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Space, surveillance, and stress: a Lefebvrian analysis of heteronormative spatial production in schools, using a photo elicitation method with LGBT+ teachers

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how schools are produced as spaces for heterosexual, cisgender citizens. Lefebvre's spatial triad is employed to analyse how conceived, perceived and lived spaces interact to produce a space that is often experienced as one of surveillance for LGBT+ people. This surveillance can lead to the internalisation of negative social attitudes and experiences of minority stress. The article details the experiences of four LGBT+ teachers who took part in a photo elicitation study, which involved taking photographs of spaces in their school that represented where they felt most and least safe. These accounts bring to life the small and subtle ways in which schools are produced and experienced as heteronormative environments. The article concludes that more needs to be done by school leaders to ensure the inclusion and safety of their LGBT+ staff and students, and that an equity model that listens to the lived experience of LGBT+ people is central to achieving this.

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Introduction

Despite significant progress towards LGBT+ inclusion within the UK, schools often remain sites of entrenched heteronormativity, in which discussions of sexuality are deemed inappropriate and cisgender heterosexuality is silently assumed. This double bind forces LGBT+ teachers into a dilemma of either revealing their identity and disrupting these silent norms or concealing their identity to meet heteronormative expectations. Many scholars have explored the experiences of LGBT+ teachers within heteronormative institutions (Cohen, Duarte, and Ross 2023; Llewellyn and Reynolds 2021; Johnson 2023; DePalma and Atkinson 2009; Ferfolja 2007), highlighting the distinct challenges they often face. This article deploys a unique theoretical framework, with a photo elicitation methodology, to reveal the in-the-moment and often invisible experiences of four LGBT+ teachers. The framework was designed to envision new perspectives of how heteronormativity is perpetuated and experienced in school environments.

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Using the findings from a photo elicitation research study conducted with LGBT+ teachers, this article engages with the work of Henri Lefebvre (1991) to analyse the subtle and unique ways that school space is produced to privilege cisgender heterosexual lives. These heteronormative spaces often evoke feelings of displacement for LGBT+ staff and pupils which in turn leads to self-policing and code-switching behaviours. The article also engages with Foucault's (1977) conceptualisation of the Panopticon to understand how schools can be experienced as spaces of intense surveillance for LGBT+ staff and pupils, which can lead to both distal and proximal stress, as posited by Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress model.

The research used to explore these ideas takes the form of a case study selected from a larger research project with UK LGBT+ secondary school teachers. The participants were asked to take photos in their school to represent spaces where they felt most and least safe. The significance of these photos were then later discussed in one-to-one interviews. Extracts of these photos and accounts are discussed within this article to explore the ways in which space is produced and experienced in schools.

The article concludes that although schools are rarely explicitly produced as homophobic or transphobic spaces, they are often implicitly experienced this way by LGBT+ people: as isolating places that centre and privilege cisgender heterosexual lives. School leaders, therefore, need to adopt an equity model approach to LGBT+ inclusion, recognising that the experiences of minority groups in school spaces can be challenging and distressing, and not inclusive in ways that some leaders may conceive.

Methods and participants

This article draws upon a selected case study from a larger research project with LGBT+ teachers which employed a photo elicitation methodology, as detailed in other writing (Brett 2021, 2022). Visual methods can be an effective way to access under-represented and marginalised groups in education. When used effectively, these methods allow us to see through the eyes of participants, access spaces that are usually inaccessible, and evoke meaning that can be difficult to capture or articulate through words alone (Greg, Namey, and Mitchell 2012). Collier and Collier (1986) are regularly cited as some of the earliest adopters of photo elicitation, describing the method as an interview in which the informants and the interviewer discuss the photographs together. This not only allows the participant to articulate the reasons why they took each photograph; it also provides a springboard from which to explore issues in greater depth.

Using a photo elicitation method, 12 LGBT+ teachers were asked to take photos within their school to represent specific spaces where they felt safe and unsafe. Participants described the significance of their photos in one-to-one interviews, producing rich data and new layers of understanding for time and contextually specific experiences; insights that were unlikely to be revealed through traditional interview alone. The participants' photos and interview scripts were thematically coded, with heteronormativity and surveillance developing as common themes. A hybrid inductive/deductive approach to the analysis was used, recognising that my lived experience as a gay teacher would provide familiarity with some accounts, but not others. It was therefore important not to make assumptions, and to let the data drive the findings to identify the 'unknown unknowns' (Allen 2011). Going into the research, I had expected heteronormativity to be a key theme,

but the themes of space, stress and surveillance revealed through the photographs and discussion were not ones I had anticipated. This was hugely exciting and provided the opportunity to widen the literature review to conceptualise the ideas that emerged using this inductive approach, leading to my encounter with the work of Lefebvre.

