

“Swimming against the current”. Analysis of the discourses of homosexual Physical Education teachers under the intersectionality approach

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Abstract

Traditionally, the PE teacher with the highest status was the white, heterosexual male, with a muscular body and belonging to a good socioeconomic level. These stereotypes are subject to socio-political factors that determine power structures and "the way forward", which generated clear discrimination and social injustice. In this sense, and taking sexual identity as a reference, the objective of this research is to analyse the discourses of 8 homosexual physical education teachers who acknowledge having felt discriminated. This analysis is carried out from the intersectionality approach and the theory of social justice. A qualitative methodology is used, employing individual interviews with each teacher, their reflective personal diaries and a focus group with all of them as a techniques. Analysis of the results focused on identifying emerging patterns and meanings from the data collected, interpreting the narratives and relevant themes to construct final categories. The results showed how, behind an apparent acceptance, teachers felt a high level of discrimination in many areas just because they are homosexual. This discrimination, from both students and fellow teachers, makes them question whether they are good PE teachers, and at times they considered leaving the profession. In addition, the fact of being a woman, being black, or not complying with the dominant body typology, is a source of even greater exclusion.

Keywords: Discrimination; intersectionality; homosexuality; Physical Education; social justice.

Introduction

If Physical Education (PE) is to be an inclusive subject, it is important to intentionally analyze and teach it from an intersectional approach (Haegle et al., 2019). It is essential to be aware of the interaction that exists between identity categories such as gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, physical ability; and systems of oppression, as they directly affect equal opportunities (Blackshear, 2022; Drury et al., 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to establish pedagogies that reverse the discriminations and stigmas that may exist behind these identities, since they cause exclusion and hardship in the people who suffer from them (Foster et al., 2018; Stride et al., 2018; Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2021; 2022; 2023), reproducing hegemonies and established sociocultural constructions (Watson, 2018). This situation affects not only athletes and PE students, but also teachers. In this sense, the intersectional approach, as initially formulated by Crenshaw (1989, 1991), allows us to understand how multiple axes of identity (gender, race, class or sexual orientation) are simultaneously intertwined in experiences of discrimination or privilege. Applied to the context of PE, this approach is particularly relevant, as PE, in many cases, historically reproduces normative models of corporeality, masculinity and physical performance. PE pedagogies are not constructed in the abstract, but are developed in interactions marked by power relations. Therefore, intersectionality allows us to analyse how certain identities (such as that of homosexual teachers) are read, judged or marginalized in a specific way in this educational and corporal framework.

Teachers, in many cases, become role models for adolescents, not only on an academic level, but also on a personal level (Kiefer & Pennington, 2017). This is intensified in PE, where societally validated body models play a fundamental socio-cultural role in evaluating PE teachers through them. The physical image projected by PE teachers is analysed under biased and stereotypical criteria, which can become a source of discrimination (González-Calvo et al., 2022). A muscular and fit body is associated with a more up-to-date, better trained and, in short, a better teacher of PE (Inan, 2021). In reality, this idea is erroneous, as the body type of a teacher in no way ensures the quality of the teaching, and even less so that the subject is taught with solid pedagogical aims.

Within these stereotypes is sexual identity, where homosexuality is an aspect used to call into question the status of a good teacher (Drury et al., 2023). Under a criterion of "apparent acceptance", people who do not comply with the established heterosexual role suffer a variety of rejections that have a negative impact on their daily lives and social

relationships (Gerber & Lindner, 2022). The field of sport and PE has been a space strongly permeated by heterosexism and homophobia (Squires & Sparkes, 1996), which has affected the identity of homosexual faculty, being forced to abide by these discourses in order to feel safe (Clarke, 1996) and to establish a personal struggle to keep their sexual orientation secret (Sykes, 1998, 2013). In this sense, making their sexual orientation visible within the school environment has been, and continues to be, a controversial issue for homosexual teachers (Griffin, 1992; Martínez-Merino et al., 2024). Fear of discrimination, the school context or how it may affect relationships with peers, students or families are some factors that lead homosexual teachers to not want to make their sexual orientation visible within their professional environment (Martos-García et al., 2025), thus understanding their sexual orientation as a private matter (Sparkes, 1994). However, the controversy is caused because it has also been shown that when homosexual teachers are able to fight against these issues, the fact of giving visibility to their sexual orientation can mean positive aspects both for themselves and for the school community (Brett, 2022) and set themselves up as reference figures for their students, by developing a more honest, dialogic and tolerant education (DeJean, 2007). In this sense, despite the progress made in recent years and the increase in LGBTQ research in PE (Landi, 2020), we are still far from being able to have a really positive discourse that speaks of the construction of real inclusive spaces for homosexual people in the field of sport and PE (Pringle 2024). Homosexuality is still a subject with a lot of implicit discrimination in the field of physical activity and sport, , which has an impact, to a large extent, on the figure of the coach and the PE teacher, as the main reference point for teaching. Addressing this situation from a global, pedagogical and curricular approach is essential to promote social well-being as well as the rigour of the subject (North et al., 2022). It should be borne in mind that the mechanisms of repression that teachers may suffer in this sense, both their professional and personal identity, directly affecting the way they experience the subject and, as a consequence, affecting the quality of teaching and student learning (Müller & Böhlke, 2023a).

