Defining a Fucking Homo: Contesting Discourses of Homosexuality Following a Norwegian TV Series

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ABSTRACT  Coming to terms with his sexual orientation is important for the mental health of a homosexual man. This chapter analyses several journalists’ critique of the Norwegian TV series Jævla homo (Fucking Homo) and argues that their commentary demonstrates a struggle over the discourse of the homosexual man today. I have identified three discourses: homopolitical, homonormative, and radical queer. The homopolitical discourse dominates the critique, which may be explained by the series itself, by historical reasons, and by the journalists’ preference for a political understanding of social issues. Several of the journalists state explicitly in the texts that they are homosexual.

KEYWORDS  Homosexual, Gay, Journalism, Discourse analysis, Identity

1 INTRODUCTION

“The traditional heterosexual values are lauded all the way, while the gay clichés are criticised and challenged” (VG 24.09.17) writes a journalist in a critique of the Norwegian TV series Jævla homo (Fucking Homo). In his critique of the programme, another journalist writes that “the average gay man and the average straight man have quite similar lives. Just as little blind violence, just as little harassment, just as much happiness” (Aftenposten 29.09.17). Interestingly, both journalists are rather young and open homosexuals, and they are commenting on the same TV series.
In autumn 2017, the Norwegian public service broadcaster \textit{NRK} launched the television documentary series \textit{Jævla homo}. The protagonist in the programme is a 26-year-old man challenging his own fears and prejudices about being homosexual and holding his boyfriend’s hand in public. Programmes in which a homosexual journalist publicly explores his own social and mental problems have been shown in several countries recently. In addition to Norway, \textit{Jævla homo} has been broadcast in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Similar programmes have been produced in other countries, such as the Danish \textit{Helvedes homo} (Damned Homo) and the BBC documentary \textit{Growing Up Gay}. All of them tell the story about a homosexual man’s struggle to overcome his social and mental health problems as an individual. The problems still exist due to real and imagined social pressures, despite an increased tolerance towards homosexuals. The percentage of homosexual men in Norway that have attempted to commit suicide is between double and triple that of heterosexual men (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013). More than 50 studies from North America and Europe have demonstrated much higher rates of attempted suicide among homosexual persons compared to heterosexual persons (Hottes, Ferlatte & Dulai, 2016). The proportion of homosexual men in Norway suffering from depression and anxiety is twice as high as that of heterosexual men, and is particularly high among young (16–19 years old) homosexual men (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013).

The aforementioned studies present different causes for reduced mental health among homosexual men, but the causes can roughly be summarised as external and internal stigma ranging from experienced violence to a low self-esteem. The term \textit{minority stress} describes an internalised homophobia that may be rooted in both experienced external homophobia or a fear of being discriminated or rejected (Meyer, 1995). A perception of a high level of homophobia correlates with internalised homophobia, low self-esteem and emotional instability, and a high level of internalised homophobia is an obstacle for the formation of a homosexual identity (Rowen & Malcolm, 2003).

This chapter aims to analyse how Norwegian journalists challenged the programme’s different discourses of being a homosexual man in Norway today, and how the journalists disagree regarding the appropriate discourse in contemporary society. The research questions are thus:

\textit{RQ1: Which discourses of the homosexual man are represented in the journalists’ critique?}

\textit{RQ2: Which discourse is dominant in the overall critique of the programme?}
Research question 1 will be addressed in both the literature review and the empirical research. Question 2 is informed by the findings.

2 MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

The way of portraying the homosexual man in the media and the reception of the audience to it have changed radically since the liberal newspaper *The New York Times* published the first front page story about homosexuals in 1963. They were described as “deviates” who were “condemned to a life of promiscuity” (Alwood, 1996). The first significant US network TV coverage appeared in 1967 when a CBS documentary described homosexuality as a “mental illness which had reached epidemiological proportions” (ibid.). The homosexual man was represented just as negatively in the Norwegian media (Gjesvik, 2015). In the 1950s he was mainly represented in Norwegian newspapers as a villain spreading homosexuality among the youth by seducing them. From the 1960s the homosexual man was increasingly represented as a victim of the heterosexual majority’s oppression. From around 1980 he was represented as a hero fighting for a just cause.
Media representations of a grouping like homosexual men are powerful. The representations shape how the heterosexual majority regards members of the group, and which place and rights the members should have in society (Dyer, 1993, p. 1). The representations also shape how the members see themselves and their place and opportunities in society. Today, since our selves are rather reflexive, traditions dictate how we see ourselves to a lesser degree – but media representations are central to this modern reflexivity (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 107).

Until the late 1960s, heterosexual sources dominated the representation of homosexuals in the Norwegian media (Gjesvik, 2015, 2018). From the 1970s onwards, increasing use was made of homosexual sources. However, a homosexual source has to deal with the burden of representation (Cottle, 2000). By his attraction to other men, a homosexual man will be representative for homosexual men, but his sexual identity will not necessarily define other values and understandings of the world. This opens for a discursive struggle about what it is to be homosexual today not only towards the heterosexual majority, but among homosexual men as well.

