



AALBORG UNIVERSITY

Sexual Education in Denmark.

A CRITICAL POLICY AND PEDAGOGICAL ANALYSIS
WITH A FOCUS ON INTERSECTIONALITY.

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Abstract

This thesis offers a critical analysis of sex education in Denmark, with particular attention to how policies and teaching materials reproduce, challenge, or negotiate discourses of intersectionality and normativity. Drawing on a theoretical framework that integrates intersectionality (Crenshaw), norm-critical pedagogy (Bromseth & Darj; Simovska), and Gramscian hegemony, the study interrogates institutional practices through a qualitative, abductive research design. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach, the analysis examines data from Danish and EU policy documents, NGO campaigns, a semi-structured interview with the youth-led teaching collective Sexualisterne, and fieldnotes from workshops conducted through the FIERCE project.

Findings reveal that while Danish sex education is presented as progressive and inclusive, its policy and pedagogical frameworks continue to rely on normative assumptions about the student as white, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied. Intersectionality is often invoked symbolically but rarely operationalized through binding mandates, teacher training, or structural support. NGO materials, especially those from Sex & Samfund, tend to reproduce neoliberal logics of individual responsibility and emotional self-regulation, often omitting structural dynamics such as racism, homophobia, or class-based exclusion.

In contrast, initiatives such as Sexualisterne and Normstormerne embody norm-critical and intersectional pedagogies through dialogical, student-centered approaches that foreground marginalized perspectives. These efforts, however, remain structurally precarious, dependent on local funding, voluntary teacher interest, and the personal labor of young, often female, educators. The FIERCE workshops further highlight how youth respond to bystander dilemmas involving sexism and racism, revealing both hegemonic discourses and moments of resistance.

The thesis argues that a structural realignment is needed to move from symbolic inclusion to substantive transformation. Recommendations include making sex education a standalone subject, institutionalizing intersectional content, mandating norm-critical teacher training, and ensuring national funding for grassroots initiatives. These reforms are presented not as technical solutions but as political commitments to recognition, equity, and educational justice.

Situated within broader European debates on gender, democracy, and education, this study contributes to the fields of gender studies, critical pedagogy, and feminist policy analysis. It underscores the need for sex education that not only informs but transforms, recognizing students as situated agents and schools as spaces of both normalization and resistance.

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Introduction

Sexual education is a crucial component of youth development, shaping understandings of sexuality, gender, relationships, and consent (UNESCO, 2018). In Denmark, comprehensive sexuality education has been a longstanding policy, integrated into the national curriculum for decades (Helweg-Larsen & Larsen, 2002; Nordics.info, 2024). However, as societal norms evolve, so do expectations regarding what constitutes effective and inclusive sex education. Recent legislative changes have extended mandatory sexuality education to upper secondary schools, making it not only mandatory for students aged 6 to 15 in Folkeskole (elementary school), but now also for students aged 16 to 19 in gymnasium (upper secondary education). These reforms have placed new emphasis on topics such as consent, gender norms, digital behavior, and well-being (Nordics.info, 2023).

Simultaneously, civil society organizations, such as Sexualisterne, play an increasing role in expanding the scope and pedagogy of sex education by integrating perspectives often overlooked in formal curricula, including intersectionality, anti-sexist and anti-racist approaches, and LGBTQ+ inclusion (Women, Gender & Research Journal, 2023).

While the Danish government has recently introduced reforms, such as allocating 15 million DKK to improve materials and expanding mandatory sex education to upper secondary schools, significant gaps remain. Sex education is not treated as a standalone subject, and teachers often lack training to address sensitive topics like sexuality, cultural diversity, or digital boundaries (Nordics.info, 2023, 2024; Roien et al., 2022).

The consequences of inadequate sexuality education are well-documented. Studies show that when young people lack access to comprehensive, inclusive sex education, they are more vulnerable to misinformation, coercion, sexually transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, and gender-based violence (UNESCO, 2018; Haberland, 2015). Conversely, high-quality sexuality education that addresses power dynamics, gender norms, and emotional well-being has been shown to delay sexual initiation, reduce risky behavior, increase respect for diversity, and improve overall health outcomes (Haberland & Rogow, 2015; Michielsen & Ivanova, 2022). These findings underscore the transformative potential of sexuality education, not only as a health intervention, but as a foundation for gender justice, bodily autonomy, and democratic participation.

Despite Denmark's reputation for progressiveness, tensions persist regarding how gender, sexuality, and power are framed in educational discourse (Roien, Simovska, & Nyby, 2022). Ongoing debates concern not only the content of sex education but also the pedagogical practices and ideological frameworks that inform it (Allen, 2011; Kehily, 2002). This thesis critically investigates the intersection of sexuality education, gender-based violence, and intersectionality in EU and Danish national policy as well as NGO-led educational materials.