These factors, linked to sexual identity, are aggravated by other stereotypes associated with gender, race, disability or social inclusion, exerting negative pressure on the PE teacher (Lleixà & Nieva, 2020). This series of pressures can have negative connotations on teachers' perceptions of their ability to teach, as well as on variables associated with their self-concept and self-esteem (Kelly et al., 2024). Therefore, it is necessary that social, curricular and educational policies act with determination in the face of this situation of discrimination, promoting plans and protocols that guarantee the full acceptance of any person, regardless of

their physical characteristics, origin, ethnicity or sexual identity. This, even more so, must be strengthened in the school environment, generating solid educational structures in order to establish personal climates based on full inclusion. Within this context, PE has a special incidence and responsibility, having to integrate among its pedagogical aims the acceptance of the body in its maximum dimension, thus contributing to the integral development of the student (O'Neil & Olson, 2021). Therefore, and through the integrated work of the affective, social, cognitive and motor domains, attention must be paid to the most important aspect, the acceptance of the person. From an intersectional perspective, the body and sexuality are intertwined with other categories such as gender, sexual orientation and professional position. In Physical Education, where the body plays a central role, homosexual teachers face particular tensions linked to heteronormative norms. Intersectionality makes it possible to make visible how these experiences are simultaneously traversed by different axes of inequality, revealing specific forms of vulnerability in the educational and bodily space.

In this sense, Spain demonstrates the need to bring together all these actions, being an example of how the legislative progress towards full equality of homosexual people, has not been parallel in the Educational System and, more specifically, in the field of PE (Piedra et al., 2013). Studies conducted in this context have shown how Spanish PE is still permeated by heterosexist and homophobic behaviors (Martínez-Merino et al., 2024), where a person's sexuality is a trigger for receiving insults or discrimination (Piedra et al., 2015). Therefore, the experiences of homosexual PE students and teachers, centered on their sexuality, continues to be a subject of study in Spain in recent years (Martos-García et al., 2024; Martínez-Merino et al., 2024), which still require research with different perspectives in order to understand the intricacies of the situations experienced by homosexual PE teachers and how to move towards a truly inclusive PE and school context.

In this approach, the following questions are highlighted: How do other personal issues relate to how homosexual PE teachers experience teaching? How do their sexual identity and other identities influence their educational practice? What personal characteristics influence their perception of their integration in schools? Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyse the discourses of 8 homosexual PE teachers (4 men and 4 women) who acknowledge having felt discriminated against. This analysis focuses on variables related to the teachers' personal and professional identity. This represents a substantial contribution to the existing literature on the subject, since, in addition to being approached from the perspective of intersectionality and social justice theory, longitudinal data collection techniques are used, such as reflective monitoring diaries.

Intersectionality theory and social justice theory to address sexual identity in Physical Education

Intersectionality highlights how people experience life through the interaction of various categories, such as gender, race, class or sexual orientation, among others. The concept of intersectionality was coined by Crenshaw (1989, 1991) as a way of breaking with the conceptual limitations that conditioned the discriminations suffered by non-normative people. This theory emphasizes that the different dimensions of identity are not isolated from each other, but are intertwined and overlapping, which implies that the theory on one topic is never finished and can always be addressed or expanded with another set of concerns (Carbado et al., 2013). In this sense, the theory of intersectionality is dynamic and can be put into practice in multiple ways, one of them being its use as a theoretical or methodological paradigm (Cho et al., 2013), to question the interrelationships between social categories and try to transform them by bringing hidden dynamics to light (Carbado et al., 2013).

When addressing homosexuality in the context of PE from an intersectionality perspective, it recognises the importance of considering the multiple identities and experiences that people may have (Blackshear, 2022). In this sense, it is necessary to highlight multiple identities as a term that, in addition to sexual orientation, implies other identifications that may affect a person's experiences in PE. For example, a queer person may also be a woman, a person of colour or a person with a disability. Intersectionality recognises that these multiple identities interact and affect each person's experiences and experiences, addressing them from a social justice perspective (Pugach et al., 2021). Intersectionality also highlights that the experiences of LGBTQ+ people in PE can vary significantly depending on their cultural, racial, socio-economic and other contexts. Therefore, it is essential to consider and address these differences to ensure if an inclusive and respectful environment might be promoted (Landi et al., 2023). Intersectionality addresses how stereotypes and prejudices can affect people based on their multiple identities, in this case, manifested through discrimination based on sexual orientation. In the field of education, it is essential to overcome simplistic or one-dimensional approaches and analyze actions from a global perspective, such as that offered by the theory of intersectionality, in order to accommodate the multiple circumstances of people in the complex educational network (Tefera et al., 2018)