3 ACCEPTANCE OF THE HOMOSEXUAL MAN

The changing representations of the homosexual man in the media are of course closely linked to increased tolerance towards homosexuality in the United States and Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2013). Surveys showed that 16 per cent of Norwegians had negative attitudes towards homosexuals in 2008 (Anderssen & Slåtten, 2008), while the share had decreased to eight per cent in 2017 (Bufdir, 2017).

Notably, the tolerance in both surveys decreases when asking about the respondent’s relations with the homosexual man or this man’s actions – 21 per cent would dislike having a homosexual son. Men are more negative than women. As many as two out of three men agree that “sex between men is simply wrong” (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013, p. 133). The proportion of Norwegian homosexual men who have experienced physical violence is double that of heterosexual men (ibid., p. 99). These circumstances contribute to explaining why only one out of three homosexual men are open in all social situations (ibid.).

4 FOUCAULT’S DISCOURSE

The French social theorist Michel Foucault used discourse to describe ways of speaking and thinking about social phenomena. What interested him were the rules and practices that produced meaningful statements and regulated discourse
in different historical periods (Hall, 2013, p. 29). In his earlier studies Foucault was concerned with how the discourses of institutions and their formally recognised “experts” constrained certain groupings by promoting certain views of the grouping’s members. In his later works, he shifted focus to how discourses might bring people to police themselves (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 126). The wider social environment remains significant in both Foucault’s earlier and later studies, and the two complement each other. Foucault did not see power as something a person can have, but as something that was everywhere and exercised within interactions. However, according to Foucault, power does not leave people powerless: “Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1998, p. 95).

5 DISCOURSES OF THE HOMOSEXUAL MAN

Throughout most of our history, homosexuals have been defined entirely by the heterosexual majority. A homosexual identity barely existed before the late 19th century, mainly being seen as a matter of two persons of the same sex engaging in sexual activity. The Christian culture defined sexual activity between men as a sin against God’s nature (Johansen, 2019). The term homosexual was introduced internationally by the German psychiatrist Richard Krafft-Ebbings in 1887 (ibid.). The young discipline of psychiatry used the new term as a diagnosis, which moved the social control of homosexuality from the church’s moral view (of a sin) to a medical view of homosexuality as an innate, mental defect (Jordåen, 2003, p. 24).

Foucault argues that the psychiatry’s social control created a counterforce among homosexuals (Hall, 2004, p. 93). The new diagnosis was embraced by some homosexual men because they found it easier to defend a mental defect for which they could not be blamed rather than being an immoral sinner (Jordåen, 2003). The rising self-awareness not only led to social and sexual aspirations, but also to a certain political aspiration. Organisations for homosexuals were established in all three Scandinavian countries around 1950 (Kristiansen, 2008).

An ever-increasing self-awareness comprised not only openness, but also a distancing from the standards of the oppressive heterosexual majority. By redefining homosexuality as a lifestyle and subculture instead of a mental disease, the homosexual subculture of the 1960s and 1970s was a rebellion against the majority’s negative attitude (Dyers, 1993).

Homosexuality was decriminalised in Norway in 1972 and the gay movement’s strategy changed in order to participate in majority rights. The Partnership Act was introduced in Norway in 1993, and in 2009 marriage as an institution was expanded to include persons of the same sex.
6 HOMOSEXUAL DISCOURSES TODAY

In the late 1980s some homosexuals started to use the term ‘queer’ to describe themselves in order to deprive the word of its negative connotations. Through the 1990s, queer theory was developed among intellectuals as a radical theory in which the ideal was to cause what Judith Butler called *gender trouble*, opposing all attempts to limit sex- and gender-based behaviour (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 147). Queer theorists argue that organisations and individuals that fight for equal rights such as marriage and adoption reinforce normative thinking. Butler (1993) writes that any term for sexual identity is determinating and that the term ‘homosexual’ supports homophobia and heteronormativity. The term *queer* relates to any sexual orientation or gender identity not corresponding to heterosexual norms. I will label the discourse inspired by queer theory the *radical queer discourse*.

The term ‘queer’ might be used today by two very different groupings of homosexual men and needs to be contextualised in order to be connected to a certain discourse (Kristiansen & Pedersen, 2003). While those inspired by queer theory use the broad definition of queer to achieve freedom from heteronormativity, another grouping of homosexual men uses the term in order to be less visible as homosexuals and to blend into the majority. The queers who do want to blend in belong to a *homonormative discourse*. The term ‘homonormativity’ was introduced by Lisa Duggan at the beginning of this century:

Homonormativity is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan, 2003, p. 50).

Duggan connects homonormativity to a neoliberal, general individualisation that leads to a transition in the gay rights movement from a community-oriented collective fight to a homogenous, conformist, individualistic programme.