Ethical approval for the study was granted by Nottingham Trent University's ethics committee, with measures in place to ensure participants were protected. These included instructions that photos should not include colleagues or pupils, and that any signifiers of the school would be blurred, and descriptions anonymised. Participants were also alerted to appropriate support after the interview should they need it. Despite the risk that can come from researching marginalised groups, each teacher expressed gratitude for being able to take part. Participants appreciated the opportunity to examine their experiences from a unique and critical perspective, describing feelings of empowerment and emancipation in having their voices centred.

This article examines the experience of four teachers from the study: Brian, Arjun, Sally and Mel. They were chosen as their photos and descriptions build upon and provide a new perspective on the existing literature. Their photos and rich narratives reveal the small, subtle, and often invisible ways in which space is produced to privilege some, while marginalising others.

Literature

This article utilises three key concepts to examine the production and effects of heterosexual cisgender spaces in school: Lefebvre's (1991) notion of *spatial practice*, Foucault's (1977) *panoptic schema of surveillance*, and Meyer's (2003) *minority stress model*.

Lefebvre

Lefebvre uses the word *production* to conceptualise the ways in which space is not something abstract or passive, nor the sum of parts contained within it, but something lived and fundamental to human beings' understanding and experience of the world.

> In Lefebvre's hands, space becomes redescribed not as a dead, inert thing or object, but as organic and fluid and alive; it has a pulse, it palpitates, it flows and collides with other spaces. And these inter-penetrations - many with different temporalities - get superimposed upon one another to create a present space. (Merrifield 2002, 171)

Originally conceived within the discourse of capitalist production, Lefebvre's work has since been used in a broader range of disciplines to examine the ways in which space is produced, including education (Middleton 2013; McIntyre and Jones 2014; Perry 2022). Central to Lefebvre's theory of production is the *spatial triad*, designed to conceptualise how the interplay of three inseparable elements produce our understanding and experience of space. As Merrifield (2002) argues, 'unfortunately – or fortunately – he sketches this out only in preliminary fashion; he leaves us to add our own flesh and to re-write it as part of our own chapter or research agenda' (p173). As such, the different elements of the triad have been discussed with varying degrees of detail and specificity, but in this article they will be examined using the following nomenclature.

- Conceived space (physical): The physical school space as conceived and designed by architects, leaders, and persons in positions of power. The space includes the bricks and mortar of the building, and the facilities and resources within. Power and knowledge are embedded in the representation of the space (Merrifield 2002).
- Perceived space (representational): The organisation of space, including routines, activities, beliefs, culture, and how a space is discussed and represented. The perceived discourse can exist independently of the physical space.
- Lived space (human experience): The individual subjective human experience which overlaps and tries to make sense of the conceived and perceived space and their interactions. Here, spaces work together to continually produce meaning and potential for change through protagonists' imaginations (Perry 2022, 2). Lived experience may or may not provide congruency with the conceived and perceived space.

Although discussed individually for the purposes of the written format, Lefebvre is keen to highlight that spatial analysis involves the exploration of the relationship between the three elements, recognising that each element is influenced and informed by the others. Watkins (2005) argues that a Lefebvrian analysis can also be used as an analytic tool to identify problematic issues within a social event.

Foucault

Foucault (1977) theorises how a panoptic schema of surveillance, initially considered in the construction of prisons, creates a culture in which power is devolved to not be seen hierarchically, or even as embodied, but to be felt as 'all seeing', where self-policing becomes a necessity and 'power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted distribution of bodies' (p202). Foucault engages with Bentham's (1843) concept of a Panopticon, a circular prison structure with cells around the circumference and a central observational tower in the middle; a construct designed so those in the cells can be observed, or more importantly, think they are being observed, at all times. The cells are designed in such a way that the observer from the centre cannot be seen, meaning self-policing takes place by those within the cells.

> The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever one may wish to put it up to, produce homogenous effects of power. (Foucault 1977, 202)

Foucault's theory of panoptic surveillance is helpful in conceptualising how pervasive heteronormativity is within school environments and how LGBT+ individuals can stand in visible contrast to the silent expectations of cisgendered heterosexuality. Although schools vary significantly in their architecture and environments, they are all spaces of surveillance, whether this be the corridor, the assembly hall, or the classroom. Foucault analyses the efficiency and multiple uses of the Panopticon, explaining how it can be used as a machine to affect behaviour, train and correct. Describing schools in this way may sound rather extreme but should be examined in the context of a school's function to produce students that are good citizens.