The aim is to explore how sex education is constructed, whose voices are amplified or marginalized, and how power operates within the frameworks that guide these practices. This includes examining whether and how Danish sex education policies and teaching materials reproduce, challenge, or negotiate discourses of intersectionality and normativity, which will be explained and defined later (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). In doing so, the thesis not only diagnoses discursive exclusions but also contributes to policy reform by offering recommendations for more inclusive and equitable approaches to sexuality education (UNESCO, 2018; Lombardo & Verloo, 2009).

This study is important because it addresses a significant gap between policy intentions and pedagogical realities. While intersectionality is increasingly referenced in official documents, it often remains rhetorical rather than substantive (Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009). By examining how intersectional identities are represented, or rendered invisible, in sex education materials, this research sheds light on the systemic challenges that hinder inclusive and equitable learning environments (Roien et al., 2022). The findings have implications for educational reform, teacher training, and civil society initiatives, offering a critical lens through which to evaluate and improve current practices.

Moreover, this research contributes to broader conversations about democracy, inclusion, and youth empowerment. In an era marked by rising anti-gender movements and political backlash against diversity initiatives (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018), it is essential to understand how education can serve as both a tool of normalization and a space for resistance (Mouffe, 2005). By identifying the discursive strategies that maintain or challenge normative assumptions in Danish sex education, this thesis offers concrete insights for building more inclusive, reflective, and socially just educational systems (Connell, 1995; Gramsci, 1971).

In order to understand the broader forces shaping Danish sex education, this thesis includes both national and European Union (EU) policy analysis. While education is primarily a national responsibility, EU directives, strategies, and legal frameworks increasingly influence

how member states, including Denmark, conceptualize gender equality, intersectionality, and anti-discrimination in education. By analyzing both EU and Danish policies, the study maintains a grounded national focus while also situating findings within a wider political and normative landscape. This dual approach highlights where Danish practices align with or diverge from EU commitments and opens space for future research and advocacy at both policy levels.

Problem formulation

How do Danish sex education policies and teaching materials (re)produce, challenge, or negotiate discourses of intersectionality and normativity, and how can these insights inform policy development toward more inclusive and equitable sexuality education?

Scope of definition

Normativity

In this thesis, *normativity* is not used as a theory in itself but as an analytical concept that helps identify and critique taken-for-granted assumptions about what is considered normal, acceptable, or desirable. Drawing from feminist and critical theory (Ahmed, 2012; Butler, 1990), normativity refers to the implicit values and expectations embedded in institutional practices, policies, and everyday interactions. In the context of sex education, this often means unspoken assumptions that all students are white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and emotionally competent. These assumptions shape both the content of education and how students are expected to behave, speak, and identify. Rather than treating normativity as a theoretical framework, this thesis uses it as a critical lens to expose how educational discourse and practice can marginalize students who do not conform to dominant norms.

1.0 Literature Review

This chapter introduces the main concepts, policies, and civil society actors shaping sexual education in Denmark. It begins by explaining norm-critical pedagogy, which is used in this thesis to examine how sex education is designed and implemented. It then explores the influence of the European Union, focusing on how EU directives, policy goals, and legal frameworks shape national responses to gender-based violence, discrimination, and education. The chapter also presents a historical overview of how Danish sex education has developed from its early focus on reproduction and disease prevention to today's broader inclusion of topics like gender identity, consent, and digital behavior. The consequences of inadequate sexuality education are also discussed. The chapter concludes by highlighting key organizations that shape the pedagogical field through policy engagement and grassroots practices. It establishes the wider policy and pedagogical landscape for the thesis and prepares the reader for the empirical and analytical discussions that follow.

1.1 Norm-Critical Pedagogy in the Context of Danish Sex Education

In the Nordic region, norm-critical pedagogy has developed as a tool to question the underlying assumptions embedded in educational practices. Rather than accepting prevailing ideas about what is considered normal, norm-critical pedagogy encourages students and teachers to reflect on how norms are constructed, who they benefit, and whom they exclude (Bromseth & Darj, 2010; Simovska, 2018). Within sexuality education, this perspective enables educators to challenge dominant assumptions about gender, sexuality, ability, and relational behavior, which often go unexamined in traditional curricula.

By challenging mainstream educational discourse, norm-critical pedagogy supports more inclusive learning environments for students often marginalized by dominant norms. It questions the assumption of neutrality in the classroom, including the idea that pedagogical content can be delivered without cultural or ideological bias, and instead foregrounds the power dynamics that shape everyday interactions, representations, and silences. In doing so, it aligns with broader feminist and critical pedagogical traditions that emphasize dialogical learning, affective awareness, and student agency (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970).

In the Danish context, these pedagogical approaches are especially relevant. As Roien et al. (2022) point out, sex education in Denmark has historically been framed through narrow lenses, such as reproduction, disease prevention, and legal responsibility, while failing to

address the ways in which social norms structure which students are seen, heard, and supported. Norm-critical pedagogy responds to these omissions by making visible the social conditions that shape student experiences and by creating space to explore alternative narratives and identities within educational settings. It does so by critically examining the norms that are often taken for granted, such as heteronormativity, whiteness, and able-bodiedness, and encouraging students to question whose experiences are centered and whose are excluded. Through dialogical learning, reflexivity, and the validation of lived experience, norm-critical pedagogy enables students to articulate identities and perspectives that may otherwise be marginalized, thereby fostering greater recognition, inclusion, and epistemic justice (Bromseth & Darj, 2010; Simovska, 2018; Ahmed, 2012).