The intersectionality theory has a close relationship with the critical theories, as theory of social justice, as both seek the transformation of context towards inclusive and equitable context that respects the diversity of identities (Carbado et al., 2013), such as those related to

sexual orientations. Under the social justice theory, it calls for the need to analyze educational programs under parameters based on affect, understanding and acceptance of all members of the classroom and teaching community (Rawls, 1971). Social justice theory is based on analyzed and redressing inequalities and ensuring equality of economic and social resources (Sen, 2009). Therefore, establishing a definition of the theory of social justice is complicated by the fact that it encompasses such a broad spectrum of analysis and action, which goes hand in hand with the difficulty of defining social justice. However, we may find that when we speak of social justice we should be referring to some aspects of social justice, such as (Jost & Kay, 2010): (a) benefits and burdens in society are dispersed in accordance with some allocation principle (or set of principles); (b) procedures, norms, and rules that govern political and other forms of decision making preserve the basic rights, liberties, and entitlements of individuals and groups; and (c) human beings (and perhaps other species) are treated with dignity and respect not only by authorities but also by other relevant social actors, including fellow citizens. In this sense, a theory of social justice need not address all three aspects, but it should address at least one of them. In the case of sexuality and sexual identity, it is important to be able to analyze both policies and interactions based on social constructs that generate discrimination in people.

In line with the theory of social justice, what is fundamental for the analysis of sexual identity of PE teachers is the focus of research on the creation of a safe environment that prevents harassment and discrimination, generating inclusive experiences among educational stakeholders (Landi, 2018). Providing a safe environment for homosexual teachers so that they can make themselves known is an important issue for them, but also for their colleagues and students, since the invisibility of these issues implies the reproduction of heteronormative practices (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021), in which homophobia is used to police the boundaries of gender and sexuality (Drury et al., 2017)... All of this must be protected and supported by inclusive institutional policies that, in addition to promoting inclusivity, establish protocols for action that serve to prevent any discrimination related to sexual orientation, as well as to be able to act on the different situations that occur (Garg & Volerman, 2021).

Intersectionality theory and social justice theory are therefore clearly interrelated, making a significant contribution to sexual identity in PE. Both theories promote the global and relational analysis of the circumstances, in order to make progress in the creation of inclusive and equitable environments that respect each person's status and ideology. They will therefore be used as a guide and structure for this research.

Material and Methods

Participants

Eight homosexual PE teachers (four women and four men) participated in the study, all of whom acknowledged that they had felt discriminated against because of their sexual orientation throughout their professional careers. All of them taught in various public schools in Spain, both at primary and secondary levels. The researchers contacted them through different PE colleagues. All teachers expressed their interest in participating in the research. To guarantee their anonymity, different pseudonyms were used. The gender, age, years of experience and race of each of them is quite disparate, ensuring variability in their characteristics, which is linked to the intersectionality approach used in the research. Based on this theory, other important personal characteristics were also collected. The use of these variables in the classification of the participants responds to the need to contextualize their discourses in relation to different identity and structural axes. These factors allow us to identify how personal and professional experiences intersect in the construction of their teaching and sexual identities. From an intersectional approach, these categories are fundamental to understanding how different forms of inequality, privilege or resistance operate simultaneously in the narratives analyzed. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the research participants.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

Data collection techniques

Three different techniques were used to collect information, which were used in a complementary way to obtain the results:

Reflective personal diaries: All teachers completed a reflective diary during the first term of the 23-24 school year (September-December). They filled it in weekly, reflecting on the experiences in their classes. Specifically, they reflected on the biases and prejudices to which they were subjected because of their sexual identities. These types of diaries, because of their introspective nature, are conducive to obtaining information on sensitive issues (Smith & Luke, 2021). They were semi-structured, in order to allow freedom in the reflections of each teacher, depending on each specific context (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2016). The researchers were in constant contact with the teacher participants, so that if they had any problems or questions, they could be addressed effectively. Once the term was over, the

diaries were sent to the researchers. This diary consisted of three questions, closely related to the research objective (table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 2]

Individual interviews with each teacher: An in-depth interview was conducted with each of the eight participating teachers (table 2). These were conducted by the researchers after the end of the term, before the Christmas holidays, and once the reflective diaries had been handed in. They were conducted on-line via Microsoft Teams and recorded. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility in the answers, in order to go deeper into each of the questions asked (Nowak & Haynes, 2018). Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. These interviews sought to extract as much information as possible related to the lived experiences of each PE teacher in relation to their sexual identity throughout his or her professional experience. The approach was reflective, generating a climate of personal trust that allowed each case to be contextualised within its specific context (Husband, 2020).

[INSERT TABLE 3]

Focus groups with teachers: It was carried out with the eight participating teachers, once the individual interviews had been completed. Due to their geographical dispersion, it was also carried out online, through Microsoft Teams. It lasted approximately 90 minutes and was also recorded for later analysis. The questions asked were clearly in line with the aim of the research, as well as with the information gathered both in the individual interviews and in the teachers' reflective diaries (table 3). Each question in the script was asked in order, establishing a climate of participatory trust in which each teacher intervened as they saw fit. The researchers moderated the interventions, ensuring that they did not move on to the next question until all had participated in the previous one (Del Rio-Roberts, 2011). This process allowed the researchers to collect information on each of the questions and subsequently contrast and triangulate it with the rest of the data collection techniques (Tortorella, Viana & Fettermann, 2015).