We know heteronormativity as a term for how the heterosexual majority’s values oppress homosexuals. The term homonormativity is used when a grouping of homosexuals tries to dominate the values that are acceptable in being a homosexual man (Duggan, 2003). The former is external, the latter internal. I will argue that homonormativity is internalised heteronormativity, the homosexual makes the heterosexual’s gaze and social values his own.

Throughout their relatively short history, lesbian and gay movements have endured searing conflicts over whether to embrace assimilationist or liberationist strategies (Rimmerman, 2014). The gay liberation movement in Norway was
divided in its view of same-sex marriage through the 1970s and the 1980s. Some activists argued for assimilation to heterosexual institutions such as marriage, while others argued for a liberation of an exclusively gay lifestyle (Johansen, 2019). I will argue that today’s homonormative assimilation to the heterosexual culture and the majority’s institutions led to a discussion, and partly a division, between homosexuals. This discussion relates to the increased tolerance towards homosexuals that allows them to enter the culture of the heterosexual majority as long as they adapt. A number of homosexual men express that they did not come out of the closet merely to be locked into heterosexual institutions: partnership, marriage, and fatherhood. They also claim that social stigma and heteronormative oppression still exists and that this should be combated by political means. I will label this grouping the homopolitical discourse.

The three groupings mentioned above represent three discourses of the homosexual man in Norway today: the homopolitical discourse, the radical queer discourse, and the homonormative discourse. The three discourses contest the discourse of the homosexual man. This struggle relates to the two phases in Foucault’s studies (Gauntlett, 2008): the external and the internal view of homophobia and heteronormative oppression. Is the homosexual man policed by his surroundings or himself?

The homosexuals defined as homonormative belong mainly to the white, urban middle class (Brown, 2012), as do the radical queer and homopolitical groupings, but these latter two disturb the homonormative project of blending into heterosexual culture as homosexual. The discursive struggle between the three groupings is demonstrated in the annual Gay Pride, where some male participants carry banners with political slogans (homopolitical), others dance through the streets wearing a dress or nothing but a few feathers (radical queer), while the ones walking in plain clothes complain about the others stirring up homophobia (homonormative). The latter grouping might choose to not participate in the Gay Pride at all.

I have performed a preliminary analysis of the critiques under study to see whether the texts relate to the three discourses. Based on this preliminary analysis and the literature review, I have developed a summary for the three discourses with their different positions in Table 1. The table will be used as a basis for the discussion in the analysis, where I will discuss the presence of the discourses and their positions in the texts written by the journalists who criticised Jævla homo.

7 THE TELEVISION PROGRAMME JÆVLA HOMO

In autumn 2017, the Norwegian public broadcaster NRK launched the documentary Jævla homo (Fucking Homo), consisting of five episodes of almost half an hour
each. The programme concerns the ways in which the protagonist Gisle Gjevestad Agledahl is trying to come to terms with his homosexuality through his journey through different queer environments. The idea for the programme came from Gisle realising that he found it socially difficult to accept that he had a boyfriend.

The expression Jævla homo (Fucking homo) is frequently heard in Norwegian schoolyards both as a general insult and as hate speech against homosexuals (Slåtten, Anderssen & Hetland, 2014). This is the origin of the TV programme’s title.

The content of the five episodes is roughly described by their titles: Shame, Femi, Fisting Party, Alone and Fight.

The programme is based on the NABC method, which defines an ideal audience in which N represents Needs, while A, B and C represent Approach, Benefit and Competition. The ideal target audience for Jævla homo was defined as a 17-year-old queer boy who is struggling with his identity (Agledahl, 11.14.17). The production team conducted several interviews with queer 17-year-old boys and read a lot of research concerning the situation for young queer boys. The team found that this boy’s needs were to normalise, nuance and defuse their queerness, and to gain a sense of belonging (Agledahl, 11.14.17).

8 THE RECEPTION OF THE PROGRAMME

During the research period under study, Jævla homo was discussed in around 140 texts published in the traditional Norwegian media, found with the search term “Jævla homo” in the media base Retriever.no. The research period is defined as 15.09.17–15.10.17, beginning three days before the programme was publicly launched in order to capture reviews from journalists who were able to watch it in advance. The texts belong to different genres, such as readers’ postings and the journalists’ interviews, reviews, op-eds and editorials. The texts relate to the television programme, but also to other texts in the newspapers that discuss the programme.