1.2 The Role of the European Union

The European Union (EU) is a political and economic partnership of 27 member countries, including Denmark. Although education is mostly a national responsibility, the EU plays an influential role through laws, policy guidance, and financial support. Through soft governance tools like the Open Method of Coordination, the EU encourages countries to work together to improve social inclusion and gender equality. Education and youth policies often receive funding from programs like Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe, which help support pilot projects, teacher training, and curriculum development across member states (European Commission, 2023).

EU directives are legal instruments that set goals all member states must achieve, but each country can decide how to do this in practice. For example, Directive (EU) 2024/1385 requires countries to criminalize all forms of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse, while also providing specific support for victims who face multiple forms of discrimination (European Parliament and Council, 2024). This directive makes intersectionality part of EU law by requiring states to address how experiences of violence are shaped by overlapping factors such as gender, race, ability, and sexual orientation.

The EU also includes protections against discrimination in Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which prohibits discrimination on grounds such as sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age, and sexual orientation (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, n.d.). Although these laws provide a strong foundation, scholars like Lombardo and Verloo (2009) and Kantola and Nousiainen (2009) point out that the way

member states implement them can vary widely. Some countries, including Denmark, have been slow to fully integrate intersectional thinking into national laws and educational policy.

Recent scholarship has applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and feminist policy critique to educational contexts to examine how norms, risk, and identity are constructed in institutional discourse (Fairclough, 2013; Wodak, 2001). Bacchi's (2009) "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) framework interrogates the assumptions embedded in policy framings, revealing what is problematized, what is silenced, and whose subjectivities are made visible. In sex education, this allows a shift from asking what is taught to asking how and why certain topics are framed in particular ways, and what effects these representations produce (Gavey, 2005).

This thesis builds on such approaches by using CDA and WPR to examine the discursive construction of intersectionality and normativity in both formal policy and NGO-led pedagogy.

1.3 The Development of Danish Sex Education

Denmark was one of the first countries to introduce mandatory sex education in 1970. It became compulsory in Danish schools for children ages 6–15 (the folkeskole, covering primary and lower secondary education) (Nordics.info, 2024). At the time, lessons were primarily focused on reproduction, menstruation, and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections. These topics were typically taught in biology, social studies, or literature classes, and little attention was paid to emotional, relational, or social aspects of sexuality (Helweg-Larsen & Larsen, 2002).

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was growing public awareness of the need for more holistic education that includes themes like love, communication, and self-esteem. Despite this shift, implementation remained uneven. Teachers often lacked specific training, and there was no standardized curriculum for sex education across schools (Helweg-Larsen & Larsen, 2002).

As Danish society became more diverse and digitally engaged in the early 2000s, calls for reform intensified. Topics such as body image, consent, and digital safety gained relevance. Yet, teaching materials often continued to reflect a narrow, biologically centered model. Roien et al. (2022) argue that curricula frequently assumed a "neutral" student, typically white, cisgender, heterosexual, and able-bodied, thus rendering the lived experiences of many students invisible. This invisibility undermines the relevance and effectiveness of sex

education, contributing to feelings of marginalization and disengagement (Ahmed, 2012; Allen, 2011; Larangeira, 2023).

Moreover, this failure to address intersecting identities can reinforce systemic inequality by positioning dominant norms as universal. When LGBTQ+ students, racialized minorities, or youth with disabilities do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their access to knowledge and recognition is limited. Crenshaw's (1989) and Fraser's (2000) work underscores how such exclusions are not only educational oversights but manifestations of structural injustice.

Despite progressive discourses, intersectionality remains more symbolic than embedded in Danish sex education. Lombardo and Verloo (2009) and Kantola and Nousiainen (2009) have demonstrated how intersectionality is often invoked rhetorically in European policy but rarely operationalized. Ahmed (2012) describes this as “non-performative” diversity: gestures toward inclusion that do not produce institutional change. In Danish schools, this can take the form of LGBTQ+ awareness weeks or posters about diversity, while core curricula continue to center normative assumptions (Roien et al., 2022).

This thesis aims to address this gap by analyzing how intersectionality is constructed, enacted, or foreclosed in both policy texts and educational practice. By situating this analysis within a historical and institutional context, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about how to make sexuality education more inclusive, reflective, and responsive to diverse student realities.

