind that the acceptance of difference depends upon the marking of certain bodies as belonging to a particular sexual identity. This means that homosexual as well as other groups must continue to mark their bodies as different from the heterosexual norm. This visibility makes them vulnerable to any backlash and visible to any group which might seek to exclude them. (Hubbard, 2001, 63-64).

Hubbard points out that the problem is perhaps not the lack of publicity but a lack of privacy. He here draws upon Ted Kilian's argument that suggests that publicity should be defined as the power to access and privacy as the power to exclude. This suggests that many sexual minorities have too much publicity, because they can access a number of different spaces but not enough privacy, because they do not have control over those spaces, because they cannot exclude others from them. In other words sexual dissidents must not only seek more publicity but also increase public legitimacy for their own privacy. A kind of intimate citizenship based on the control over one's own body, feelings and relationship. Sexual practices like prostitution, sado-masochism and same sex relationships are represented as threatening to 'public decency' they are defined as public

problems which needs to be regulated even though they occur in private, between two consenting adults. (Hubbard, 2001, 64-66).

Hubbard therefore proposes that sexual dissidents should promote their own model of citizenship by producing spaces where they have both the right to publicity and privacy. These spaces should not be fixed in permanent communities, instead they would be temporary sites of freedom and control which could be used to create momentary identifications out of which new identities and citizenships could emerge. The freedom and intimacy in these spaces would have to be policed by rejecting one particular model of citizenship in favour of a different model. The rejection would be based on a set of norms which would celebrate and accept difference but do not allow full rights to those who threaten the privacy of others, as well as the exclusion of those who threaten the ability of people to control their own bodies, feelings and relationships with other consenting adults, uniting around a shared sexual identity. This alternative citizenship cannot be understood in terms of the conventional understandings of public and private space but as temporary spaces that disrupt heteronormativity and allowing people to perform their sexualities in a safe and pleasurable environment. New citizenship based on sexual respect, intimacy and equality might ultimately emerge from these 'sex zones'. (Hubbard, 2001, 65-68).

### ***3.2 Berlant and Warner:***

In their paper *Sex in Public*, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner discuss how sex is mediated by publics and how the notion of privacy is used to cloak the sexualisation of citizenship. They do this to promote queer cultural building, not only to make a safe zone for queer sex but also to see the possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is not privileged in sexual culture. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 355).

Berlant and Warner use heteronormativity to take a look at intimacy. They say that even though intimate relations of private personhood appear to be a part of sexuality, making 'sex in public' seems as a thing out of place, intimacy itself is really a publicly mediated. The conventional ideas about public and private space presuppose a structural split between these two spaces, the public life of work and politics are separate from the private personal life. The normative status of heterosexuality links intimacy only with the institutions of personal life making sex seem irrelevant and a personal matter in the public world which makes heterosexual relations the privileged institution of social reproduction. This heteronormative understanding of intimacy blocks the construction of non-normative or explicit public sexual cultures. Furthermore, this split between public and private promotes a fantasy, where we have a private space from which we emerge from to engage in political conflict to which we also return to afterwards. A place where the 'good' citizens can be produced away from the confusing distractions and contradictions of capitalism and politics. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 358-9).

Berlant and Warner say that this idea of the intimacy is not as clear cut as we are made to believe. "A complex cluster of sexual practices gets confused, in heterosexual culture, with the love plot of intimacy and familialism that signifies belonging to society in a deep and normal way." (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 359). This community, imagined through the sense of intimacy, coupling and reproduction makes a whole field of social relations understood as heterosexual. Things that we usually connect to public life and we think of as have nothing to do with privacy and intimacy, become part of it through heteronormativity because they support and sustain it. Things like paying taxes, being disgusted, celebrating a holiday, investing for the future, buying economy size, teaching, carrying wallet photos, divorcing and so on. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 359).