A preliminary analysis of the texts revealed that a majority of the journalists explicitly declared their personal orientation as either homosexual or heterosexual in their critique of Jævla homo. A declaration of the journalist’s own sexual orientation is rarely seen in journalism and demonstrates a highly explicit subjectivity. This indicates that the journalists use their professional ethos to take a strong personal stand as individuals in the discussion about the discourse of the homosexual man in Norway today. The critique of Jævla homo is found most explicitly in the review, op-ed and editorial genres, and these genres give the journalist the greatest opportunity to argue for his personal opinion on how homosexuals should be understood today.
TABLE 1 Three discourses of the homosexual man today

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The homopolitical discourse</th>
<th>The homonormative discourse</th>
<th>The radical queer discourse</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual identity</td>
<td>Strictly defined: Homosexual</td>
<td>Loosely defined: Queer</td>
<td>Undefined: Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to own grouping</td>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Individual self, but collective inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal/external: Victim of</td>
<td>Victim of homophobia</td>
<td>Victim of yourself or not a victim</td>
<td>Not a victim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attitude to homophobia</td>
<td>Reveal and attack</td>
<td>Internalisation or denial</td>
<td>Displace, make “Gender trouble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to heteronormativity</td>
<td>Liberationist. Reveal and attack</td>
<td>Adaptationist. Internalisation</td>
<td>Liberationist. Displace, make “Gender trouble”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to femininity</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social appearance</td>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Invisible</td>
<td>Visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social ideal</td>
<td>Friends and partners</td>
<td>Partnership/marriage and children</td>
<td>Friends and partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude to sexuality</td>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Liberal and radical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I found 13 texts that belong to the genres mentioned above published during the research period under study. In order to expand the material under study I have included one op-ed criticising the programme’s promotion video, which was launched in the spring. The 14 texts are published across a range of media from national newspapers to student newspapers. I will perform a discourse analysis of the 14 texts in the tradition of Foucault in order to explore how the journalists challenged the programme’s different discourses of being homosexual. I have sorted the discussion according to the different positions in the three discourses (as shown in Table 1).

8.1 HOMOSEXUAL OR QUEER?

The homosexual in the programme is mainly referred to as *queer*. In one scene, Gisle is challenged to guess how different persons standing on a stage define themselves – and he gets most of them wrong. The persons on the stage identify across a range of identities – as a pansexual and polyamorous transgender person, for example, to a person that has given up trying to define herself.

In his review, Tor Martin Bøe of the major newspaper *VG* writes that the many different sexual identities represent a real tongue-twister and that everyone in the
programme “agrees that they may call themselves queer” (18.09.17). Bøe emphasises the thrill of the term “queer” by quoting a heterosexual woman in the programme saying “it is boring to be heterosexual, because you do not go through any processes. Just belong to normal”. This celebration of the declared diversity within being queer supports the radical queer discourse.

In his op-ed, Bøe’s colleague at VG, Morten Hegseth, presents a completely different view of the term queer (24.09.17). Hegseth criticises Gisle for consistently using queer when the title of the programme – Jævla homo – emphasises the concept of homosexual. Hegseth believed one of the most widely used profanities in Norwegian schoolyards “would be reinstated as something fine and different in the Norwegian vocabulary”. He is of the opinion that Gisle and others in the programme “are dressing up with their impartial ‘queer’”, which is “a mockery of those who have stood on the barricades so that people like me and Agledahl can say we are gay without risking anything”. This view belongs to the homopolitical discourse.

I do not find any journalist praising the almost constant use of ‘queer’ from a view that belongs to the homonormative discourse. This might be due to the fact that the term is very loosely defined within this discourse in order to avoid attracting attention to sexual orientation.

8.2 INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL PROBLEM – THE ABSENCE OF HOMOPHOBIA

Each episode of Jævla homo begins and ends with Gisle talking to the camera (and hence the viewers) about himself and the content of the episode. In one episode he says “I have to pull myself together and manage to love all of me”. This quote alone might be read as the problem of coming to terms with his homosexuality being an internal one, not an external problem of homophobia. On another occasion, however, Gisle says to the camera “I hoped that the difficulties were only in my head” and then states that this was wrong.

Ane Bamle Tjellaug of Vårt land (25.09.17) writes in her op-ed that Gisle realises through the programme that “A lot of the prejudices exist in his own head. That he limits himself to what he thinks others think about him”. This emphasis of homosexuality as an internal problem belongs to the homonormative discourse.

In an op-ed in Aftenposten, Jonas Brenna appreciates that the programme shows Gisle’s painful feelings because many young people have them too (29.09.17). Brenna writes that for a young homosexual “it is normal to distance yourself from
the clan” and “one criticises the most visible gays. That makes the search for identity harder”. In its criticism of the tendency among many gay men to distance themselves from highly visible homosexuals, Brenna’s argument so far belongs to the homopolitical discourse.

Brenna argues that young homosexuals have painful feelings due to minority stress. Minority stress is an acknowledged theory in psychology, and several studies show that many young homosexuals fear the possibility of being stigmatised (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013). When Brenna continues arguing that the programme exaggerates the problem of homophobia, he emphasises minority stress as internal, and his argument connects to the homonormative discourse.

All of the following journalists criticise Jævla homo for making homosexuality an inner, private problem, and they argue that the programme should also deal with outer challenges such as heteronormativity and homophobia. This view belongs to the homopolitical discourse.