1.4 The Current Landscape of Danish Sex Education

As mentioned earlier, Denmark has undertaken several reforms in recent years to enhance the quality and scope of sex education. In 2021, the Danish government allocated 15 million DKK to update teaching materials and improve teacher training (Nordics.info, 2024). In 2023, sex education was made mandatory for students in upper secondary education (gymnasium), ensuring that youth aged 16 to 19 continue engaging with these topics beyond elementary school (folkeskole) (Nordics.info, 2023). These policy shifts reflect growing recognition of sex education as essential for promoting equality, consent, and inclusion.

However, persistent challenges remain. Sex education is not treated as an independent subject, it is taught through a cross-curricular approach in subjects such as biology, social studies, or health. This decentralized structure results in wide variation in the quality and

content of education delivered across schools. Roien et al. (2022) highlight that many teachers feel ill-equipped to address sensitive issues, including those related to sexual orientation, cultural diversity, or digital behavior, due to lack of training and clear guidelines.

Additionally, dominant discourses continue to shape the pedagogical content and tone of sex education. As Roien et al. (2022) observe, prevailing narratives often center reproduction, disease prevention, and legal responsibility. While these topics are important, they frequently overshadow affirmative discussions about pleasure, identity, and emotional literacy.

Moreover, normative assumptions about who the student is, a white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied subject, remain largely unchallenged in many classrooms (Ahmed, 2012).

This gap between inclusive rhetoric and everyday practice contributes to the marginalization of students who do not conform to dominant norms. LGBTQ+ youth, students of color, and young people with disabilities may find that their experiences and needs are not reflected in teaching materials or classroom discussions. This not only limits the effectiveness of sex education as a health intervention but also undermines its potential as a tool for recognition, belonging, and empowerment (Crenshaw, 1989; Fraser, 2000).

While national reforms represent a step forward, their implementation often depends on local initiative, school leadership, and individual teacher commitment. Without binding requirements for instructional hours, curricular content, or teacher certification, the realization of inclusive sex education remains inconsistent. Thus, structural change is still needed to ensure that all students receive education that is not only comprehensive but also reflective of the diverse realities they inhabit.

In sum, the current landscape of Danish sex education is marked by both progress and limitation. Reforms have expanded formal mandates, but pedagogical practices remain uneven and normatively constrained. Addressing this requires more than policy adjustments, it necessitates a systemic commitment to embedding intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and structural inclusivity at all levels of education.

1.5 Consequences of Inadequate Sexuality Education

While the introduction briefly outlined the broader implications of sexuality education for youth well-being and equity, this section delves deeper into the social consequences of inadequate, inconsistent, or exclusionary approaches. These outcomes extend beyond individual knowledge gaps and shape broader patterns of inequality and marginalization.

Research shows that when young people lack access to comprehensive, inclusive sex education, they are more vulnerable to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and sexual coercion or violence (UNESCO, 2018). Without critical engagement with consent, gender norms, or emotional boundaries, youth may turn to peers or pornography, sources that often perpetuate misinformation and obscure issues of power and respect (Haberland & Rogow, 2015).

Critically, the absence of intersectional and structural dimensions limits the effectiveness of sex education. In a review of 22 programs, Haberland (2015) found that those addressing gender and power were five times more effective at reducing risky sexual behavior. This highlights that inclusive, norm-critical approaches are not only ethically important but demonstrably more impactful.

A European Parliament report underscores that sexuality education is essential to emotional well-being, gender-based violence prevention, and bodily autonomy, especially for marginalized groups (Michielsen & Ivanova, 2022). When LGBTQ+ youth, racialized students, or students with disabilities are excluded from teaching materials and discussions, they often experience invisibility and alienation, undermining both educational outcomes and the goals of inclusion and safety (UNESCO, 2018; Ahmed, 2012).

In Denmark, these dynamics appear in the persistent focus on reproduction, risk, and individual responsibility. While important, these framings often displace conversations about pleasure, identity, or structural power. Roien et al. (2022) argue that this narrow conception of sex education positions students as individually responsible for managing risk, while ignoring the social conditions that produce vulnerability.

In sum, inadequate sex education is not simply a missed opportunity, it is a mechanism through which inequality is reproduced. A truly inclusive approach, grounded in intersectionality and norm-critical pedagogy, is essential not only for individual empowerment but also for democratic participation, public health, and social justice. Without it, the promise of education as a space of recognition, safety, and transformation remains unfulfilled.

1.6 NGO Contributions and Civil Society Engagement

Due to persistent gaps in public sex education, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have become key actors in supplementing and innovating educational content in Denmark. Among

the most prominent is Sex & Samfund (Sex & Society), also known as the Danish Family Planning Association. Since 2008, they have organized the national campaign Uge Sex (Week Six), which invites schools to voluntarily engage with themed educational materials on sexuality, identity, consent, and digital safety (Sex & Samfund, 2022). In 2023, more than 21,000 teachers participated, signaling the initiative's broad reach (Nordics.info, 2023).