However, when contextualised against the existing literature about the experiences of LGBT+ teachers (Brett 2021; DePalma and Atkinson 2009; Henderson 2019; Johnson 2023), this altering of behaviour takes on a more insidious dimension. Here, the Panopticon is

operating in a way in which the silent expectations of heteronormativity can lead to instances of self-policing, or individuals 'correcting their behaviour', to exhibit the expectations of heteronormativity.

Meyer

Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Model draws on existing research to conceptualise the additional forms of stress that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations often experience, identifying how stigma, prejudice and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that can cause mental health problems (p674). Meyer's postulates that LGB people experience excess stress compared to those from majority groups, and that this additional stress can lead to negative mental health outcomes.

> One elaboration of social stress theory may be referred to as minority stress to distinguish the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position. (Meyer 2003, 675)

While all people experience general stressors in the course of day-to-day living, the stresses may be especially acute for those working or studying in a school. In such a context, LGB people may face additional stresses which can be defined as either distal or proximal. Distal stressors include external prejudice, discriminatory or stressful events such a verbal or physical abuse. These may lead to proximal stressors, including expectations of discriminatory events occurring and the vigilance this expectation requires. Tan et al. (2019) have developed Meyer's work to consider specific minority stressors that trans and gender diverse (TGD) populations may face, for example, by being unsure which bathroom to use.

Surveillance and perceived threats

Two key themes developed from the thematic analysis were those of surveillance and perceived threats. Each of the four teachers in this article presented images of open or panoptic spaces in their schools which they described as spaces that caused anxiety, due to perceived surveillance. Several scholars have examined the increasing role of surveillance and monitoring practices in schools through technology, accountability measures, Ofsted inspections, and datafication (Hope 2016; Nemorin 2017; Page 2017), warning of the significant impact on teacher well-being. The stress produced by surveillance is uniquely experienced by LGBT+ teachers, as their identities and associated professionalism become sources of additional monitoring and surveillance. Analysed through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial triad, we can examine how the conceived and perceived spaces of a school often act as a hegemonic disciplinary tool, restricting LGBT+ freedoms.

> With disciplinary power various segments of living are permeated, and because many of these sources go undetected, the individual is unaware of being under surveillance. This is an especially significant component of surveillance structures of schools. (Piro 2008, 41)

Piro (2008) develops Foucault's concept of panoptic surveillance, to consider its role in creating regimes of power in schools. Piro argues that disciplinary power is diffuse and difficult to locate, resulting in self-policing for fear of being 'seen' as breaking the rules. When considered in the context of the stubbornly heteronormative space of a school, it is

possible to see why LGBT+ teachers may experience discomfort in open or panoptic spaces. Almost every participant in the larger study made reference to the impact of Section 28[1] when discussing their experiences. While the restrictions imposed by Section 28 were vaguely written and widely misunderstood, the fear the legislation created augmented the view that heterosexuality was the only form of sexuality to be visible in schools. Over time, this consolidated an expected social norm (Edwards, Brown, and Smith 2016). While Section 28 was not solely responsible for the heteronormativity of schools in England, it created the fear that many participants in this study described of being visible in their school.

Findings and discussion

Brian

Brian was a 37-year-old, gay, Black, teacher who had taken up the position of Deputy Head teacher at a new school only 6 months previously. He understood the need for LGBT+ role models, but due to the stage of his career, felt he needed to keep his sexuality hidden and embody what he considered to be the role of a deputy headteacher. Brian explained how, when he started at the school, he introduced himself through a series of assemblies.

> For my first assembly I kind of talked about where I'm from, and you know, that I'm Black and you know, everything that brings to me, and I feel like that's something that the school needs more if that makes sense, than kind of the LGBT . . .

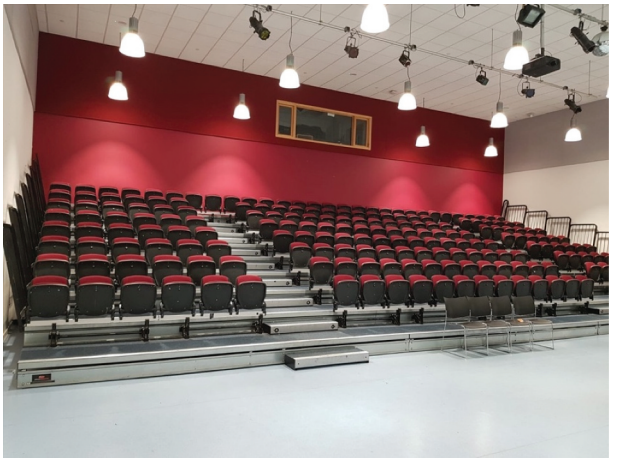

Figure 1. Brian – Assembly Hall.