[INSERT TABLE 4]

Design and procedure

The study responds to a phenomenological design. It is based on the understanding of educational phenomena through the analysis of the experiences and discourses of the participants (Mertens, 2005). In this case, it delves into the discrimination suffered by homosexual PE teachers. The discourse produced in interviews, personal diaries and focus groups was analysed from a socio-constructionist and intersectional perspective of discourse analysis. This approach allowed us to examine how participants construct meaning about their identity, gender and sexuality in the educational setting. The analysis combined an initial phenomenological coding with a second phase focused on discursive patterns, positionings and tensions between social categories, paying attention to how these intersect in individual and collective narratives.

The research was structured in five distinct phases: 1) Analysis of the contribution of the subject matter and establishment of the schedule; 2) Preparation and follow-up of the personal reflective diaries; 3) Preparation of the individual interviews with each teacher; 4) Preparation of the discussion groups with the teachers; 5) Analysis of all the data obtained by the researchers.

Once the participants had been contacted and expressed their willingness to participate in the research, we began working together through personal reflective diaries. At the end of the quarter, individual interviews were conducted, followed by the focus group. The last phase was the analysis of the data by the researchers. Once all the data from each of the techniques used had been collected, they were transcribed and categorised according to the objective of the research and the intersectionality and social justice theory approach used.

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the principal investigator's University Ethics Committee. Participants were clearly informed about the aims of the research. They were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

Analysis used

A qualitative approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of homosexual PE teachers. The starting point was the reality of each participant's educational context, taking their experiences in the classroom as a source of data (Harricharan & Bhopal, 2014). This, through an interpretive approach, allows us to approach the phenomenon of the study and reflect on the objective of the research (Carrión-Martínez & De la Rosa, 2013). In this case, the sexual identity of each participant was explored from intersectionality and social justice, analyzing the stereotypes and prejudices to which teachers were subjected in their

professional practice. To this end, the three data collection techniques were triangulated, giving the analysis a rich and in-depth approach to obtaining the results. (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). However, this triangulation was not used solely as a saturation strategy, but as a way of capturing different layers of teachers' discourse and experience. Individual interviews provided access to intimate and detailed accounts of teachers' experiences. The personal diaries offered a more leisurely space for reflection, where participants explored aspects that may not have emerged in direct interaction. For their part, the discussion groups made it possible to observe how meanings are negotiated collectively, revealing discursive dynamics among peers. This combination enriched the intersectional analysis by allowing individual and shared perspectives to be contrasted in diverse contexts. In addition, there is a high cultural and social component to the research topic, in this case homosexuality and physical education teaching, which gives more coherence to the qualitative approach used (Lindqvist & Forsberg, 2023). In order to guarantee coherence in the interpretation of the results, a coding of the most significant text extracts was carried out in each of the data collection techniques, using cross-matching patterns (Saldaña, 2009). All results were analysed, individually by each researcher firstly, and then reviewed together.

The analysis was carried out in two phases. In the first, a phenomenological coding of the data (interviews, diaries and groups) was carried out, identifying units of meaning linked to experiences of the body, sexuality and teacher identity. Subsequently, an intersectional discourse analysis was applied, examining how participants construct meaning about their professional role in contexts marked by gender norms and heteronormativity. Three main categories emerged from this process: questioning the performance of the teaching role, constant justification of 'who I am' and actual integration into the educational community. For example, one participant recounted: 'it seems that I have to prove all the time that I am a good teacher, as if being gay makes you doubt that'. This testimony was discursively analyzed in relation to the first category, identifying patterns of legitimization and resistance.

In this sense, the intersectional approach was not limited to the theoretical framework, but also structured the methodological design of the study. In the selection of participants, multiple identity dimensions were considered (gender, sexual orientation, professional trajectory, national context, family situation), understood not as isolated variables but as interrelated categories that configure diverse experiences. In the data collection, open-ended questions were designed to explore how participants experience these intersections in their daily teaching lives. During the analysis, discourses were examined in terms of how different forms of oppression and privilege (the tension between hegemonic masculinity, sexual

visibility and pedagogical authority) are intertwined, as reflected in the three main analytical categories.

Generation of categories and their categorization

All data collected in each technique used were analysed by the WEFT QDA computer and analysis program. Through the saturation of paragraphs and coincident ideas, different thematic axes were established, to finally generate three categories in which the results are structured: 1) Questioning in the performance of the teaching role; 2) Constant justification for "who I am"; 3) Real integration in the educational community. These categories are related to the objective of the research, as well as to the intersectionality approach and the theory of social justice used.

- *Questioning in the performance of the teaching role*: aspects related to the influence of sexual identity on the role of the PE teacher are addressed, and how this, and other related identities, influence their possibilities, abilities and limitations to teach class.

- *Constant justification for "who I am"*: includes all the information related to how the discrimination suffered at a professional level affects them on a personal level, analysing the consequences that this has on their daily life.

- *Real integration in the educational community*: the information obtained about the rejection that teachers have experienced from the educational community (families, colleagues...) is recorded, as well as the attitude they have taken to face this situation.

Coding data collection techniques

Different acronyms have been used to identify the text extracts with the data collection technique, as well as with the specific participant. For example, for Lorena's reflective personal diary, (RPD Lorena) is used, for the interview with Juan (Inter. Juan). For focus groups, the acronym FG is used.