Each year, Uge Sex introduces a theme designed to resonate with young people's lived experiences. For example, the 2024 campaign "Skærmkrop" (Screen Body) addressed how digital environments affect body image and self-esteem. While these campaigns often foreground affective and social dimensions of sexuality, scholars have critiqued their underlying assumptions. Simovska and Jensen (2015) point out that the campaign's universalist framing tends to overlook how race, class, gender identity, and ability shape student experiences. As Roien et al. (2022) argue, the materials often promote a notion of personal responsibility for boundary-setting and emotional regulation while neglecting the structural forces that constrain students' agency.

This critique aligns with broader feminist concerns about "additive inclusion" (Lombardo & Verloo, 2009), where difference is rhetorically acknowledged but not structurally embedded. As Ahmed (2012) contends, such forms of symbolic inclusion can function as institutional shields against deeper change. When sex education emphasizes "respect for all" without addressing how power and normativity shape who gets heard or protected, it risks reproducing exclusion in more subtle ways.

In contrast, other NGOs such as Normstormerne (The Norm Stormers) adopt a more overtly norm-critical approach. Based in Copenhagen and Aarhus, they facilitate workshops that interrogate dominant norms around gender, sexuality, and identity. Their sessions rely on participatory methods and facilitator positionality, often drawing on personal experiences as LGBTQ+, racialized, or disabled individuals. This approach helps shift the epistemic dynamics of the classroom, validating marginalized perspectives and creating space for structural critique (Women, Gender & Research Journal, 2023).

Such practices are not merely pedagogical innovations but interventions into what counts as legitimate knowledge. Freire's (1970) concept of dialogical learning and hooks' (1994) notion of education as the practice of freedom underpin these models, where the goal is not only to inform but to transform. Cammarota and Fine (2008) similarly emphasize how youth

participatory education enables students to become agents of change in their own communities.

However, these interventions remain peripheral. Initiatives like Normstormerne often depend on precarious funding, limited geographical reach, and individual champions within schools or municipalities. Without structural mandates or national integration, their contributions risk being seen as supplementary rather than central (Lombardo & Verloo, 2009).

Another notable actor is LGBT+ Danmark, the national advocacy organization for LGBTQ+ rights. In recent years, they have expanded their work in schools by developing teaching materials, offering workshops, and supporting educators through training modules aligned with Denmark's national LGBT+ Action Plan 2022–2025 (Børne- og Undervisningsministeriet, 2022; LGBT+ Danmark, n.d.-a). Their efforts bridge grassroots activism and institutional reform, advocating for the structural embedding of inclusive practices in all school levels (LGBT+ Danmark, n.d.-b).

Taken together, these organizations form a vibrant civil society landscape that not only supplements but also critiques state-led sex education. Through norm-critical pedagogies, intersectional awareness, and participatory methods, they challenge normative framings and expand what is imaginable, and teachable, within sexuality education. Their work highlights the potential of civil society to act as both a catalyst for reform and a reminder of what is yet to be institutionalized.

1.7 The Sexualisterne Collective

Sexualisterne is a youth-led teaching initiative based in Aalborg that exemplifies how norm-critical and intersectional pedagogies can be embedded in public educational settings.

Building on the work of NGOs like Normstormerne, Sexualisterne pushes further by situating youth themselves as facilitators of sexual education. Composed of educators aged 19 to 25, the collective designs and delivers participatory lectures for 8th graders in elementary schools, focusing on topics such as consent, pleasure, boundaries, gender norms, and digital behavior (Aalborg Kommune, 2025).

What makes Sexualisterne particularly distinct is their emphasis on co-creation and affective safety. Each session begins by establishing a shared “safe space,” followed by creative methods, such as metaphor-based exercises and anonymous Q&A tools, that allow students to engage without fear of judgment (Aalborg Kommune, 2025). Unlike more standardized

campaigns like Uge Sex, their approach is flexible and adapted to the specific group they are working with, allowing for responsiveness to student needs while also introducing structural critiques of normativity (Ungdomsringen, 2022).

Their pedagogical strategy aligns with the principles of norm-critical education, explicitly interrogating how whiteness, heteronormativity, and ableism operate as silent norms in the classroom (Roien & de la Motte Gundersen, 2018). These sessions do not merely diversify content, but shift the epistemic terrain of sex education by centering lived experience, student agency, and dialogical learning. In doing so, they reflect broader traditions in feminist and critical pedagogy, including Freire's (1970) concept of dialogical education and hooks' (1994) emphasis on teaching as a practice of freedom.

Importantly, Sexualisterne's institutional positioning, funded by Aalborg Municipality and embedded in local school programming, demonstrates a rare case where intersectional and norm-critical education is not just tolerated but structurally supported. However, their model also reveals tensions, such as how to sustain radical pedagogy in an educational system still shaped by behaviorist logics and "neutral" curricular framings (Roien et al., 2022). As such, they represent both a hopeful intervention and a case study in the fragility of progressive educational reform.

Given the relevance of Sexualisterne's work to the themes explored in this thesis, an interview with the collective's project coordinator was conducted and will be analyzed as part of the empirical data.