Brian shared a photograph of the hall (figure 1) where the assemblies took place. In the assemblies, Brian recognised the importance of addressing his minority status as a Black man as he wanted to be a role model for students. However, Brian chose not to reveal his minority status as a gay man, worrying that this would undermine his professionalism. When asked if at any point he would feel comfortable coming out to students, Brian was

conflicted, explaining that he knew the importance of being an LGBT+ role model, but worried about the impact it would have on how he was seen as a leader.

> I always feel like, especially with like gay male teachers, there's always this weird connotation, in terms of like being creepy, versus like women gay teachers it's more 'oh like, that's accepted, and they won't do anything, like you know to other female students' so it's a weird one, yeah.

Brian's view that gay men are often perceived as 'creepy', or even paedophiles, speaks to post World War II views of homophobia, in which gay (or homosexual) men were seen to be 'socially deviant' Seidman (2001), demonstrating the shadow of cultural narratives connecting gay male identity to paedophilia (Weeks 2011; Foucault 1978), and the fear of being visible as a gay man working with children.

In this example, Brian experienced proximal stressors through an internalisation of negative social attitudes, enacted and revealed through the panoptic space of the assembly hall. Examined through the lens of Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad, it is possible to see how a space designed for the surveillance of students can produce different effects. The conceived space of the assembly hall is one to be found in schools across the world. Row after row of chairs, all face a single focal point – the perfect arrangement for a space in which many people need to be addressed and monitored at once. In this conception, the person standing at the front is the observer and the one possessed of the panoptic gaze under which students are surveyed. The space is also a setting of discipline and reverence, in which students remain silent from entry to exit, to be addressed by their leaders and teachers. However, Brian's lived experience of this space demonstrates a disconnect with the conceived and perceived. Despite the space functioning as designed, Brian's experience was still one of anxiety and stress. Within this space, Brian felt placed under a metaphorical spotlight in which he was fearful of being read as gay. This, in his view, could 'isolate him' and damage people's perception of him as a leader.

Arjun

Arjun was a 33-year-old head of Sixth Form, who worked at an all-boys school, and felt a duty to be a role model for what he described as his 'three pillars' - gay, Asian, and a science teacher. He felt the school was old fashioned in its culture, with traditional views of masculinity being valued and upheld. Arjun shared three photos of his school where, despite never encountering a problem as a visible gay member of staff, he experienced anxiety for fear of comments that might be made towards him. Like Brian, this feeling was most acute when delivering assemblies, as explored in the following quote and photo (figure 2).

> So that's, that's where I give my assemblies, um, so that's one of the places where I feel a bit uncomfortable because, um, because … because there's so many of them at the same time that I'm talking to … and you know, I give my assemblies quite often, and I don't hide my sexuality from anybody, so the student body knows that I'm gay … but when I'm doing my assemblies I feel, I feel scared and I don't know if it's because I know that they know that I'm gay and therefore, I'm like afraid of them … I don't know hurling a slur or something.

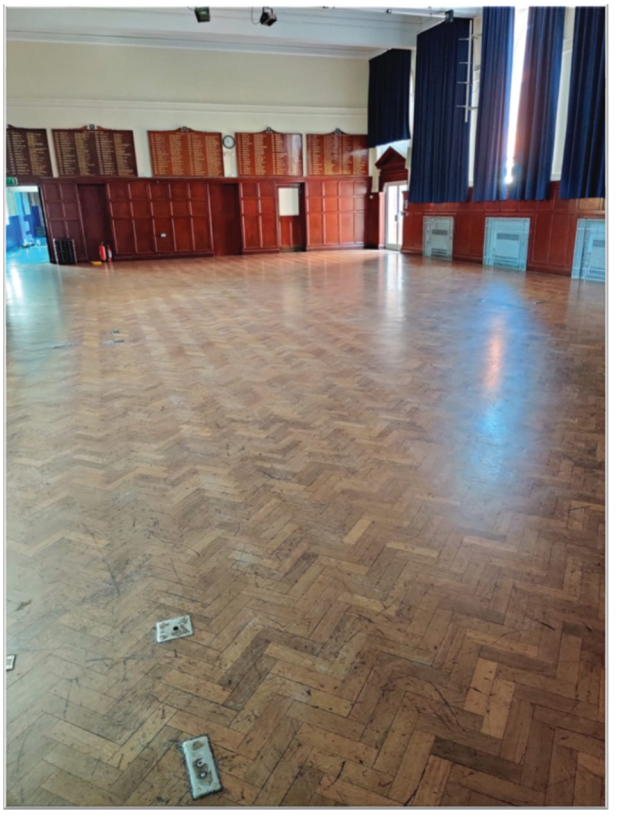

Figure 2. Arjun – Assembly Hall.

When asked if a student had ever hurled a slur, Arjun laughed and said 'no, no, never!'; his dismissal demonstrating how unlikely this would be. Despite no previous incident, Arjun's discomfort in front of this many students illustrates the 'perception versus reality' or 'emotion versus reason', that many teachers in this study experienced within panoptic spaces.

