Irina Schmitt

Do you have a boyfriend?
Feeling queer in youth and education research

It is no accident that compulsory heterosexuality works powerfully in the most casual modes of conversation. One asks: 'Do you have a boyfriend?' (to a girl), or one asks: 'Do you have a girlfriend' (to a boy). Queer subjects feel the tiredness of making corrections and departures … No matter how 'out' you may be, how (un)comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be experienced as bodily injury; moments which position queer subjects as failed in their failure to live up to the 'hey you too' of heterosexual self-narration. (Ahmed 2004:147)

Questions of positionality – of positioning oneself and being positioned – are central to research processes, most obviously when we directly interact with research participants. In this text, I reiterate instances of problematic interpellation of the researcher within my research with young people (Schmitt 2008b), and aim to understand the character and function of the queer failure suggested by Sara Ahmed.[1]

   My ongoing research aims to document the regulatory aspects

of policies on gender-sex-sexualities in schools and to re-visit notions of positionality in order to productively use the researchers self-positionings (queer or otherwise). I am drawing on material from Canadian, German and Swedish school curricula and policy documents, comparing representations and discourses of gender-sex-sexuality in immigration societies. This project is grounded in the knowledge that education environments are spaces greatly invested in gendered, sexed and sexualized norms, and that young people spend considerable energy to learn and successfully present gendered, sexed and sexualized identifications. A critical reflection of the work of research, I propose, can help to reflect and broaden the structural and embodied boundaries and spaces young people inhabit.

This research is motivated by an earlier empirical study with young people. In 2004–2005, I did extensive field research, mainly in a German secondary school, but also in a Canadian Junior High School (Schmitt 2008b). I wanted to learn about young people's self-positionings, with a focus on migration and the negotiations in many-cultural societies. I was interested also in how gender-sex-sexuality played into these negotiations. In both research schools, students pointed out that being lesbian or gay was clearly not considered normal, though students had diverse positions on the issue, from open homophobia to thinking about sexuality as changing and changeable.

This study left three aspects unresolved for me: the prevalence of negative or problematizing reactions towards non-heteronormative sexualities, the difficulties of queer young people to mention (never mind discuss) their self-positioning, and my own positioning within gender-sex-sexuality in the interaction with the participating young people. This last question will be central

to this text, in a discussion of the inherent limits and taboos in notions of self-reflection and positionality in research with and about young people.

Why queer methodologies?

Debates about queer methodology reflect different understandings of what is meant by 'queer' and different research traditions. For this text, I will depart from a queerly feminist anthropological tradition (in the global North).[2] Queer research, here, is a way to take up and expand the feminist challenge to question existing research frameworks that are re-producing and re-inscribing stable identification and belonging. For the purpose of this text, queer means reflecting the ways norms are created and perpetuated (Ahmed 2004:149), recognizing diverse ways of self-understanding and self-positioning, and the – utopian – project of making that recognition politically and socially valid and possible. So queer is not mainly about a person's understanding of self, but about how societal norms organize positions given and taken on. Thus, a

> queer methodology could be a way of examining and redefining social relations ... The anti-racist feminist principle of positionality contains especially rich impulses for queer methodologies, which have so far neglected the question of difference ... This would help us avoid colonising and appropriative instances of 'queering from above'. (Haritaworn 2008:1.5)

Considering these conceptual suggestions, I focus on the term 'queer' to point out limitations that affect all young people, not only those who identify or are seen as bisexual, gay, genderqueer,

intersexual, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, queer and questioning (realizing that no such list can capture the diverse personal and cultural positions queer people inhabit).[3] I also use the term 'queer' in connection to political activism challenging binary notions of gender. This makes 'queer' a term that allows for ambiguity and adaptation.