Results

Below, the results of the research are presented in which, within each analysis category, the most significant and coincident text extracts are shown. Within each category there are results of each collection technique used, establishing a narrative of them aligned with the objectives of the study and the theories used.

Questioning in the performance of the teaching role

Teachers say they feel questioned in PE classes, arguing that there are many biases and stereotypes in the subject, among them, that of homosexuality:

“The subject, even today, is plagued by stereotypes, we see it every day [...]. I have always felt questioned and different because I am homosexual, as if I had to justify everything I do more” (Inter. Sonia).

This questioning seems to be observed, for example, in the value given to daily practice:

“In the end you have the feeling, more than contrasted, that your sexual identity means that the way you teach the class, or the contents you apply, do not have the same value as if another classmate did it.” (FG).

This fact seems to become more acute depending on gender and nationality:

“As a woman, I have always had it a little more difficult than a man as a Physical Education teacher, something that multiplies when, as in my case, I like women.” (RPD Lorena).

“In my culture, being homosexual is unthinkable.” “This is observed in classes, since it seems that what you teach is less important” (RPD Hakim).

In addition to the previous characteristics and identities, the disability and age of the participants also influence the development of their teaching practice:

“With my disability I have always felt questioned as a Physical Education teacher, as if my classes were not of quality because I had a hand amputation [...]. Of course, being homosexual does not help, since there are still many stereotypes in the subject” (Inter. Lorena).

“I have had several unpleasant experiences for being homosexual and a Physical Education teacher: looks, comments... At various times I have considered leaving the profession, something that with my age I value more and more, since it also penalizes me for having lost physical abilities” (RPD Daniel).

The participants agree that homosexuality can generate discrimination in any teacher, but more so in the Physical Education teacher:

“Any teacher can suffer discrimination due to their sexual identity, but it is true that in Physical Education we are constantly exposed physically, there is constant interaction with students... something that increases the chances of having worse experiences” (FG).

Such reflections reveal how the body, as a central focus in PE teaching, becomes a space of additional tension for queer teachers:

“Being a language teacher is not the same as being a physical education teacher. Here the body is in the foreground all the time, there is contact, there is a look... and that means you have to be even more careful about what you say or do. Everything is interpreted” (Inter Hakim).

The results of this category reflect how identities such as gender, age and disability influence and feedback into the discriminations suffered by FE teachers due to their sexual identity, in accordance with the intersectionality theory approach. Body stereotypes are a factor that seems to increase the predisposition of PE teachers to suffer these discriminations, as they feel more exposed to their students. All this leads them to perceive themselves as questioned as PE teachers, without any real relation to their professional practice, as they do not comply with the established social patterns.

Constant justification for "who I am"

Teachers indicate that the discrimination suffered within the school environment affects their daily lives:

“It's normal, you can't escape from what happens in the classroom” (Inter. Jun). “You take the subsequent discomfort home” (FG).

They express the frustration generated by not being able to feel what they want:

“I have cried a lot at home, alone, with my family. Why don't I have the right to feel whatever I want? That's not fair, in fact, I would say it's not even humane.” (RPD David).

In this sense, they recognize that they have come to think about whether this discrimination is justified:

“It is a discrimination that is often hidden [...]. From how much you live it, you have the feeling that maybe they are right and you deserve it” (Inter. Juan). “You end up accepting and normalizing the situation, something that affects your way of being.” (FG).

They state that the situation is hard and complex, since it goes against the inclusive approach that they always try to apply in the classroom:

“It is frustrating, since in class you always try to promote respect, inclusion and acceptance and then it turns out that the one who suffers is you” (RPD Sonia).

This discrimination has a negative impact on their life and personal identity, recognizing that on many occasions they do not act as they truly are:

“You no longer only feel bad in your profession, but in your life, and this affects you a lot as a person” (Inter. Daniel). “I recognize that at certain moments in my life I have pretended to be another way, not what I really am, to be accepted. This is really very sad (FG).

In addition, this affectation in the personal sphere is linked to the professional sphere, affecting the PE classes:

“On some occasions I have come to feel like a bad PE teacher for not complying with the sexual identity of heterosexual male” (Inter. Hakim). “It seems that because you are homosexual your motor performance is going to be worse or more limited [...] You get to feel questioned (FG).

As PE teachers, participants report an intensified bodily exposure that not only affects their teaching practice, but also places them in a position of constant social scrutiny:

‘In PE you are not behind a desk, you are in tracksuits, moving around, showing exercises... and being gay, you always feel that you are being measured differently, as if your body speaks more than what you want to say’ (FG).

The results of this category present how the perception of justice is altered in the participants, as a consequence of the constant injustices experienced because of their sexual condition. The social constructs analyzed from the theory of social justice allow us to observe how the PE teachers perceive that their profession and their personal life are closely linked due to their sexual condition. The questioning experienced in their classes and school permeates their daily lives, making them accept bad experiences as a normal part of their sexual choice and other personal identities. This fact leads them to a dissonance between the type of PE teacher they are, focused on equality and respect, and the one they consider they should be; which leads them to end up acting as they are expected to be and not as they really are, hiding their true identities.