The participants in the larger study who spoke of unsafe spaces described environments in which they could not account for the actions of those around them or challenge and escalate a situation if necessary; by contrast, most teachers described the classroom as a safe space. In their classrooms, the teachers had relationships, expectations, and routines with their students which allowed them to produce the space as one they experienced as safe. Arjun explained that he thought the likelihood of discrimination was reduced in the classroom due to the relationships he had with students. Arjun explained that by getting to know him as a gay teacher, students developed empathy and understanding, which minimised the likelihood of homophobia and allowed him to challenge students' misconceptions. Although Arjun had not experienced discrimination anywhere in the school, his perception was that it was less likely to happen in the classroom, highlighting how people's lived experience differently makes sense of how conceived and perceived spaces interact (Perry 2022).

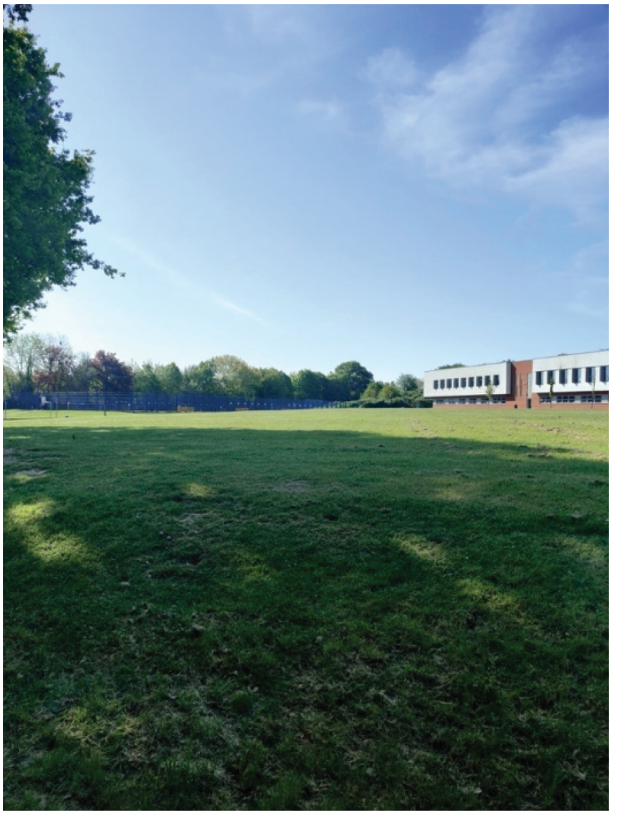

Figure 3. Arjun - school playing field.

Arjun further described his discomfort in walking across the path or field to the Sixth Form block (figures 3 and 4), saying, 'if somebody was to say something, I wouldn't be able to identify who it is, and therefore I wouldn't be able to deal with it, so that I think is the main part of the scariness of it all'. He explained further:

> So, that is where I have to walk across quite often, because I am going to my sixth form block Science lessons, and so during lesson change over, that again, it's a space that's full of lots and lots of students, and so I feel a bit uncomfortable there because I've sometimes felt like people have made, um, I don't know, either like a comment or something . . . they've not said anything directly, but I'd like, I'd noticed . . . I feel like I've noticed something like you know, as if they're communicating with each other about something, when I pass by, and so it's one of those places where I'm not as comfortable, because I just don't feel as comfortable being visible there.

In this example, a space conceived for its simplicity, a path that connects the Sixth Form block and the main school, was experienced uniquely by Arjun as a gay teacher. The field was perceived as a space dominated by students in which teacher authority was diminished, a space that lacks the disciplinary structure and systems of a classroom or school hall, and a setting in which power is simultaneously visible and unverifiable (Foucault 1977, 201). Within this space, Arjun's lived experience was