Queer research is often understood as research with and about people who are queer.[4] Yet:

> Extending queer sensibility […] can be a grammar to both share and contest knowledges of Whiteness (of homonormative gays who 'hate straights'), of heteronormativity (of diasporic straights who disavow queers), or of sex work (of non-sex working diasporic people who reduce prostitution to a culturally demeaning discourse). (Haritaworn 2008:5.2)

A queer sensibility like this can be more useful than merely focusing on identifications and 'identities'. Read this way, a queer approach to research helps to answer questions concerning interdependences of diverse aspects of oppression (now often summed up under the concept of intersectionality, see e.g. Nash 2008). This is even more important when research is done with the wish to increase social justice, as notions of identity and the recognition of specific groups are often based on an understanding of authenticity and legitimacy. By contrast, I am interested in understanding how young people are conceptualized as a social category as well as individuals through notions of becoming rather than being (Rasmussen 2006). I want to understand how they are constructed as incomplete and are therefore 'rightly' – meaning through legislation as well as through notions of what is normal, right and just – limited in their self-definition.

Writing about queer methods means to take up and to write myself into feminist research traditions and to underline the role of 'queer anthropologists' (*avant la lettre*) in these traditions (Bell 1993; Kennedy and Davis 1996; Newton 2000). Clare Hemmings suggests that one reason for the rejection of earlier feminist work is the distance from the original text (Hemmings 2005:255). Judith Jack Halberstam also has warning words about the insistence on a feminist generation gap:

> A queer pedagogy must also try to break with the oedipal deadlock that creates and sustains intergenerational conflict: To first wave queer theorists, I would say, let's not become a generation of whiners complaining about what the youth of today don't know [...] To generation Q'ers, I would say, avoid the 'kill daddy/mommy' syndrome of critical labor within which you are right because those who came before you are wrong. (Halberstam 2003:363)

Thus, the aim of this text is not parenticide, but to grapple with some blind spots in research, especially with and about young people. While critical feminist researchers have created tools to address gender as an aspect of research (Bell, Caplan and Karim 1993), naming sexuality is mostly relegated to research by and with people who 'have' sexuality, that is, to non-heteronormative, queer, LGBTTIQQ people – to the sexually Other. The heterosexual norm remains, again, unnamed.

Loudmouth silence, in your face invisibility and paradoxical empowerment of 'queer youth'

In order to discuss this silence in the context of youth research, it

is necessary to understand some assumptions about queer young people.

> When given the freedom, queer youth have the ability to create their own cultural practices and to alter the ways in which they are conceptualized by people and institutions. (Shelton 2008:69)

This statement by Jama Shelton points out an issue that by necessity troubles research with 'minorities', the balance between (self-)representation and co-construction by everyone involved in the research relationship. This balance is not easy to find and also affects methodological choices. Do queer – and otherwise minoritized – young people only need 'freedom'? Freedom from what or whom? How might this freedom be achieved? The notion of freedom presupposes that most queer young people actually suffer from lack of visibility. The notion of queer invisibility is a constant in writings on queer youth; at the same time, visibility is as equated with shame and harassment as with freedom:

> Queer youth are often invisible in schools, and when they are visible this is most often under the gaze of people who embody heteronormative and homophobic discourses. … when queer youth become visible in schools, the inability for school professionals to contend with the fact that sexual minority youth exist in schools or of the harassment faced by these youth often leads to troubled times for queer youth. (Filax 2006:214)

Becoming visible, coming out of the un/comfortable safety of what is considered normal is regarded as important for securing healthy self-identification. On the other hand this process implies in many cases the need for a young person to educate most peo-

ple around them, often at high costs. While not all students experience their being queer as problematic, children and young people who stand out as 'different' in terms of gender-sex-sexuality are often singled out by class-mates as targets for assaults and by teachers who make 'well-meaning' remarks (Corbett 1999:108).

Fanny Ambjörnsson gives a striking example when she describes a situation during her field research (Ambjörnsson 2008:220–221). A teacher for 'Livskunskap' (health and life knowledge) asked students about their own tolerance for homosexuality (all students signalled acceptance) and students' interest in same-sex sexual experiences (only the one out lesbian student signalled interest). During this session, the teacher anonymously read aloud questions concerning sexuality handed in by the students. She gendered all questions ('what excites boys' became 'girls want to know what excites boys' etc.), and thus discursively 'made' all students into girls or boys with heterosexual desires. The one lesbian student was relegated to the position of the Other that manifests the normalcy of the heterosexual students.