Heterosexuality is therefore more than just the sexual acts associated with it, it is a variety of practices that spreads heterosexual privilege as a silent but central index of social membership. It is embedded in the social and economic discourses, institutions and practices even though they do not feel sexual. They collaborate in producing the heteronorm and promote an ideal and narrow way of life. Further more the heterosexual culture has to exclude much of the things people know to be able to hold its normative

status. It can not recognise, validate, sustain, incorporate or remember people's experience of the cruelty and flaws of normality even to the people that identify with it. But it is not totally unregistered, every day people talk publicly about their failure to sustain an intimate heterosexual relationship as gossip or to get advice how to do it right not only in private conversation but also in mainstream media such as talk-shows and journals. Berlant and Warner say that we can learn much from these stories of love that went wrong and the most important lesson is that no one ever blames the ideology and institutions of heterosexual culture. People have to identify themselves with the heteronormative life narrative to be socially recognised and that their individually responsible for the rages, instabilities, ambivalences and failures they experience in their intimate lives. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 359-361).

For Berlant and Warner this is not only a problem for non-heterosexuals but also all heterosexuals who do not manage to live up to the heteronormative expectations. They therefore want to promote a queer culture with a different understanding of intimacy. They say that queers have for a long time strived to cultivate what good moral citizens used to call criminal intimacies and have managed to develop a kind of intimacy that does not have a necessary relation to domestic space, kinship, the couple form, property, and even the nation. They have managed to create intimacies that are not recognised by the heterosexual culture: girlfriends, gal pals, fuck buddies, tricks. Queer culture has learned how to sexualise these and other relations, how to use them to witness intense and personal affection and by doing so created a public culture with a feeling of belonging and which gives rise to hope of transformation. It is public because it is accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity and therefore could transform the heteronormative understanding of intimacy. (Berlant and Warner, 1999, 361-364).

### ***3.3 Feminist critique:***

Hubbard's theory of sexual citizenship and his understanding of heterosexuality is a fascinating one. The idea that people should be able to live their (sex) life as they please and only exclude those that threaten privacy of others or in other ways try to manipulate peoples control of their own bodies, feelings and relationships with other consenting adults sounds promising. Berlant and Warner's idea of how our understanding intimacy is a part of the heteronorm and how a new understanding of intimacy could change it is also an exciting reading. Both theories are successful analyses of heteronormativity but are they useful from a feminist perspective?

Hubbard's idea that if we successfully can transform the heteronorm to give all people the control of their own body, feelings and relationship and that people can be able to express there sexualities in private without that effecting other aspects of there life sounds promising but without rearranging the power relations between men and women it does not change the subordination of women. His gender blindness becomes clear when he talks about the 'bad' citizen. The failure to match up to the dominant definition of sexual morality has resulted in denying the sexual 'others' full citizenship not only in terms of state benefits and political recognition but also social stigmatisation by the 'decent' and 'respectable' sexual subjects. According to Hubbard a 'bad' citizen can be a variety of things; single mothers, prostitutes, absent fathers, stalkers, spinsters, child molesters, pornographers, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites and all other non heterosexuals or all those that do not match up to the heteronormative life stile. I am not saying that this is wrong, all these different people do not have the same right to there sexuality as heterosexuals how live there life within the boundaries of the heteronorm. I am pointing out that by putting all of them in to one category he ignores the different situations and power relations that they find themselves in. The single mother and the child molester for example do not have in common interests or find them self's in similar situations even though they both might feel rejected by the 'decent' citizens and/or the state.

To clarify this we should take a lock at how Hubbard talks about the prostitute. Hubbard takes them as an example of how 'bad' citizens are forced to occupy particular

spaces. Prostitutes are often forced to work out of sight, in particular areas or off the street in brothels or private flats. Their ability to leave this confined space and enter the public realm as sex workers is highly restricted. The sight of the sexed body of the prostitute disturbs the idea of the feminine sexuality that should be domesticated in the monogamous reproductive relationship. The state and law, as well as the stigmatisation of the 'good' citizens, limit these spaces so that their immorality does not 'leak out' in to the public realm or interfere with the right of the 'decent' citizen to walk the streets without offending their sense of decency. Even though Hubbard's analysis is right it does not include the violent situation of exploitation they often find themselves in. His proposal of an intimate citizenship based on the control over one's own body, feelings and relationships could change the space that prostitutes are allowed to occupy but it does not necessarily have to change the power relations they find themselves in. In stead his idea of prostitutes is that they have chosen to be sex workers and enter into the work place in control over their body, feelings and relationships. The prostitute in Hubbard's theory is the happy hooker that feminist research has shown is a myth. A myth that is created so that the client does not feel that he is abusing the prostitute but helping her, for example to put her self through college. (Raymond, 1998).