Real integration in the educational community

Teachers recognize that the most painful contempt comes, in most cases, from their colleagues and families, not from the students:

“You always end up having a good relationship with students, although at first, with new groups, it is always a bit difficult. The problem is in the environment, you always know that

some colleague talks about you behind your back [...].(Inter. Lorena). "I have always had a good relationship with most families, but there is always someone who asks you about your personal situation or questions some aspect [...]. This makes me very sad" (FG).

In this sense, they recognize that, on occasions, they have felt questioned by their colleagues, asking them inappropriate questions of a personal nature.:

"In a tutorial, a mother asked me, if I had a partner, what was the process for a homosexual person to have children [...]. Honestly, I was perplexed. It is incredible that these things happen" (RPD Jun).

These personal situations make them feel questioned and out of place:

"Getting divorced today is a very common act. However, when I did it, I noticed that I was questioned for being homosexual, something that has not happened to my heterosexual teaching colleagues." (Inter. Daniel).

These experiences cause them to have to take refuge in colleagues who generate more confidence:

"At times I have had to take refuge in very good colleagues, which I have had, seeking to obtain greater understanding [...]. You always try to look for someone with whom you have more confidence, in whom you can take refuge." (FG).

This results in deep discomfort and sadness, as these are situations that occur in the educational field:

"This seems very sad and unfair to me, since normality and respect should be established in society, and much more so in school" (RPD Sonia).

In relation to the intersectionality and social justice approach used, the results of this category show how the discrimination suffered due to the sexual identity of the participants is related to other more personal and family elements, related to children or marriage. These personal issues are reproached or discussed with homosexual teachers of PE because of their sexual condition. These discriminatory actions, sometimes not even to their face, usually come from colleagues or families, which makes them feel alienated from being part of the school community. Their support is usually found in peers, individually, who empathize with their situation. In this sense, they consider that school should be a space for social justice, but

that it is far from being achieved and is still bound to countless biases, stereotypes and judgments.

Discussion

The aim of this research was to conduct a discourse analysis of eight homosexual Physical Education teachers who have felt discriminated against because of their sexual orientation in their professional career, through the theory of intersectionality and social justice. In line with other works, the results have shown how the sexual identity of homosexual teachers has been a relevant aspect in their work as Physical Education teachers (Dal'Igna et al., 2019; Dos Santos et al, 2023), which has also affected them in the relationships established within the educational community and in their personal lives (Squires & Sparkes, 1996). In this sense, having conducted in this article the analysis from both theories mentioned above has allowed us to corroborate that identity is multiple, discontinuous and social in nature (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011). Focusing on the multiplicity characteristic, several studies have affirmed and studied that teacher identity is composed of different professional sub-identities (Popper-Giveon & Shayshon, 2017; Swennen et al., 2010). Contributing to these studies, the results obtained through the theory of intersectionality have shown that the multiple ways in which a teacher can identify personally have a great influence, since injustices, pressures or discriminations are amplified when several non-normative personal sub-identities are possessed and converge. In addition, the results show that this situation affects more, in some cases, Physical Education teachers, due to the bodily, ageist, racialized and heteropatriarchal expectations that are presupposed to them.

In the first category, the results analyzed have shown how the work of the PE teacher is subjectively judged when the multiple identities of the teacher do not meet the established stereotypes. In addition to the discrimination, pressures and questioning suffered because of their sexual condition, PE teachers perceive that being of a different nationality, having a disability, being older or being a woman exacerbate these negative actions. All these issues are due to the way in which PE is still socially perceived, constrained by dominant social values (Kirk, 2020) and, more specifically, with heteronormative perspectives (Berg & Kokkonen, 2021). As a consequence, a stereotype of the PE teacher has been constructed that is deeply embedded in the social imaginary, strongly associated with a masculinized and manly figure, and it is through this stereotype that the whole educational community judges the work of the PE teacher (González-Calvo & Gerdin, 2023). The didactic and pedagogical

knowledge of the PE teacher is perceived in the background when his or her sexual identity is not heteronormative, and this is intensified when other bodily aspects of the teacher do not meet the imagined pattern either. This fact represents a strong social injustice by establishing an erroneous and unfounded causal relationship between the teacher's sexual identity, together with his or her bodily traits, and his or her professional work.