During my earlier project, the discursive invisibility was mirrored in the strategies of some young people I saw as queer and their attempts to avoid public discussion of their 'difference'. Among the young people who took part in the project, none presented as openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual, or trangender or intersex. One girl, however, Semra, defined herself as bisexual, not on the basis of emotional or sexual preference, but as not clearly fitting into the prescribed femininity she saw available (Schmitt 2008b:173–175). To be seen as different was often marked by fear and insecurity; this insecurity was again fostered by a lack of visibility when teachers, as students told me, chose not to include non-heteronormative positions and relationships in their teach-

ing. Moreover, this was flanked by ongoing teasing of young people who presented 'difference'. The 'effeminate' boy and the 'ungirlish' girl were regularly reminded by school mates that they did not follow the rules of gender or sexuality. Homosexuality is an issue of constant bantering (Ambjörnsson 2008:219) and 'gay' is a common word of denigration (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002).[5]

One of the boys taking part in the research, Baran, was the aim of such constant gender-border control. While he regularly professed his heterosexuality, his non-heteronormative appearance was taken up routinely (Schmitt 2008:107–108). While Baran was very eloquent and often able to turn the focus away from himself, I remember one moment when I felt I could have intervened more effectively if I had been out to the students. In the individual meetings with Baran, he also stressed that he was indeed heterosexual. Baran's story could be read in two ways: as an example for a student who could not come out, or as a student who was targeted because he seemed to be queer. Anti-discrimination theories generally include being seen as queer as equally problematic in homophobic contexts as being queer. Harassment has little to do with identity, and more with normalized images of gender, sex and sexuality.

I consider the common talk about gayness, at least as swearword, an aspect of continuous othering, concurrently silencing actual experiences of non-heteronormativity. This may seem a contradiction in terms, but I found it useful to keep this paradox intact, in order not too loose the complexity of the issue. Such experiences are regularly reflected in texts about queer young people:

> Queer youth face many of the same challenges as all youth. Like all teens, these youth seek a school culture characterized by caring teachers and administrators, positive peer relationships, and a safe and orderly school environment … However, for at least some youth these years are filled, not with hope and promise, but with verbal abuse and harassment from peers and rejection by teachers and administrators because of their real or perceived sexual orientation and/or their gender identity and/or expression. The research on the relative frequency and impact of peer harassment and rejection by teachers is sobering. (Meyer and Stader 2009)

For a queered research with and about (queer) young people, this indicates an added responsibility for the researcher. The researcher needs to remember that some of the young people addressed will try to avoid being seen as queer. They might therefore try to also avoid a researcher who discusses queer sexualities.

Flashback: Feeling queer in the field

While I was acutely aware of this responsibility in my earlier research, I found it hard to integrate in the research process. I had decided not to position myself as queer/lesbian to the participants; this decision was partly based on colleagues' estimation that being out in research could be problematic in various ways. Mainly, they (and I) feared that Muslim participants might boycott the project. Underlying was also the perception still valid in (German) academia that being openly queer is a disadvantage in the competitive academic job market.[6] Their warnings seemed serious enough, but not being out also caused a number of problems during the research.

The preconception that Muslim young men are generally

homophobic has become entrenched in public discourse (Simon 2008). As anti-racist feminists keep reminding us, it is important to understand the interdependence of sexuality, ethnification/racialization and nationality/citizenship in the context of the ongoing strengthening of nationalist sentiments (Bredström 2003; GLADT n.d.). Ascribing homophobia to migrant male youth reflects discourses of othering and exclusion, and avoids an analysis of homophobia on a broader social scale.

In order to discuss the weight of Ahmed's "queer failure" in research relationships (Ahmed 2004: 147), I will present situations during the research at the German school when non-heteronormativity was discussed and shifting power relations between researcher and research participants were obvious. These vignettes will give an understanding of the pervasiveness of gender-sex-sexuality in the discussions, and the ubiquity of questions regarding the researcher. In one of the group discussions, the interdependences of sexuality and ethnicized belonging were central to the students' debate (Schmitt 2008b: 184-187). Hanna, a grade 8 student without migration background introduced the topic with a question directed to students with migration backgrounds:[7]

> Hanna: "Yes, I have a question here, so that's not really on the topic, I just wanted to ask, if there is something like lesbians and gays for you?"