Berlant and Warner's theory is not as easy to criticize as Hubbard's. In Berlant and Warner's theory gender is totally absent and irrelevant. It is an extremely successful analyze of heteronormativity and how it affects non-heterosexuals as well as heterosexuals because of the narrow way of life it promotes. Gender and the structural inequalities that are a part of the heteronormative discourse are not mentioned by Berlant and Warner is a problem. The gender blindness of the theory makes gender relations look like they do not matter even though it is not hard to see that the heteronormative discourse does not promote the same behaviour for men and women. The total silence of gender makes the idea of intimacy without a connection to the heterosexual couple no better for women than the existing one.

Both Berlant and Warner's theory as well as Hubbard's is opposed to the existing heteronorm of our culture and both propose ways to change the norm. Both solutions sound promising from a feminist perspective but because of the absence of gender and

gender relations it does not promise to change them even though it looks like they can be affected. I am convinced that gender relations do not change without a conscious effort. Every thing that is as well constructed and institutionalised as heterosexuality will not change without a conscious effort and hard work. If it were easy we would have done it by now, after more then 150 or 200 years of women's liberation.

Hubbard's theory is amid to disrupt heteronormativity to allow people to perform their sexualities in a safe and pleasurable environment with sexual respect, intimacy and equality. He proposes a new model of norms that would celebrate and accept difference but exclude those who threaten the privacy of others and their ability to control their own bodies, feelings and relationships with other consenting adults. This new model excludes all forms of sexual exploitations and lets in people that are excluded by the heteronorm. This proposal could have an affect on gender relations and the structural inequality in our society. Sexual respect, intimacy and equality would probably have an affect out side what we cal sexual. The same thing can apply to Bertlant and Warner's theory. A new queer understanding of intimacy, an intimacy that is honest about the failures of the heteronormative culture and does not have a necessary connection to domestic space, kinship, couples or any other form of relations we usually think of when we talk about intimacy. This would widen the understanding of relationships and make people find intimacy in new places. This would probably also effect the way we understand gender relations. The question here is whether an analysis that does not take gender, gender relations or the structural inequality of gender in to consideration can have a real effect on it? An effect that will change it into something better than the existing order of things. My answer would have to be no. It can do so but not to the extent or not in the way that would be satisfactory from a feminist perspective. By this I am not saying that changes in out culture that are not specifically directed at gender relations can not have a positive affect on women's situation but that we have to keep in mind that all changes can have effects that we did not for see. An example of this is the sexual revolution that was supposed to lead to the sexual freedom of all people. But the fact is that it ended up as sexual freedom for heterosexual men because the existing gender power relations were not threatened nor was the heteronormativ. If gender relations had been part of the mainstream ideology of

the sexual revolution the outcome would probably have had a better effect on women's life in general and maybe not created the double standards that we live with today. (Greer, 2003). A successful feminist critique of heterosexuality must therefore contain two elements: a critique of heterosexuality's normative status and of heterosexuality's gender system that is male dominated.

If I were discussing this critique with Berlant and Warner or Hubbard they would probably answer my critic with a simple sentence: That gender is irrelevant here. My answer would be that gender is always relevant if you are talking about sexuality. It is like Judith Butler said; we have to take into consideration how sex, gender and desire work together. To problematise or analyse only one of these categories will not give us a better understanding of the discourse. We therefore have to analyse how these categories work together within the discourse to be able to find ways to disrupt the heteronormative.