In an advance review in Dagbladet, Marie Kleve writes (15.09.17) that the programme “could not be more intimate and more personal, but it is still as though we’re only touching the surface”. She refers to a scene in Jævla homo where Gisle participates in a football exercise and one of the players says he does not accept homosexuals and that this “is connected to religion”. Gisle does not pursue this; Kleve criticises the programme for focusing on his painful feelings, not the religious reasoning: “This is where the challenges are buried!”

In her review in the student magazine Universitas (22.09.17), Teresa E. Cissé agrees with Kleve: “it is unfortunate that the feelings of the programme’s host are so central and overshadow the serious problems”. She concretises these serious problems as violence against homosexuals and the high level of suicide among them.

In his review in the culture magazine subjekt.no, André Breivik acknowledges Jævla homo for presenting Hussein, who is kicked out from home because he is homosexual, and a gay Sami man who has experienced that both his gay brother and his boyfriend committed suicide. Breivik writes that Hussein and the Sami man demonstrate how difficult it may be to live a life as a homosexual and argues that they would make better protagonists than Gisle (27.09.17).

In an op-ed in VG (26.09.17), Lars Joakim Skarvøy writes that “The gay liberation struggle in Norway and internationally is unfortunately not included in your story about the encounter with your own prejudices”. Skarvøy believes the programme only shows that different homosexual persons face prejudices without trying to understand why and how someone has managed to free themselves from those prejudices.
In an op-ed in *Klassekampen* (26.09.17), Pål Hellesnes argues against colleagues who have criticised *Jævla Homo* for presenting homosexuality as a personal problem. He finds value in the programme’s showcasing of Gisle’s internalised homophobia in which the protagonist actively seeks “all the things he has prejudices against and becomes wiser and less prejudiced” against homosexuals, and thus, himself. Hellesnes praises Gisle for revealing and challenging his internalised homophobia in order to fight against it. This argument belongs to the homopolitical discourse because it emphasises homophobia as a reality, even though it is internalised.

Several critics believe that *Jævla homo* is almost only concerned with internalised homophobia. This can be perceived as seeing homosexuality as a mental problem, which connects to the previous heterosexual discourse of homosexuality as a mental defect. Faced with this historical backdrop, the attention to the protagonist’s painful feelings can be seen as reactionary and lacking historical understanding.

### 8.3 HETERONORMATIVITY AND HOMONORMATIVITY

In the opening of the first episode, Gisle presents himself as an average young man who likes to hang around with friends, eat pizza and play PlayStation.

All of the following journalists recognise the presentation of Gisle as an average man undefined by his homosexuality. This view belongs to the homonormative discourse.

In *VG*, Bøe praises the programme for giving “us heteronormative insight and understanding of what it is like to be an outsider” (18.09.17). Bøe appreciates that Gisle presents himself as an ordinary guy who “plays shooting games and never has been to a gay club”. Bøe writes that the only difference is “that he happens to have a same-sex partner” and that the programme addresses “stereotypes and prejudices that remain in all of us”.

In the Christian newspaper *Vårt land* (25.09.17), Tjellaug acknowledges Gisle’s resistance to being defined by his homosexuality. She draws a parallel between being Christian and being homosexual and writes that the programme “shows that queer persons are just as different as everybody else”.

In *Aftenposten* (29.09.17), Brenna writes that “the average gay and straight people have quite similar lives. Just as little blind violence, just as little harassment, just as much happiness” and argues that *Jævla homo* exaggerates the challenges of being a homosexual man today.

Still, a majority of the journalists criticise the programme for being homonormative, and thus argue from within the homopolitical discourse.
Boe’s colleague at VG, Hegseth, criticises the programme for being both heteronormative and homonormative in an op-ed with the title “Fucking annoying. ‘Jævla homo’ is not my gay struggle” (24.09.17). He writes that “NRK makes a gay programme in which the homopolitical platform is the right to play PlayStation, eat cheese sandwiches and dream about husband and children – this is not only boring, but also unhistorical”. Hegseth criticises the programme for being perhaps “the most conventional adjudicator of taste on TV in Norway: Traditional, heterosexual values are lauded all the way, while gay clichés are criticised and challenged”. Hegseth concretises a gay cliché according to Gisle as somebody who “likes bad pop music and is promiscuous”. Hegseth summarises that Gisle appears to be “the most homophobic host on Norwegian television today”.

Andreas Breivik at subjekt.no (08.03.17) says that it seems as though Gisle is oppressed from both the heterosexual and the homosexual side by “all the stupid gays that fuck around, unable to kick a football, whining and howling during Eurovision”. He criticises Gisle for saying of himself and his boyfriend that they are “two persons with interests and dreams and values that are just as weird, stupid and fine as everyone else”. Breivik believes this is an attempt “to normalise homosexuality at the expense of expressions of identity that do not fit into ‘decent behaviour’”.