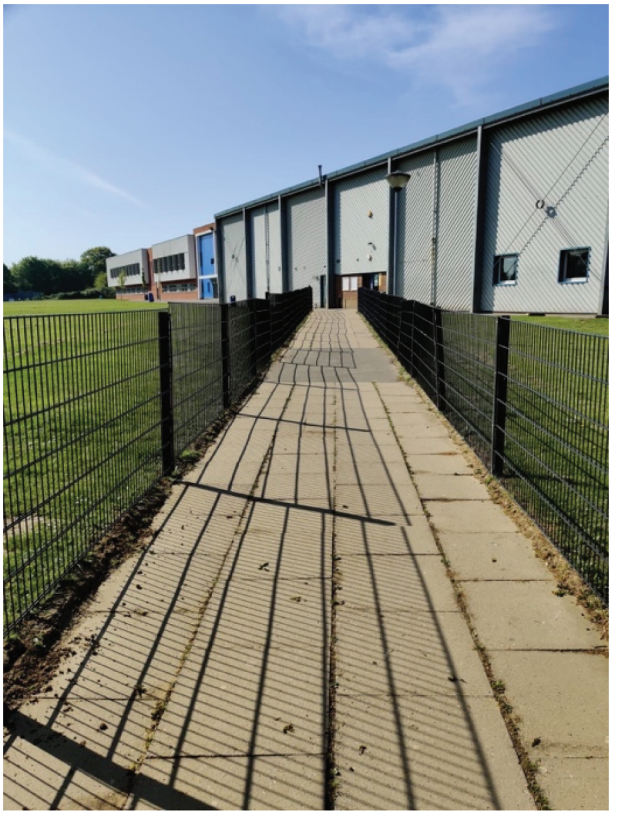

Figure 4. Arjun – path to sixth Form.

one of vigilance and hyper-visibility as he felt under the surveillance of students. Arjun's description of 'feeling he noticed something' in this space, rather than being able to describe a specific incident, demonstrates the realities of proximal stress; that internalised self-policing is produced in spaces of surveillance that act as micro-scopes of conduct (Foucault 1977, 173). Although Arjun's experiences of discrimination may have only been perceived, they were lived as real. The fear of prejudice occurring for LGBT+ people can be just as distressing as the discrimination actually happening.

Sally

Sally was a 41-year-old, lesbian, Music teacher. She spoke of a few isolated incidents that had left her in a permanent state of fear that she might experience discrimination. Sally was emotional during her interview as these incidents had clearly created a lot of stress. She had recently felt more comfortable sharing her sexuality with select students and groups and had begun using her relationship status to reveal her sexuality; however, this was challenging as her wife also worked at the same school and did not wish to be outed. Sally spoke of the anxiety she felt when staff discussed her wife in front of other students

and shared a photo of the 'student support' area (figure 5), a very public space at the centre of the school, where this had happened on a day when she was receiving first aid. Sally was fearful that the incident would out her wife to students.

Figure 5. Sally – Student support area.

> And they were really, really lovely and really kind and really supportive but utterly, utterly thoughtless, a complete lack of awareness and understanding, actually no … there's professional, there's personal boundaries, and actually that wasn't really appropriate to go and say well I'll get Jane [Sally's wife], she needs to go home, she need to go the hospital, I'll go and get Jane to take her to the hospital, when there were students there, that just shouldn't have happened.

When asked if she thought this incident was due to people's lack of understanding of LGBT+ experience, she said 'absolutely, there was no malice in it, it was just a lack of understanding'. She used a straight member of staff from the student support team, whose husband worked at the school, to draw a comparison.

> And I know that they would have had the exact same conversations 'let me go get your husband', and it would have been utterly fine, and we were treated with absolute equality, which is a wonderful positive thing, but it's a double-edged sword.

Sally's description of equality as a double-edged sword speaks to the ways in which spaces are produced as heterosexual. The fact colleagues had not considered that Sally might have an issue with her wife being discussed in front of students, demonstrates a complete acceptance and inclusion of Sally's (and her partner's) sexuality. However, it also shows a lack of understanding of Sally's experience of minority stress in a space that was both conceived and perceived as public and heterosexual. Sally commented that colleagues clearly were not aware of the caution she and her wife felt towards students knowing about their sexuality and relationship. Although treated with equality, this example demonstrates the need for an equity model. Recognising that the straight colleague could refer to her husband without issue, while a similar discussion for Sally

would involve coming out for both her and her wife, speaks to the permission that heteronormativity grants. Heterosexual people can discuss their partners without issue, whereas the same act for LGB people can be seen as inappropriately raising issues of sex or sexuality in school.

Sally shared a photo of the school bicycle compound (figure 6), a highly panoptic space, and described an incident of transphobia her wife had experienced.

> I know that while she's been on break duty by here, groups of kids who've been in the bike compound, not that they should be at break time . . . have hurled abuse at her, verbal abuse, and because she doesn't teach uniformed pupils, she only teaches Sixth Form, she didn't know who these students were, so there was nothing she could ever do about it and, and it left her feeling very vulnerable, very, very nervous and very powerless.

Figure 6. Sally – bicycle stands.

Sally's wife's inability to identify students and ensure the issue was properly dealt with brings to the fore the fears of Arjun and Brian in these types of spaces. Sally also explained that her wife would not be comfortable speaking to members of the leadership team about the incident as in order to do so she would need to out herself, triggering additional proximal stress. Sally described a school environment in which LGBT+ issues were all but silent.