The feminist and anthropologist Gayle Rubin does not agree with Butler on the importance of feminist theory when we are working on sexuality and points out that feminism "... should not be seen as the privileged site for work on sexuality." (Rubin, 1997, 95). She is referring to the distribution of interests, activities, objects and methods between feminism and lesbian/gay studies and the debate about the proper objects of these two fields. Rubin thinks that it is not a good idea to erect an exclusive disciplinary barrier between these two because they have so much in common. Sexuality, she says, is something that is too big to belong only to one discipline. It is such an important social category that we should add it to the list with class, race and gender. We have to look at oppression based on sexual activities and/or desire as distinct from gender oppression in the same way that we have to look at class oppression as distinct from gender oppression. Though not necessarily unrelated or in opposition to each other. If we do not analyse sexuality independently there is a risk that we unwillingly support abusive, oppressive and undesired actions and/or theories. (Rubin, 1997, 94-98).

I think that Rubin is right, feminism should not be the obligatory approach to analysing and theorising sexuality but at the same time I think that we can not ignore gender when we talk about sexuality because of the same risks involved. Sexuality is a category divided by gender. It does not matter if we are talking about heterosexuality or



homosexuality (maybe with the exception of bisexuality), gender is what divides the desirable from the undesirable. Therefore I think that we have to analyse and theories this two together like Butler proposes to avoid unwilling support of abusive, excluding and oppressive discourses.

Within feminism there is not only a debate about how we should think about sexuality but also about the usefulness of queer theory to the feminist agenda. Even though some feminists have gone back to the old arguments of the 80's most of the response from heterosexual feminists has been more positive. There has been a renewal of the critique of heterosexuality as an institution and lesbians no longer condemn their heterosexual sisters as collaborators in their own oppression. Part of this renewal of the debate of heterosexuality is because of the popularity of queer theory and the possibilities it proposes. Some feminists remain sceptic to the usefulness of queer theory and see it simply as a reinvention of the sociological wheel. They also are worried about the limitations that queer theory has. It takes place at the level of culture and discourse and has not been able to make a connection to social structure and material practices. (Jackson, 1999, 159-161).

The feminist Stevi Jackson has pointed out that radical feminism and queer theory have some elements in common. Both approaches call in to question the naturalness of heterosexuality as well as its normative status in society, both assume that gender boundaries and the divide between heterosexuality and homosexuality are not fixed by nature and in both cases is the critique of heterosexuality a political response to oppression and exclusion with opposition to the existing cultural order and hope of radical changes. (Jackson, 1999, 161). Even though feminism and queer theory have got all this in common there is one thing that distinguishes the two: a queer perspective does not have to call in to question the structural inequalities of gender that is the main object of the feminism.

Jackson agrees with my conclusion above, that a successful feminist critique of heterosexuality must contain two elements: a critique of heteronormativity and heterosexuality's gender system. She also points out that the various theories both

feminist and queer, that have been developed so far often fail to include both elements. (Jackson, 1999, 163-164).

The failure of queer theory to include the structural inequality of gender and its gender blindness was discussed above. Feminists on the other hand fail to make it clear that heterosexuality is what they are talking about. They have analysed how the institutions and practices associated with heterosexuality oppress women and sustain that oppression. Much of the research of patriarchy and its powers, male violence against women, young women's relationship patterns, and division of waged and domestic labour are connected to heterosexuality. They are describing the power relations of heteronormativity but do not mention them as such. (Jackson, 1999, 164-165).

Despite that some feminist did not mention that heterosexuality was what they were talking about radical feminists did combine the critique of heteronormativity and heterosexuality's gender system as male dominated from the beginning. Adrienne Rich theory of compulsory heterosexuality, for example links together heterosexuality as a social construction and women's subordination to men in way that explores the connection between the two. Even though they managed to combine the two elements together from the beginning they put an over emphasis on heterosexuality as the root of the problem that should be eliminated. That proposes a problem for heterosexual feminists which feel that they are being attacked and must defend there sexuality. This creates a dialog that about heterosexuality as good or bad and louses the sight of the real problem. We therefore must find a way to move past that debate.