2.0 Theoretical framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical perspectives that underpin the analysis of Danish sex education policy and pedagogical practice in this thesis. Drawing on intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony, it builds a comprehensive framework for examining how dominant norms are reproduced, challenged, or negotiated in sexuality education. These theories are selected not only for their analytical utility, but also for their normative commitment to social justice, recognition, and structural critique. The framework guides the thesis in analyzing how sex education constructs subject positions, whose experiences are centered or marginalized, and how educational settings can become both sites of normalization and resistance.

2.1 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, originally developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), is used here as a foundational lens for understanding how social categories, such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability, intersect to produce unique configurations of privilege and oppression. Rather than treating these categories as separate, intersectionality emphasizes their simultaneity and co-constitution. In the context of sexuality education, this framework is vital for revealing how educational materials and practices may center certain experiences while rendering others invisible.

Intersectionality in this thesis is not merely a theoretical lens, but a political commitment to foregrounding the lived realities of students whose identities do not align with dominant norms. For instance, a lesson on consent may be interpreted very differently by a white, heterosexual, cisgender student than by a queer, racialized student who has experienced marginalization. Intersectionality helps surface these differences and demands attention to how structural inequalities shape students engagement with education.

2.2 Norm-Critical Pedagogy

Building on the insights of intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy (Bromseth & Darj, 2010; Simovska, 2018) provides a pedagogical orientation that actively interrogates what is considered "normal" in educational discourse. Developed in Nordic feminist and queer educational contexts, norm-critical pedagogy goes beyond inclusion to ask: which norms

structure the curriculum? Whose experiences are legitimized, and whose are marginalized or erased?

This approach encourages reflexivity, dialogical engagement, and recognition of students as situated knowers. Rather than "adding" diverse content, norm-critical pedagogy seeks to expose and unsettle dominant assumptions, such as heteronormativity, whiteness, able-bodiedness, and emotional self-regulation, that often remain unspoken yet deeply influential in educational environments.

Importantly, norm-critical pedagogy also values emotional and affective dimensions of learning. Discomfort, disagreement, or confusion are not viewed as failures but as entry points for critical reflection. This aligns with feminist pedagogical traditions that treat the classroom not as a neutral space, but as a political site where power, identity, and knowledge are actively negotiated (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970).

2.3 Gramscian Hegemony

To understand how certain norms maintain their dominance within education, this thesis incorporates Antonio Gramsci's (1971) theory of cultural hegemony. Gramsci argues that power is sustained not only through coercion but through the production of "common sense", those ideas that become so normalized they are no longer questioned. In education, this can manifest as seemingly apolitical discourses about "respect," "responsibility," or "neutrality," which in fact carry and reproduce normative values.

Gramsci's insights are crucial for this thesis's critique of depoliticized inclusion. As demonstrated in policy documents and NGO materials, values like inclusion or diversity are often deployed in ways that reaffirm rather than unsettle dominant ideologies. Gramsci helps explain how such practices function ideologically, maintaining consent for the status quo even under the appearance of progress.

In educational settings, hegemonic discourses become embedded in language, curriculum, institutional routines, and teacher expectations. This normalizes the figure of the "neutral student" and makes normativity appear natural rather than constructed. By foregrounding this ideological dimension, the thesis draws on Gramsci to interrogate how educational institutions serve not only as places of learning but also as sites of ideological reproduction.

2.4 Theoretical Integration

Taken together, these three theoretical perspectives offer a multidimensional approach to analyzing sexuality education. Intersectionality centers structural inequalities, norm-critical pedagogy offers a method for engaging with these inequalities in the classroom, and Gramscian hegemony reveals how power operates through consensus and invisibility. These theories are not applied in isolation, but in dynamic interplay: normativity is both a discursive and institutional phenomenon, one that must be interrogated at the intersection of identity, pedagogy, and ideology.

In this thesis, the theoretical framework is operationalized through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's WPR approach, detailed in the methodology chapter. These methods allow for a nuanced examination of how sex education materials construct normative assumptions and regulate recognition. This framework does not aim to offer a single explanatory model, but to support a layered, reflexive analysis that accounts for complexity, contradiction, and change within educational discourse and practice.

3.0 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological foundation of the thesis, detailing the research design, data sources, analytical strategies, and ethical considerations that guide the study. Grounded in a social constructionist ontology and a feminist epistemological stance, the methodology reflects a commitment to situating knowledge production within the dynamics of power, discourse, and positionality. The chapter begins by outlining the epistemological assumptions that inform the study, followed by an explanation of the abductive logic and adaptive theory approach used to structure the empirical analysis. It then introduces the multi-source data set, including policy documents, NGO materials, fieldnotes from youth workshops, and a semi-structured interview. The final sections describe how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) framework were applied, and discuss the ethical challenges and reflexive strategies embedded in the research process. This chapter serves as both a justification of methodological choices and a reflection on the political and ethical dimensions of researching sexuality, education, and intersectionality.