Nancy, another girl in the group, with familial connections to the Lebanon and Iraq, replied directly:

> Nancy: "No, is not allowed and does not exist."

Nancy reacted according to a discourse that generalizes the non-

existence of homosexuality within Islam, or that it is an 'import-ed problem'. Barry van Driel critically discusses this notion, that has become more popular after 9/11 as "a way to oppose West-ern influence and domination" (Driel 2007: 35). Had the group discussion stopped with Nancy's statement, it would have easily confirmed the notion of young homophobic Muslims. Howev-er, the story went on, as Hanna was following her own agenda with this topic: When her mother found out that two women in Hanna's football team were a couple, she threatened to take Hanna out of the team. Had it not been for her father's interven-tion, Hanna might have had to drop out from football, a 'mixed' group in terms of socio-economic and ethnicized background that was an important part of her friendship network. In this discussion, homophobia was not held by migrant positions only.

This fragment points to some of the complexities and meth-odological implications. When Nancy was pointing out that she would be disgusted if she knew about homosexuals in the school, I clearly remember thinking: "If only you knew, there is one sit-ting right next to you!" I also remember being infuriated, and of going home with this combined feeling of anger and annoy-ance. Also, I had come to respect and like Nancy, and this situ-ation complicated my emotional reactions towards her. As I felt I could not react by telling the group that I am queer, the "effect was to make the affective register secret and my state of mind a secretively held undercurrent pulling some of the subsequent work with the data in a particular direction" (Lewis 2008: 212). My reaction was – somewhat passive aggressive – to state that more likely than not there were a number of lesbian and gay peo-ple in the school and indeed in any larger group. This situation also brought more questions. Would Nancy have taken part in

the project had she known about my sexuality? Would she have made these statements? These questions cannot be answered, but for my research, for the analysis of the material and my own theoretical learning, this discussion had been very productive.

In another situation, I was asked if I would marry one of the students' uncle in order to facilitate his immigration to Germany. I refused, and some banter developed. Again, my refusal to present myself in relation to another, most likely a male other, was the motor for this discussion. At the time, it seemed that only a statement of such a relationship would have been a satisfying answer for the students. In these situations, my 'silence' was not silent at all; in fact, it was rather verbose. As my answer that I would rather not engage in (such a) marriage was not sufficient for the boys, I tried to divert the focus, asking if they would marry this uncle for the purpose of immigration. In the end, one of the boys stated that 'for a million' he might 'do it', referring to the possibility of 'gay marriage', that had recently been made legal in Germany. In this situation, the possible ascription homosexuality was not considered a serious threat.

In another group discussion, the issue of (my) sexuality came up in a way that highlights my concerns in terms of the research process and the emotional inaccuracies that result from my omission. The meeting was a very lively discussion with a group of grade 7 girls. One of them quite directly asked me if I was lesbian. More than in similar situations outside of structured research settings, in the hallways and the cafeteria, I felt trapped. Before I could decide how to act in this situation, another girl 'came to my rescue', saying that even if I was, it did not matter.

As in the situation with Nancy, I vividly remember how I felt. Although I had no means to find out at the time, I was sure I

turned quite red in the face, and I shrunk in my chair, not looking at the students. I felt, in short, not like a capable and responsible adult and academic researcher, but acutely ashamed that I was unable to speak of my sexuality. I had disabled myself and allowed myself to be disabled by discourses that problematize queer sexualities, especially in research. I had exchanged the shame about sexuality with the shame of not speaking about my sexuality. While I was momentarily glad about the 'solution' provided by the second girl, I felt that I had lost a chance for an important discussion, and delegated the responsibility for the situation to the students.