Jackson therefore proposes that we should see heterosexuality not only as an institution but also as an identity, as something that is practised and experienced. The way heteronormativity and male domination interact with each other cannot be mapped out in predictable ways at all four of these levels. In other words it is not possible to separate identity, practise and experience from what is institutionalised. This is not possible if we deny heterosexuality any complexity and treat it as a monolithic, unitary entity which happens if it is seen only as eroticized power as radical feminists have done, by seeking to condemn all heterosexual practices as systematically oppressive. It also happens if it is treated as a singular norm as queer theorists have done, by celebrating a plurality of

sexualities outside heterosexuality. This leaves heterosexuality merely normative and simply boring. (Jackson, 1999, 163-164).

Jackson emphasises that heterosexuality can be many things. Some times it is necessary to collect the difference in to usable and unitary concepts, like when we are talking about heterosexual privilege, its naturalisation and institutionalisation of gender hierarchy within heterosexuality. At the same time we must address diversity when we are talking about identities, practices and experience. This makes it possible to recognise intersections between different identities, social locations and patterns of dominance and subordination. This enables us to see heterosexuality as a site of struggle and contradiction with different meaning for those how are heterosexual as well as those how are not. By addressing the diversity and difference of heterosexuality we avoid the dangers of turning the critique in to an attack on heterosexuals and make the position of heterosexual feminists possible and exiting in stead of a contradictionary. (Jackson, 1999, 164-165).

I agree with Jackson's proposal of how we can leave behind the old trenches and start to work on the real problem of heteronormativity. The complexity and multiplicity of the heteronorm is hard to chart but is a necessary task if we are willing to change it. I therefore propose that we take up a perspective of heterosexuality that is critical to its normative status in society and examine the gender relations that are closely related to its status in society. A perspective that sees heterosexuality not only as an institution but also as an identity which is practised and experienced in multiple ways. I cal this perspective feminist not because it is more feminist that queer or Butlerian but because to my it is a political strategy that is useful for a critical social analyse of women's status in society, gender and gender relations that can be used in feminists fight against inequality.

## **4. Conclusions:**

I think feminism has more to gain than lose by taking up a queer perspective. The problematisation of heterosexuality and analysis of its status in society has shown that it is closely related gender and gender relations. Therefore is it necessary for feminism to continue the work that radical feminists started. Foucault theory of discourse and power as well as his ideas of normative judgements is a starting point from which Butler and others have used to analyse heteronormativity. Butler has shown us how integrated the heteronorm is in to social theory and philosophy as well as pointing out how well the discourse have managed to convince us that sex, gender and desire are coherent categories that only fit together in predetermined ways. We have to analyse how the heteronormative discourse and its institutions work in order to find ways to change it.

Queer theorists like Hubbard, Berlant and Warner have produced exiting and fascinating analysis of heteronormativity and produced ways to problematise, denaturalise and denormalise heterosexuality and change or dissolve heteronormativity. The most troublesome part of queer theory is the gender blindness and ignorance that are evident in Hubbard's theory as well as in Berlant and Warner's. I am not saying that by adding gender to the mix will fix the flaws of queer theory but that a queer perspective can have something to add to feminist analysis of heterosexuality and be one of the many ways that we can use to the structural inequalities of gender and gender relations.

A successful feminist critique of heterosexuality must contain two elements: a critique of heterosexuality's normative status and of heterosexuality's gender system as male dominated. This is not an easy thing to do and there are many things that have to be considered. In my opinion Jackson has managed to combine the two elements in a successful way, taking with her the work of Foucault and Butler and at the same time examined the pros and cons of both queer and feminist theory. She sees heterosexuality not only as an institution but also as an identity, which is practised and experienced. This

view gives heterosexuality complexity and recognises intersections between different identities, social locations and patterns of dominance and subordination. This makes heterosexuality an exiting field of analysis for feminists.

To be against heteronormativity is not the same as being against heterosexuality or norms, nor is it the same thing as promoting actions without responsibility or being afraid of being normal. It is about recognising that the heterosexual culture is centred on maintaining a narrative lifestyle that excludes and manipulates people. It makes people feel that they have to identify them selves with the heterosexual life narrative to be socially accepted and any failure to do so is their fault. The gender relations within the heteronormative are unequal and male dominated. To problematise and analyse heteronormativity is therefore the beginning of being able to imagine another world.

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