3.1 Epistemological and Methodological Foundations

This thesis is grounded in a social constructionist ontology and a situated feminist epistemology. It approaches concepts such as "problematic sexual behaviour" or "consent" not as objective realities, but as discursively constructed within specific social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Knowledge is understood as partial, situated, and relational, shaped by the authors' positionality and by the historical and structural conditions in which it is produced (Haraway, 1988; Ahmed, 2012).

Methodologically, the study is guided by an abductive research logic, operationalized through Derek Layder's (1998) adaptive theory approach. While not positioned as part of the theoretical framework itself, adaptive theory has served as a flexible methodological scaffold that allows theoretical concepts to evolve in continuous dialogue with the empirical material. Rather than working in a purely deductive or inductive mode, the analysis has moved iteratively between theory and data, identifying sensitizing concepts at the outset, while remaining open to new insights that emerge from the field.

This abductive process has allowed for both depth and responsiveness in the analysis. Early concepts such as intersectionality, normativity, and performativity were used to guide data

collection and initial coding. As fieldwork and policy analysis progressed, these concepts were revisited and adjusted to reflect the empirical realities and tensions observed. This aligns with the core ethos of adaptive theory: to maintain a dynamic interplay between conceptual frameworks and empirical complexity (Layder, 1998).

The methodological stance adopted here reflects a broader feminist and critical commitment to knowledge production that is reflexive, responsive, and politically engaged. Rather than aspiring to neutrality or objectivity, the research design embraces the epistemological value of situated inquiry, acknowledging the ways in which power and positionality shape both research questions and interpretive outcomes.

3.2 Empirical Material and Data Collection

The empirical foundation of this study is composed of multiple data sources that collectively enable a situated, multi-perspectival analysis of how sex education is framed, delivered, and contested in Denmark. This multi-layered dataset allows for triangulation across institutional discourse, pedagogical practice, and youth perspectives, supporting the study's commitment to intersectionality and norm-critical analysis.

The primary data sources include:

- Danish and EU-level policy documents related to sex education, gender equality, anti-discrimination, and educational inclusion.
- Teaching materials and public campaigns produced by NGOs such as Sex & Samfund, Normstormerne, and Sexualisterne.
- A semi-structured interview with the project coordinator of Sexualisterne.
- Fieldnotes from two youth workshops conducted at the Danish Youth Democracy Festival, as part of the FIERCE project. The author participated as a notetaker and observer.

These data sources were selected for their ability to illuminate both top-down institutional framings and bottom-up educational encounters. While the FIERCE project is not exclusively focused on sex education, its intersectional, participatory approach and its engagement with youth on topics such as sexism, racism, and consent make it a relevant empirical site. The inclusion of this material expands the analytical scope by capturing how intersectionality and normativity are negotiated in real-time, dialogical settings.

Each data source was treated as a discursive artefact and was analyzed with attention to both its explicit content and its underlying assumptions. Across all materials, particular focus was placed on how subject positions are constructed, which identities and experiences are centered or silenced, and how the “problem” of sexuality education is represented.

Data were organized and coded using a set of sensitizing concepts, including normativity, inclusion, responsibility, and vulnerability. These concepts served as analytical entry points and were adjusted over time in accordance with adaptive theory. Some were derived from existing theoretical and policy literature, while others emerged inductively during the engagement with empirical material. This dual approach, moving between predefined and emergent concepts, reflects the abductive and iterative character of the research design and supports the identification of broader discursive patterns and contradictions.

3.3 Analytical Framework: CDA and WPR

To analyze the empirical material, this study employs a dual analytical framework combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi’s “What’s the Problem Represented to Be?” (WPR) approach. These methods are complementary: while CDA focuses on the linguistic and structural features of discourse, WPR interrogates the epistemological and political assumptions embedded in problem framings. Together, they offer a layered strategy for examining how sex education policies and pedagogies (re)produce, challenge, or negotiate normative assumptions.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (2013) and Wodak (2001), provides tools for exploring how language constitutes social reality. It examines how discourses shape subject positions, define what is sayable or unsayable, and normalize particular ways of knowing and being. In this thesis, CDA is used to analyze lexical choices, framing strategies, narrative structures, intertextual references, and silences across the empirical materials. These elements are examined to understand how educational subjects, such as students, teachers, or bystanders, are positioned in relation to power, normativity, and inclusion.

Bacchi’s WPR approach (2009) complements this by shifting the analytical gaze from what is being said to how the problem itself is constructed. Rather than asking what solutions are offered, WPR asks: What is the problem represented to be? What assumptions underpin this representation? What is left unproblematic or invisible? What effects does this framing have

for those who are governed by it? This approach is especially useful in the analysis of policy documents and educational campaigns, as it reveals how particular issues, such as sexual risk, consent, or inclusion, are framed as problems requiring specific kinds of responses.