I was enacting my role as a researcher in a space of silence, a silence generated by an ideal of academic rationality that created a feeling of shame. At the same time, my own gender transition from a 'common' lesbian to femme played part in my enactment. I did not go to my research school dressed up femme. Yet, what would have been overt signs of 'untoward' femininity among lesbians in my own community made my gender-sex-sexuality invisible and that invisibility was activated by my silence. Ulrika Dahl writes about the 'Now you see me, no you don't' effect that has become a staple in writings by and about femmes (Dahl 2008: 86). My representation of gender (and, by inference, sexuality) in the schools was only made ambivalent when I refused to answer questions about a boyfriend some of the young participants asked. This question came up repeatedly, sometimes accompanied with generous offers to 'organize' Viagra for this imagined heterosexual(izing) partner (Schmitt 2008a). My failure to present myself as successfully heterosexual generated an interest I had not anticipated. And I wonder how exactly I failed in these situations. Would I have 'passed' if I had presented myself as single?

(In another situation, the fact that I was living alone, that is, neither with my parents nor with a husband, sparked incredulous comments.)

Paradoxically, these situations also show that my in/visibility, while highly uncomfortable and riddled with problems, was also productive, in the sense that it sparked discussions and, importantly, tipped the power imbalance towards the students. Yet, my (sometimes verbose) silence also served to distance myself as researcher from the research participants (Phoenix 2010) and to disenable specific questions.

Queer positionality

> This points to the indispensability of positionality for a queer methodology. (Haritaworn 2008:2.3)

By telling these stories, I fill a gap in my analysis and in much of academic writing. The notion that the gender-sex-sexuality positioning of a researcher is mainly a personal concern, that has little or nothing to do with the research as such, is widely spread within academia. I began to write about the importance of the researcher's gender-sex-sexuality for the research process, the importance of reciprocity and honesty, of self-reflexivity, to point to the triple heteronormative assumptions between researcher and participants and last but not least, the ethical responsibility of queer adults to serve as one example of everyday non-heteronormativity (Schmitt 2008a: 262–266). Baran's story might serve as one example. Another student, Lolle, very tentatively negotiated her gender and sexuality in our communication. In our discussions, she mentioned that she was sometimes seen as a boy, and

she was very careful not to commit herself in terms of sexuality (Schmitt 2008: 92). She briefly mentioned that she would have liked to receive information about diverse sexualities in school, but was not offered such information in any way in school.

There are important methodological issues at stake here. My own feelings and expressions of silence and shame need to be analyzed as part of the research, not as something embarrassingly personal that needs to be analyzed out of research. While the role of a researcher in a research participant's life should not be overestimated, it is similarly useful to remember our role in the process of knowledge production and discursive maintenance of power hierarchies. The aim is not the imperative of the researchers emotions, but a reflexive awareness of their existence.

Both the discussion of research relationships and the question of positionality as approach are central to feminist research. Thinking about positionality has gained renewed interest, aiming to work with criticism against the "privilege of partial perspective" (Haraway 1988), that mainly pointed to on the risks of essentialization. To be "vigilantly reflective" is an important tool when incorporating the self in the analysis to prevent creating new blind spots (Kennedy and Davis 1996:173; Haritaworn 2008).

To my knowledge, very few texts exist in youth research where the author mentions their sexuality as a legitimate issue for scientific knowledge production. North-American publications practice something that might be called confessional empathy – the understanding of, and interest in, queer youths' experiences through the reflections of the authors' own, sometimes traumatic experiences (many texts in Rottnek 1999; Rofes 2005). Both methods, silence and confession, are legitimate in themselves,

though I prefer something in-between, that avoids an overdose of auto-biographic navel-gazing while allowing for the integration of the researchers' experience as part of knowledge production.[8]

Successful failure? Towards a knowing suspension of heteronormativity

The need for vigilance, however, is not cancelled out by the statement of sexual position, queer or otherwise, if thought as confirmation of identity rather than a questioning of norms:

> For example, the methodological necessity to declare positionality when trespassing the domain of self-sameness […] not only reinforces normative concepts of identity and empirical knowledge but also ultimately facilitates the idea that the proper object of queer studies is limited to sexual and gender transgressions. […] I consider it an enormous problem that issues of race, for a primary example, remain special or secondary considerations in gay and lesbian/queer studies. (Sholock 2007)