In this line, a fundamental aspect shown by the results is that this feeling is strongly felt by the PE teachers themselves, which leads them to perceive themselves as less competent. Despite being aware of their personal characteristics and that these do not affect their teaching work, this does not seem to be enough for teachers to break this false duality between sexual identity and teaching work without having to carry out complex identity work (Llewellyn & Reynolds, 2020). The results have shown that the discrimination and judgments experienced continuously because of their sexual condition have a great impact on their perception as teachers, which leads them to question whether this really makes them worse teachers. This allows us to reflect on and extend the results of other previous studies which, in contrast to this feeling of incompetence, demonstrated the use of more educational approaches and attitudes on the part of homosexual teachers, due to their awareness of injustices having experienced them first hand. (Donahue, 2007). In this sense, we can see how having experienced injustice throughout their lives may not be a key factor if it is not worked on critically at an early age, since the participants have not helped them to transform or reject it when they have become teachers. In this line, preceding research has shown that homosexual PE teachers who experience discriminations have several ways of acting, mainly by ignoring them, acting out or using them educationally (Martínez-Merino et al., 2024). In this way, the results of this study indicate that the decision of how to act as PE teachers in the face of such discriminations may be conditioned by the way they have lived and internalized the injustices they have experienced (Lee, 2019). In this sense, the second category shows how this assimilation of the injustices caused by their sexual condition in the school environment has affected their personal lives. School and society are strongly linked, both contexts are permeable, and, therefore, school plays a really important role in the construction of pro-social values, inclusion or criticism and transformation of injustices. However, there are strongly adhered discriminations in society that in a hidden way have been continuously propagated, such as discrimination based on sexual condition. In our case, the results show how teachers have transferred to their daily lives the problems, insecurities and questionings perceived continuously in their schools, which has meant that they have had to face continuous processes of reflection through which, sometimes, they have come to assimilate

and accept these injustices. Although in recent years some research has pointed to an advance in equality towards sexual diversity in the field of sport and PE (Anderson et al., 2011; Magrath et al., 2013), the truth is that we are still far from it being real (Storr et al., 2021) and, following this line, the results of our study show similar behaviors on the part of homosexual PE teachers to those already investigated almost 30 years ago, where due to the oppressive and heteronormative environment of the school context, homosexual PE teachers decide to abide by the dominant discourses to feel safe at school (Clarke, 1996). In this sense, and as defended by the theory of social justice, it seems necessary that within the educational community itself there are those spaces of acceptance and correction of inequalities (Landi, 2018), since the transfer outside the school of these negative situations experienced and their criticism only individually can end up with the assimilation of the situation by the affected people, as they are not supported by a program or system that guarantees them equality. In addition, injustices due to sexual identity mean that teachers need to hide their sexual condition, in many cases even denying it, in order not to be judged publicly and previously for it (Martínez-Merino et al., 2024). This is an action that requires homosexual PE teachers to reject their identity in certain contexts, such as school, in order to be accepted and that gives them the feeling of living a double life. (Clarke, 1997; Sparkes, 1994; Woods & Harbeck, 1992). And this becomes even more acute in PE teachers, since their corporal exposure is constant and, in addition to hiding their tastes, they must suppress any type of gestures or corporeality that departs from the heterosexual male stereotype.

In the third category, the results have pointed out how the importance that the educational community gives to the sexual condition of the PE teachers and the existing social impunity they have to express it, sometimes, come together giving rise to segregating spaces within the school for homosexual teachers (Gray et al., 2016). The personal and private life of homosexual teachers is judged and valued directly by colleagues, parents and parents, which means that they have to give constant explanations of their sexual condition, something that they have not perceived in the case of heterosexual teachers. This questioning, sometimes unconscious, on the part of the educational community implies support for maintaining PE as a heteronormative space (Lynch et al., 2022). These facts make it very difficult for homosexual PE teachers to feel part of the educational community. The construction of inclusive spaces within PE classrooms is being worked on a lot in recent years, as well as the use of pedagogical models that promote it (Casey & Kirk, 2024; Lieberman et al., 2025). However, The simple curricular adherence to these models has already proven to be insufficient to build a PE even capable of breaking with hegemonic values (Parker & Curtner-

Smith, 2011). Therefore, the results of this study support the conclusions of Müller & Böhlke's systematic review of the experiences of homosexual teachers in PE (2023b), stating that homosexual teachers have hardly been given a voice and need to be taken into account in the construction of these safe spaces.

In this line, in the third category, the PE teachers also expose how important it is to have a support group within the school context when they suffer these discriminations. The construction of support networks among teachers are very important for teachers, mainly, in their first years (Thomas et al., 2018); but the article shows that this benefit extends when the teacher suffers some kind of injustice due to their sexual condition or any other identity issue. In the case of PE, there are hardly any studies on teacher support networks, something that may be logical due to the difficulty for this collective, being, many times, the only teacher of the specialty in the center and teaching in all courses. However, the results show that, despite sometimes having had the support of colleagues and having been important to them, this is insufficient. Teachers demand a profound transformation of the educative system, so that it is capable of adapting and accommodating to the multiple realities of each of them. Thus, according to the theory of intersectionality and social justice, support networks within the school community must be built under educational programs based on the acceptance of the whole community and an inclusive and equitable environment that respects all identities, both of students and teachers. However, these results clash with the current social reality, where the advance of policies focused on prohibiting sex education in schools, both internationally (Yang, 2023) and in Spain (Villar-Aguilés & Venegas, 2024), limits the knowledge and expansion of sexual diversity among the entire educational community and perpetuates heteronormative values in education. This is also evident in the realm of physical activity at school, as hypervigilance and the imposition of heteronormative rules not only marginalise LGBTQ+ individuals, but can also harm all young people involved in sport (Wernick et al., 2023).

Conclusions

The realization of this study through the theory of intersectionality and social justice has allowed us to develop a detailed analysis of the discourse of eight homosexual PE teachers, in order to understand the multiple edges that make up the discrimination experienced in their professional career because of their sexual orientation.