Sally was highly conflicted throughout her interview as she was keenly aware of the need for LGBT+ role models within the school, yet equally conscious of the spaces within the school that could make life difficult for herself and her wife. The few incidents that she had experienced were enough to make her feel under a state of permanent surveillance. Consequently, Sally regularly code-switched her behaviour and avoided certain spaces within the school to reduce her exposure to stressors.

Mel

Mel was 31-year-old, lesbian, Science teacher who had recently left the Catholic School she had worked at for seven years. At this school, discussion of LGBT+ topics had been considered against the Catholic ethos and was, therefore, strictly prohibited. Mel described how one day she had been passed a note, summoning her to the head teacher's office at the end of the day, along with three other colleagues.

> We had all been outed at the same time. Now we were asked to sign this non-disclosure; we weren't allowed to talk about the fact [that we were gay], and it was clear . . . they brought it back to the contract and said 'you are meant to be upholding the Catholic ethos, you signed this document' which is fair enough . . . but yeah, we weren't allowed to say anything, but what I felt put extra pressure on us [her and her partner], that because we were a couple outside of school . . . I then was always very conscious of not going anywhere where we could potentially be seen by kids, and worrying if we were, and worried what the implications would be if we were found out.

Mel and the three other members of staff having to sign a non-disclosure agreement immediately marginalised them, clearly signifying them as Other; a school sanctioned act of discrimination and significant distal stressor. The non-disclosure agreement can also be read as a direct act to ensure the school was conceived and perceived as a space of heterosexuality. While threats to the other teachers in this study were often perceived or implicit, this threat was explicit, forcing Mel to make her sexuality invisible. Mel felt the surveillance extend beyond school into her personal life where she experienced proximal stress for fear of being seen with her partner. When asked how this made her feel, she explained how much she struggled with it, as she had always been open about her sexuality. She feared that if students found out she could lose her job, and so was forced not only to hide her sexuality, but if she was ever discussing her partner in school, she had to do so in a way that did not reveal her gender, therefore making her pass as heterosexual.

> It was always on the back of my mind on holidays and outside of school. I felt like when we did things like PSHE, you couldn't quite talk about what you wanted to, because I was always worried . . . it made me hypersensitive to the fact that people might work out that I was gay. I wasn't allowed to refer to my ex-partner with full name, we had to shorten it, so that nobody even if it was overhead could work out whether it was male or female.

Mel wanted to be visible as an LGBT+ teacher, but by signing the non-disclosure agreement, was unable to be so. She felt under surveillance in any space where there might be people who knew her or had connections with the school. She was experiencing what happens when, as Foucauldian analysis suggests, an individual assumes personal responsibility for the constraints of power. Not only did Mel being forced to present herself as if she were in a heterosexual relationship cause significant minority stress, but her 'passing' as heterosexual reinforced the heteronormative ideals that kept her marginalised. She explained how much anguish this caused her, 'you've got to be closeted, and you've got to be quiet, and you've got to not talk about yourself, and you've got to pretend you're someone you're not'.

Mel's story demonstrates the pervasive sense of surveillance in schools and how 'a sense of being watched, and the fear of retribution for one's observed actions

becomes incorporated into an individual's consciousness' (Edwards, Brown, and Smith 2016, 300).

The impact of surveillance on Mel's consciousness was demonstrated by how few photos she was able to take that represented safe spaces within her new school, namely her classroom and her car (figure 7). Despite the homophobic surveillance she had experienced at her old school being no longer present, the fear and stressors associated with it had become so internalised that she perceived all schools as unsafe spaces.

> So, when I started here, I came from school where no one was allowed to know who I was, so when I first started, I was still very much in that frame of mind, and still sometimes, because of comments, occasionally don't always feel like I can go and maybe speak my mind clearly. So, quite often if I'm listening to something in the morning or, like when I go home, but particularly in the morning, I might have listened to something like a podcast on the way in, or it might be something like that, it's just my little, quiet place where it doesn't matter what I'm listening to, or what is going on . . . and it just looks out and it's just a nice quiet place.