From the research situations presented earlier, it is more than obvious that I enacted my in/visibility as a White non-migrant academic. However, while the participants did discuss my ethnicized position with reference to the obvious visibility of my position and social status, issues of sexuality were relegated to the space of assumptions and guesswork. It is equally important to remember that a

> shared sexual identity does not automatically make researchers more sensitive … therefore, it may be prudent not to assume shared knowledge

or interests, regardless of the biography of those involved. (Rasmussen 2006:47)

Within the context of education, debates and ideas about non-heteronormative and otherwise minoritized young people are often based on a language of identity: young people should be empowered to 'find' and 'show' their 'true' identities. In such debates, the production of identities through processes of exclusion and inclusion is often forgotten and identity-based approaches are easily incorporated in more pacificatory projects (Brady 1995). The critique of heteronormativity in education is not just another project to be ticked off the list of well-meaning awareness.

The quest for a language that avoids simplification and the limitations of definition leaves a colourful trail in feminist, queer, and anti-racist literature. "They produce more work for their readers, and sometimes their readers are offended by such demands" (Butler 1999:xix). As readers, we need to be patient with ourselves as well as the authors who make us work through our own categorizations. As authors and participants in discussions, we have to balance the need for readability and transparency with the task of questioning the very words that inspire our work.

Partly, it is only possible to think that research (with young people) as an out non-heteronormative researcher is queer if we assume the research participants to be heteronormative, thus confronting an 'Other' researcher with 'normal' participants. The same is true for research 'in the closet', though with a different outcome, as my stories indicate. Yet, the re-inscription of the norm through its critique can only partly be avoided and one crucial aspect of queer research is to consciously discard heteronor-

mative knowledge. This has to be done consciously because we cannot completely suspend power relations, and therefore need to be aware of them during research. But a suspension none the less, as it might create space that is not entirely restricted by these norms. Or, in Halberstam's words:

> Queerness names the other possibilities, the other potential outcomes, the non-linear and noninevitable trajectories that fan out from any given event and lead to unpredictable futures. (Halberstam 2008:153)

The project of queer methodology for me is also a project about everyday utopias. Part of this utopian vision is to create an understanding that not only researchers who consider themselves or are considered to be Other should address issues of difference/differentiation in their work. Rather this should be realized as a central aspect to all empirical projects.

By the end of my earlier research project, I still did not have a boyfriend, and my butch partner is still around. Now, during my project on school policies and the role of gender-sex-sexualities in schools, I have come to read this not only as the enjoyable aspect of my private life it is – read: an aspect of affirmative identity politics – but as a productive means to re-investigate my own investments in my research and my research approaches. Not (only) as means of personal change and growth, but as a node of reflection on the structural and embodied boundaries and spaces young people – and everyone else – inhabit. Thus, I am using my own positioning as one means of negotiation and investigation. In workshops with Swedish teachers on norm-critical education, done together with teacher and activist Yona Kimhi, I use myself as an example (Kumashiro 2000). I also use these stories from

my earlier research in interviews with teachers, as an example of the possible pitfalls of queer invisibility and the inherent assumptions.

In these workshops with teachers, it becomes clear that, while there is no objection against the new anti-discrimination legislation of January 2009, teachers need more knowledge and support, as their professional training left them insufficiently prepared. The delay in implementation registered by the school inspection authorities (Skolinspektionen) is tangible. While I find top-down measures strangely compelling, if only because I am impatient and consider decades of feminist and queer-rights activism a more than adequate basis for change, the ongoing lack of translation into education contexts shows that legal frameworks need to be made visible in everyday contexts. Judith Butler describes this conundrum:

> But it would be a mistake, I believe, to understand all the ways in which gender is regulated in terms of those empirical legal instances because the norms that govern those regulations exceed the very instances in which they are embodied. On the other hand, it would be equally problematic to speak of the regulation of gender in the abstract, as if the empirical instances only exemplified an operation of power that takes place independently of those instances. (Butler 2004:40)

As researchers, we can choose to confirm the status quo or to actively work for a change in attitudes and create knowledge that allows educators to work against oppression and young people to learn the possibility of diversity – gendered, sexed, sexualized in many ways.