In the student magazine Under dusken (10.10.17), Maria Norum finds it shocking that Gisle is unable to see any point in having gay clubs. Norum quotes him saying “because special clubs for people with curly hair do not exist” and that he really does not want to be seen in a gay club. Norum argues that the programme makes a distinction between “ordinary gays” and “queens”. She refers to the scene in which strangers are guessing Gisle’s preferences according to whether they know that he has a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Norum perceives him to nod to the people who believe he has a girlfriend and guess that he likes PlayStation, only to see him get insulted when people believe he is homosexual and guess that he likes reality TV and emotional talk. She writes that the programme establishes that “it is the conventional values that are desirable, while unconventional expressions are extreme and silly”.

In an editorial the newspaper VG refers to Jævla homo as “a fucking important programme” showing that “the meeting between an individual’s sexuality and society’s norms and perceptions may create friction and misery” (19.09.17). The editorial equates “the individual’s sexuality” with “society’s norms” and argues mildly within the homopolitical discourse.
8.4 FEMININITY

Femininity has historically played a part in the male homosexual subculture and it is one of the visible traits that has most provoked homophobia. While femininity is a clear topic in Jævla homo, it is surprisingly scarcely discussed in the critique of the programme. This may be a difficult topic for the journalists since it would easily be perceived as inappropriate both to say that homosexual men are feminine and to say that they are not. But some of the journalists do discuss femininity in their critique. All of them criticise a coarse distinction between being either feminine or masculine, and hence argue within the homopolitical and radical queer discourses.

In Dagbladet (15.09.17), Kleve criticises the programme for superficially presenting extremely feminine and masculine arenas such as the Costume Awards and the soccer field. At subjekt.no (27.09.17), Breivik finds the scene in which the masculine Gisle poses in a feminine way for a photo shoot banal. Hellesnes in Klassekampen (26.09.17) praises the programme for showing Gisle’s discomfort at being perceived as feminine because it exposes his own prejudices and gives him an opportunity to fight them.

8.5 SEX

The aim of homonormativity is to blend into the majority. Hence, a rather discrete and average sex life will be preferable, supposedly similar to a heterosexual sex life – except for the fact that two men are having sex. In episode three, Gisle visits a gay S&M club where the dress code is leather and he himself wears an astronaut suit. Later in the episode he meets a promiscuous Dane who has had a lot of sexual partners.

In Aftenposten (29.09.17), Brenna refers to a survey that shows that the share of heterosexual men that find homosexuality disgusting is markedly decreasing and writes: “In reality, ever fewer heterosexual men shudder at the thought of gay sex”. Brenna’s argument diminishes the fact that two out of three heterosexual men in Norway agree that sexual activity between men is wrong (Anderssen & Malterud, 2013, p. 133). His argument belongs to the homonormative discourse.

The following three journalists criticise Jævla homo for being puritan and they support the liberal view of sexuality in both the homopolitical and the radical queer discourse.

In VG (26.09.17), Skarvøy praises the programme for presenting a range of homosexual roles when Gisle meets both a sadomasochist and the promiscuous Dane, but thinks Gisle ridicules them when he visits the S&M club wearing an astronaut suit and meets the Dane “with giggles and a shocked gaze”.
At subjekt.no, Breivik thinks the S&M fan and the Dane are “portrayed as if they are performing strange hobbies while waiting for real life” in a cosy home, but when Gisle visits “the parents with two children and a town house, everything is happiness and soft colours” (27.09.17). Breivik believes that the programme creates “an unfortunate distance between the horny gays and kind Gisle” who “appears as a mother-in-law’s dream”, as if NRK has sent “a clean astronaut to a dirty planet”. NRK published a video to promote the programme in advance, and Breivik is even more explicit in his critique of this promotion video. He points at a time before AIDS when the gay movement attempted to “blow out the frameworks for different sexual expressions, not just strive to be incorporated into a big community.” Breivik concludes his critique: “I want to be promiscuous and wonder how large your dick is without shame, how it is to have sex with you. I will not adapt; I will demand a seat at the table without making myself cute and innocent”.

In Under dusken (10.10.17), Norum argues, like Breivik, that the visit to the S&M club is presented as a negative contrast to the fathers with kids “where everything is pure happiness”. She argues that Gisle’s use of an astronaut suit makes the members of the S&M club appear like “freaks” and that “people who like group sex or have several sex partners are presented as being extreme”.

8.6 A FOURTH DISCOURSE

Common for the three discourses discussed above is that they are rather clearly defined as possible interpretations of what it is to be a homosexual man in Norway today. The persons belonging to all three discourses are mainly characterised by being white and urban. In my analysis, I find that most of the critics agree about a fourth possible discourse, one that belongs to all the homosexual men that do not fit into the three discourses, among other things because they live in the countryside. This matters because homosexuality is more accepted among heterosexual men in the big cities than in the countryside (Anderssen & Slåtten, 2008, p. 47).