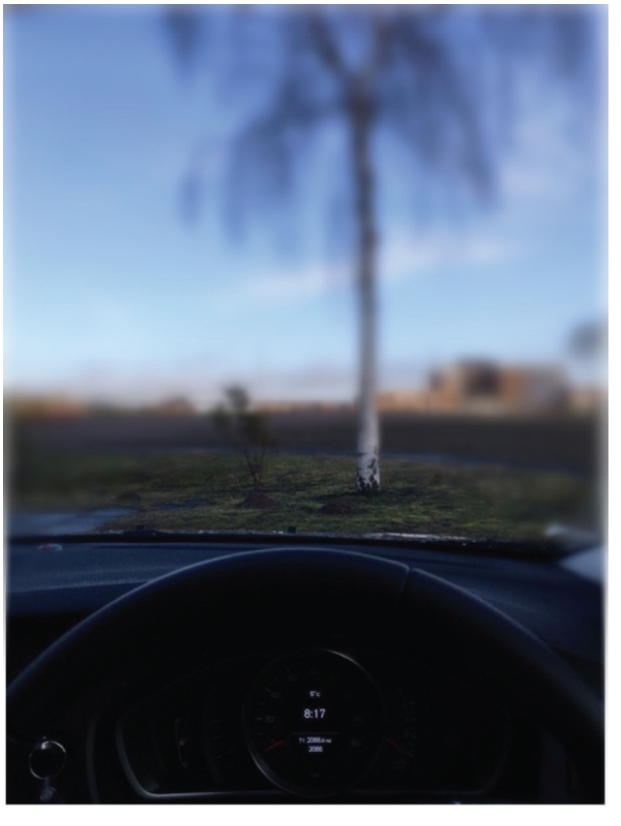

Figure 7. Mel's car.

The discrimination Mel had earlier faced resulted in the internalisation of surveillance to the point at which her experience of the physical and conceived space of a school was almost irrelevant, where her car became one of only a few spaces of safety.

When asked if there had been any LGBT+ visibility in her previous school, Mel replied, 'absolutely zero, there was not a single thing'. She explained there was no curriculum content, no visibility, and no discussion of same sex relationships, which in consequence created a 'huge, huge problem' with homophobia. Mel explained that despite her former school having a robust anti-bullying system, there was no way of recording or identifying the problems that arose with homophobic language in school. The absence of LGBT+ visibility or discussion had created a culture in which homophobia had become, somewhat inevitably, 'everyday common language in the corridor'.

The homophobic culture had become a form of devolved power that benefitted the leaders of the school, allowing them to align the perceived school space with the conceived space, coercing staff into a system of fear and surveillance in which they monitored their own and others' behaviour. This monitoring had produced a space in which only heterosexuality and heterosexual lives were intelligible.

Mel's example demonstrates the damaging and lasting effects of both prejudice and surveillance, revealing what Foucault's chilling conceptualisation of the Panopticon – as a machine to alter and correct behaviour – might look like in a school.

Discussion

This article began by describing schools as heteronormative environments in which cisgender, heterosexual lives are centred and privileged. Lefebvre's spatial triad was used to conceptualise how conceived, perceived and lived experience overlap and interact to produce space within a school. Surveillance has also been used as a concept to examine how spaces that are conceived of as safety for the majority, can be experienced as ones of discipline and scrutiny for the LGBT+ minority, producing both proximal and distal stressors. Arjun, Brian, Sally, and Mel's stories have revealed something of the vulnerability and fear LGBT+ teachers can experience within open or panoptic spaces. For Arjun, Brian, and Sally, the fear was an example of proximal stress, built upon a perception or worst-case scenario of potential discrimination, and informed by wider cultural narratives and past experiences of prejudice. For Mel, these spaces were actively produced as ones for the exclusive visibility of heterosexual citizens, where distal stress was experienced through forms of direct and indirect discrimination.

Limitations and strengths

Like all research, this study has its limitations. The small sample size and the manner of selection caution against claims of generalisability. Juxtaposed against this, however, is the contribution the article makes to a new perspective on life in school through the use of multiple theoretical lenses centring on LGBT+ lived experience. The key finding that despite progress schools are not experienced as safe spaces for gender and sexuality

diverse teachers in England is a pertinent one. With less than 4% of the UK population identifying as LGBT+ (ONS 2023), the majority of people in a school experience congruency with their heteronormative surroundings. On the whole, cisgender, heterosexual individuals experience a school environment in which their lives and identities are intelligible. LGBT+ people, on the other hand, can experience incongruency in these same spaces and it is here that Lefebvre's triad can be used as an analytical tool, together with a focus on lived experience, to inform our understanding and approaches to inclusion.

Conclusion

This article has exemplified how spaces of inclusion for the majority can be experienced as ones of exclusion and isolation for the LGBT+ minority and, therefore, calls for a greater focus on equitable approaches to LGBT+ inclusion in schools. Leaders must recognise that to develop true LGBT+ inclusion, as well as engage with the physical space of a school (toilets, curriculum, policies, etc.), perceived space must be addressed with equal importance to the physical space in which life is lived. By examining the perceived and lived spaces of a school through the voices and narratives of LGBT+ staff and students, leaders can move beyond anti-bullying and equality discourses so as to foster a truly equitable approach to LGBT+ inclusion.

Note

1. Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act in England (in place from 1988–2003) sought to ban local authorities from 'intentionally promoting homosexuality or publishing material with the intention of promoting homosexuality' or 'promoting the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'.

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