The results of this work allow us to conclude that it is important to understand a person's sexual identity within a broader construct formed by multiple identities.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender, race, age or disability does not occur in isolation. Homosexual PE teachers point out that when they identify with various non-normative identities, discrimination multiplies. Although in recent years there seems to have been social progress, there is still a great change to be made in the rupture of pre-established normative models in the social imaginary. The PE teacher is associated with a very marked stereotype, where homosexuality has no place. This fact means that homosexual PE teachers have to justify their work as teachers much more, as they perceive themselves to be constantly questioned. The more aspects of the person do not support this stereotype, the more this questioning increases. This discrimination and constant questioning has had an impact on their personal and professional lives, generating a multitude of negative feelings that have affected them inside and outside the school environment, to the point of blaming themselves, admitting injustices or hiding their true identity. These facts imply the need to rethink education and PE in order to put an end to social prejudices, with the aim of being able to accommodate social diversity in the educational context, both among students, teachers and families.

The results obtained in this study represent a substantial contribution to the existing research on the topic, as they address it within the teaching environment and do so through the theory of intersectionality and social justice. In addition, the data collection instruments, such as the diary, have allowed for a prolonged analysis over time of the experiences and feelings of homosexual PE teachers. Among the main methodological limitations of the study is the non-generalisability of the results, given that it is a purposive qualitative sample focused on specific contexts. Furthermore, although the triangulation of techniques provided interpretative richness, it also implied challenges in the comparison between types of data (interviews, diaries and groups), as not all participants contributed in all three formats. On the other hand, the researcher's own position (and his or her relationship to issues of sexual identity) may have influenced discourse production and analysis. These limitations do not invalidate the findings, but invite us to interpret them as part of a situated understanding, open to future studies in other educational and cultural contexts. In this sense, we believe that in the future it could be interesting to extend this work by giving voice to other educational actors, such as students or other teachers. We would also like to analyse whether there are factors associated with teaching, such as the content taught or the educational stage, which affect to a greater or lesser extent the production of this discrimination.

We consider this research to be of special relevance for PE teachers, as well as for teachers of any subject, families, future teacher trainers and educational legislators, since the

article has shown that the problem is social and the need to establish collaboration between all agents in order to move forward along the same line, that of social justice.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare

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TABLES

Table 1

Characteristics of research participants

| Name | Gender | Age | Years of experience | Origin | Other features |
|---------|--------|-----|---------------------|----------|--|
| Jun | Female | 35 | 8 | Asian* | Has worked in three schools. Single. |
| Lorena | Female | 47 | 19 | Spanish | Has worked in five schools. Married. Two children. Amputated right hand. |
| Hakim | Male | 27 | 3 | Arabic* | Has worked in two schools. Single. |
| Juan | Male | 42 | 15 | Spanish | Has worked in three schools. Married. One son. |
| Sonia | Female | 49 | 22 | Spanish | Has worked in a school. Single. |
| Kamaria | Female | 40 | 12 | African* | Has worked in two schools. Single. One child. |
| Daniel | Male | 56 | 30 | Spanish | Has worked in 5 schools. Divorced. Two children. |
| David | Male | 33 | 6 | Spanish | Has worked in two schools. Single. One child. |

* Their parents are of that descent. They were born in Spain.

Table 2

Questions that were part of the teachers' reflective personal diaries.

1. Have I felt challenged or judged at school this week because of my sexual identity? (comments from students, comments and/or attitudes of peers, families...)
2. When, why and how does this discrimination influence my personal identity? And in the professional field? (feeling of being a bad teacher, professional incompetence...)
3. In addition to my sexual identity, can this discrimination stem from other factors, and which ones?
4. How do I cope with this situation in my professional work as a PE teacher? (content taught, material used, type of feedback with students, relationship with other teachers... ..)

Table 3

Script used for the semi-structured interview with each participant.

- 1- Do you consider that your sexual identity has influenced your role as a physical education teacher? How? Can you give an example?
- 2- Have you felt that your sexual identity has had a negative impact on your ability to teach? Why? Can you give an example?
- 3- In addition to your sexual identity, do you think there are other reasons for your personal characteristics that influence this discrimination? Which ones?
- 4- Has the discrimination you have suffered affected you beyond the professional level? How? Can you give an example?
- 5- How have you managed this situation on a personal level? What consequences has it had on your daily life?
- 6- Have you perceived rejection within the educational community (families, other classmates...)? Can you give an example?
- 7- How and how have these situations affected you? What has been your attitude and behaviour?

Table 4

Discussion script used with teachers

- 1- Why do you think that your sexual identity limits you and conditions your role as PE teachers? What factors might this be due to?
 - 2- In what specific aspects do you feel this discrimination in PE classes?
 - 3- What other aspects, apart from your sexual identity, can influence this discrimination?
 - 4- How does this affect you personally? Can you give an example?
 - 5- Have you rethought your way of acting, doing and feeling? In what way?
 - 6- Beyond physical education classes, do you feel included in the educational community? Why?
 - 7- In what aspects of your daily life at school do you feel discriminated against? By whom? What do you think can be done about it?
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