In VG (18.09.17), Bøe is generally very positive towards Jævla homo, but criticises the programme for being focused on the capital Oslo and says that it probably is not as relevant “in other parts of the country where being queer is an even larger and more difficult feeling to live with”. Juliane Fossheim is a journalist at Hadeland, a newspaper that covers a rather rural district. She argues that it is more difficult to fit in in small environments and finds it wrong that homosexuals “need to move to larger environments, like Oslo” (06.10.17). In VG, Skarvøy (26.09.17) criticises the programme for mainly presenting persons belonging to “strong environments or strong relationships” and missing the lesbian youth who “just have
finished Friday prayers at the mosque”. He argues that Gisle avoids presenting the variation that could have been found by searching for those who “are not heterosexual and most unlike yourself”.

It is debatable whether we should gather all those who do not belong to one of the three more clearly defined discourses into a fourth discourse. A homosexual Muslim boy in the city and an old, homosexual teacher in the countryside have little in common, except attractions and feelings they find difficult to reveal. We ought probably to talk about the many other discourses that these persons represent, but that would go beyond the limits of this analysis. However, what is clear is that neither of these persons are a part of the discursive struggle about what it means to be a homosexual man today since their voices are hardly ever heard.

9 EPILOGUE – GISLE AND HIS FIERCEST CRITIC JOIN HANDS

The texts analysed above relate to a certain degree to each other’s arguments, and several readers related to the journalists’ texts in readers’ postings, in the newspapers’ comment sections and on social media. However, I will discuss a text that tried to come to a consensus in the debate between the journalists. Gisle Gjevestad Agledahl at NRK contacted his fiercest critic, Morten Hegseth at VG, and they co-wrote an op-ed that was published online by VG and NRK (09.10.17). They start by describing themselves ironically as “Gisle, the unhistorical and queer whippersnapper” and “Morten, the grumpy old gay” (Hegseth is actually in his early 30s). The two situate themselves respectively in the homonormative and the homopolitical discourse. They continue writing that they wish “to elevate the debate beyond an internal struggle about labels and categorisations”. Their main argument is that they wish to leave the internal discursive struggle of the homosexual man today and bring the mainly heterosexual politicians into the debate. Agledahl and Hegseth encourage the government to improve the education of public servants on homosexuality to put them in a position to help children, youths and the elderly feel accepted. They write that “young persons end their lives because these lives are too difficult”. With the argumentation expressed above, the suicides are connected to an external homophobia. All the arguments above belong to the homopolitical discourse viewing homophobia as an external problem with political solutions.

They end their argument by stating that “we disagree about whether queer or homosexual is the right label for boys who like boys” and “nobody can speak on
behalf of all those who do not identify themselves as heterosexuals”. This relates to the burden of representation (Cottle, 2000), but also acknowledges the value of disagreement among homosexuals and their participation in the discursive struggle about the homosexual man today.

10 DISCUSSION

The homopolitical discourse dominates the critique of Jævlar homo. More than a half of the journalists argue principally within this discourse. The next most represented discourse is the homonormative discourse, while the radical queer discourse is scarcely employed. Not surprisingly, some of the journalists argue within several discourses since their individual experiences may be too complex to fit into the narrow scope of one single discourse.

To understand the unequal presence of the three discourses, we need to take a closer look at journalistic, personal and societal explanations.

10.1 THE PROGRAMME’S CONCEPT

There are at least four challenges with Gisle as protagonist, all related to the burden of representation: A member of a grouping cannot represent the characteristics of all the members (Cottle, 2000). The first relates to the discussion about the target audience above. Gisle is 26 years old, which is usually an age at which a societal and political understanding of being gay is more prominent than for the 17-year-old boy whose feelings he is supposed to represent. Secondly, Gisle is a certain individual with certain traits that will be read into the discourse. His appearance lets him easily pass as any heterosexual man (see the picture in the introduction), as demonstrated during the scene in which the audience is guessing his preferences. This can be seen as positioning him as belonging within the homonormative discourse. Thirdly, the concept of the programme is based on Gisle’s prejudices and how he challenges them. Several of the critics have read the expressed prejudices literally as ultimate statements about homosexuality, and this might again place Gisle within the homonormative discourse. Fourthly, Gisle has a dual role as both a gay man and a reporter, and the two roles represent different ways of reading him in the discourses. Is the young man on the screen experiencing or reporting? I will argue that some of the critics have read the preliminary experiences as reported statements.
10.2 THE JOURNALISTS

The debate is clearly dominated by male journalists, which may be explained by the fact that the male homosexual is at the centre of the programme (Table 2).

Almost half of the journalists explicitly declare that they are homosexual. This proportion displays a strong personal engagement in the struggle about the discourse of the homosexual man today. Several of these journalists refer to their own experiences as young homosexuals. Brenna in *Aftenposten* (29.09.17) argues by using his experience of five years “hand in hand with my boyfriend” in public. Declaring his homosexuality might emphasise his right to have a say in the struggle. It is a common understanding today that a minority should be defined from within. This point is emphasised by the fact that three of the journalists find it necessary to declare that they are heterosexual, and, hence, maybe less entitled to have a say in the discussion.