IRINA SCHMITT är vikarierande lektor vid Centrum för genus-vetenskap vid Lunds universitet. Hon forskar och skriver om ungdomars villkor i skolan, i intersektionen av nationella och sexuell/genus/könstillhörigheter. Materialet är nu för tiden poli-cytexter från Sverige, Kanada och Tyskland. Tillsammans med förskolelärare Yona Kimhi leder hon seminarier med skollärare. Hon har bland annat publicerat artikeln "'Normally I should belong to the others' – Young people's gendered transcultural competence in creating belonging in Germany and Canada" (*Childhood* 17, 2010) och boken "'Wir sind halt alle anders' – Eine gesellschaftspolitische Analyse deutscher und kanadischer Jugendlicher zu Zugehörigkeit, Gender und Vielkulturalität" (2008).

Notes

1 My heartfelt thanks to the participants in the workshop on Queer Methodo-logies during the Feminist Research Methods, Stockholm, 4–6 February 2009, for the discussion of a previous version of this paper, to Fanny Ambjörnsson and the anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments, and to J. Seipel for wonderfully critical and helpful remarks on the text.

2 As introduced for example by Esther Newton and Eve Kosowsky Sedgwick. Beginnings of this field are captured in the by now classic collections *Out in the field and out in theory*, edited by Ellen Lewin and William L. Leap (Lewin and Leap 1996; 2002).

3 These notions of sexuality in individualization need to be read as one aspect of geopolitical and cultural Western understandings of the self.

4 And here, queer is obviously a short form for research with people who were and are, in their time and societal context, considered non-heteronormative.

5 Obviously, the negotiation of notions of safety and subject formation are more than complex; I tend to simplify them, when specific groups (of youth) are subjected to incomparably higher levels of physical and psychological trauma than their peers, as studies on the high levels of queer teen suicide suggest.

6 There is also a 'trail of discourse' around the impossibility of being an out (male) queer researcher doing research on queer issues (Boellstorff 2007; Schmitt 2008a).

7 Translation of interview passages by the author. See for this also Schmitt (2008b).

8 I would like to thank Ingeborg Svensson explicitly for questioning my scepticism about 'navel-gazing'.

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ABSTRACT

Att forska med och om ungdomar och i skolan är spännande och skrämmande. När jag forskade om ungdomar i en tysk (och sedan även i en kanadensisk) skola hade jag bestämt mig för att inte komma ut i forskningsprocessen. Vad jag inte hade väntat mig var hur det kändes att återigen befinna sig 'i garderoben', som jag dessutom kom att reproducera. Det var å andra sidan väldigt produktivt forskningsmässigt. I denna artikel diskuterar jag den spänning som uppstod mellan de forskningsmässiga fördelarna med att undvika att komma ut för de man studerar och problemen med att reproducera heteronormativitet. Jag diskuterar möjligheten, kanske framför allt i ungdoms- och skolforskning, av en queer positionalitet som inte enbart reduceras till sexualitet utan snarare omfattar en kritisk analys av forskarens och forskningsdeltagarens position i samhället. Det handlar inte om en re-essentialisering, utan om att tydliggöra hur specifika positioner o/synliggörs.

Anammandet av en queer positionalitet aktualiserar frågan om vilka förväntningar vi som forskare har på våra forskningsdeltagare. I min studie fanns en underliggande förväntan om att speciellt muslimska elever skulle komma att lämna projektet om de fick reda på min sexualitet. Denna problematiska förväntning använder jag som utgångspunkt för en analys av det ömsesidiga beroende som jag, genom konceptet queer positionalitet, försöker förverkliga. Den queera positionaliteten innebär också ett synliggörande av forskarens sexualitet – inte bara queerforskarens – i forskningsprocessen. Slutligen handlar det om hur vi som forskare använder oss av vår egen position som metodologiskt verktyg, och hur vi förstår och analyserar de begränsningar och möjligheten den innebär.