Four of the six declared homosexual journalists argue mainly within the homopolitical discourse. One reason for this might be that homosexual journalists belonging to the homonormative discourse are uncomfortable declaring their orientation publicly. Another reason might be that journalists mainly understand social issues politically. Half of the journalists that declare themselves heterosexuals or do not define their orientation also relate mainly to the homopolitical discourse. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journalist</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>Explicit sexual orientation</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Main discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andreas Breivik</td>
<td>Subjekt.no</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Radical Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa E. Cissé</td>
<td>Universitas</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morten Hegseth</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lars J. Skarvøy</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonas Brenna</td>
<td>Aftenposten</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homonormative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gisle A. Gjevestad</td>
<td>NRK</td>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Boe</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homonormative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julianne Fossheim</td>
<td>Hadeland</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Editorial</td>
<td>VG</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie Kleve</td>
<td>Dagbladet</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ane B. Tjellaug</td>
<td>Vårt land</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homonormative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pål Hellesnes</td>
<td>Klassekampen</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mari Norum</td>
<td>Under dusken</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Homopolitical</td>
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</table>
other half of this category argues within the homonormative discourse – which corresponds to the heteronormative discourse in this case. The programme’s declared aim – to satisfy a 17-year-old boy’s needs to normalise, nuance and defuse being queer – implies a homonormative profile. This might lead to a perception of bias among the journalists and strengthen the homopolitical view in their critique.

Only one journalist argues clearly within the radical queer discourse. One reason for this might be that Breivik is writing at subjekt.no, a journal concerned with raising debate about culture among a liberal elite described as a “young, critical, cultivated, influential audience with good taste” mainly living in the big cities (subjekt.no). On the other side of the ideological spectre one finds VG, a mainstream newspaper that follows the middle way. VG’s editorial supporting the homopolitical discourse indicates how established this view has become.

10.3 HEALTH AS AN ISSUE IN THE DISCUSSION

To what degree do the journalists argue within the field of mental health in their critique? Jævla homo is not very explicitly concerned with mental health – it is concerned with satisfying the 17-year-old boy’s need to normalise, nuance and defuse being queer, and to gain a sense of belonging (Agledahl, 11.14.17). Referring to a lot of scientific studies and talking in health terms would likely scare this boy, marking him as a person with mental health problems. The programme is concerned with the psychosocial well-being of the young boy’s acceptance of himself as queer, and even without using psychological terms, this belongs to the field of mental health.

The programme presents one explicit mental problem: Suicide. This is praised in some of the homopolitical critique, but they wished for a closer discussion of homophobia as a reason behind the suicides. This brings the discussion further into the field of politics than of health.

The journalists do not use many terms explicitly related to mental health in their critique, but the field of health is used mainly as a battleground in the discursive struggle about homosexual identity. Those arguing within the homonormative discourse claim that minority stress is due to an internalised, mainly non-existent homophobia. Hence, the problem is personal and mental. The journalists arguing within the homopolitical discourse claim that homophobia is strong in society, and that the problem is political in a wide sense. Those belonging to the radical queer discourse argue that the problems are social and cultural.
10.4 THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE DISCOURSES

The three discourses will have different impacts on the political view of the homosexual man – for example, whether the politicians need to take measures to improve the conditions for homosexuals or not. Within the homonormative discourse one might say that marriage and other civil rights for homosexuals have led to equality, and the high level of acceptance among the majority shows that the problem of homophobia is very limited – and hence there is no need for political campaigns or for homosexual subcultures. This involves a policy of maintaining the status quo, which could be labelled as conservative. Some label it as neoliberal (Duggan, 2003).

The homopolitical discourse suggests that there is still a need for political means to fight homophobia and a cultural need for the liberation of a homosexual identity through subcultures. The history of gay liberation has not ended, and today it also means solidarity with transgender persons and people of other sexual orientations. I label this policy as mildly radical; in Norway one might call it social democratic.

The radical queer discourse involves a strategy that is more cultural than political. One should make gender trouble (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 147) by neglecting all limits of gender and sexual orientations. This is a personal project, but all efforts to challenge heteronormativity should be supported. Even though the project is not strictly political, it will clearly challenge the existing politics, which are based on an understanding of two clearly defined genders and defined sexual orientations. I label this policy as highly radical.

10.5 THE IMPACT ON THE AUDIENCE

A large and diverse audience watched Jævla homo and read the media critique in the wake of the programme. In the discussion, the readers met several journalists they knew and who had already established their credibility in other fields in a different way. By declaring their sexual orientation and making use of their personal experiences, they moved from their roles as mere journalists to being individuals as well. Declared heterosexual journalists took part in the public discussion and, thus, emphasised that this was more than an internal struggle among homosexuals. The discussion showed that different discourses of the homosexual man exist side by side today and that homosexual identity is a complex and nuanced issue. But most of the journalists argued within the homopolitical discourse and thus demonstrated that politics does not end with civil rights. I believe that this may have established – or rather re-established – a broader political view on homosexuality and stigma in the audience.
REFERENCES