The combination of CDA and WPR allows for a multi-dimensional reading of the data. While CDA uncovers how normativity is produced at the level of language and interaction, WPR exposes the deeper political and ideological logics that shape institutional and pedagogical discourse. Together, they illuminate how policies and practices construct normative assumptions, regulate inclusion, and structure the conditions under which intersectional identities are recognized or erased.

This dual framework also supports the broader aims of the thesis: to interrogate how educational discourses function as technologies of power, and to identify where resistance or transformation becomes possible. In doing so, it aligns closely with the theoretical framework grounded in intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony.

3.4 Applying CDA and WPR to the Empirical Material

The analytical framework outlined above was applied to each type of empirical material with attention to its specific context, discursive characteristics, and intended function. While all sources were examined using both Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach, the balance between these tools varied depending on the nature of the material.

Policy Documents

Danish and EU-level policy texts were analyzed to uncover how values such as inclusion, respect, and equality are discursively constructed. CDA was used to examine tone, terminology, implicit norms, and absences, such as the lack of references to race, queerness, or structural power. WPR enabled a deeper interrogation of how sex education is problematized: Is the issue framed as a lack of knowledge, a matter of individual responsibility, or a structural failure? This dual lens revealed how policies often construct a universal student subject while neglecting intersectional realities.

NGO Teaching Materials

Campaigns and curricular materials from Sex & Samfund and Normstormerne were examined to assess how normative expectations are communicated in non-governmental educational content. CDA was used to analyze textual and visual elements, including the use

of inclusive language, imagery, and affective appeals. WPR facilitated an analysis of how these materials define problems such as, online risk, boundary-setting, gender-based violence, and what assumptions guide their proposed solutions. This approach made visible the tensions between surface-level inclusivity and deeper normative reproduction.

Interview with Sexualisterne

The semi-structured interview with Sexualisterne's project coordinator was approached as both a narrative and a site of reflective practice. CDA focused on how the educator constructed their role, navigated professional boundaries, and described the affective and institutional challenges of norm-critical pedagogy. WPR was used to examine how the coordinator framed the pedagogical "problem" being addressed, whether as a gap in knowledge, a need for representation, or a lack of structural recognition, and how they envisioned change within and beyond the classroom.

FIERCE Fieldnotes

Although not full transcripts, the fieldnotes from the FIERCE workshops captured key dialogue, behavioral cues, and group dynamics during student discussions of bystander dilemmas related to sexism and racism. CDA was employed to analyze how students responded to facilitators, engaged with normative assumptions, and expressed resistance or solidarity. WPR was used to reflect on how the workshop itself constructed social issues: which dilemmas were foregrounded, which identities were recognized, and how students were positioned as moral agents or passive observers.

By applying CDA and WPR across diverse data types, this section of the research produced a layered analysis that attends to both surface discourse and deeper structural assumptions. It allowed for the identification of cross-cutting patterns, such as the construction of a "neutral" student subject or the responsabilization of youth, as well as points of rupture where counter-hegemonic practices emerged. This methodological approach supported the thesis's aim to explore how normative discourses are reproduced, challenged, or reimagined across multiple institutional and pedagogical sites.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive themes and the involvement of minors and potentially vulnerable participants, ethical considerations have been central to every stage of this research. The project was conducted in accordance with Aalborg University's ethical guidelines and the

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Ethical care was exercised not only as a procedural obligation but as an epistemological and relational principle, consistent with the feminist foundation of the thesis.

Informed Consent and Anonymity

All participants were informed about the project's purpose, the use of data, and their right to withdraw at any point. The interview with Sexualisterne's project coordinator was conducted with informed consent, and identifying information has been anonymized. For the FIERCE workshops, fieldnotes were produced through non-intrusive observation in a public setting. The facilitators and participants were made aware of the note-taking, and no personal identifiers were recorded. Anonymity was protected through the use of pseudonyms and careful removal of any potentially identifying contextual details.

Sensitivity to Vulnerability and Disclosure

Several forms of vulnerability were anticipated and encountered during the research, particularly in contexts where students anonymously disclosed experiences related to sexual boundaries, assault, or discrimination. The Sexualisterne sessions revealed the blurred boundary between pedagogical work and affective care, as facilitators, many of whom are themselves young and non-professionally credentialed, were tasked with navigating serious disclosures. In response, the project coordinator developed a formal procedure for mandatory reporting of anonymous disclosures, which was treated as part of the ethical infrastructure of the thesis.

As the author of this thesis, I approached these data with caution and humility, ensuring that disclosures were not overinterpreted, speculated upon, or instrumentalized. Rather than viewing students vulnerability as a data point, I treated it as a prompt for institutional and ethical reflection, on the emotional labor borne by educators and the limitations of current support structures in schools.

Authors Positionality and Reflexivity

Part of the motivation for undertaking this project stems from my experiences with sexuality education as a young person. Looking back, I found the education received to be inadequate, overly focused on biological reproduction, and lacking in relevance to real-life challenges and diverse identities. This personal reflection sparked a desire to investigate how sex education can be more inclusive, meaningful, and responsive to the lived experiences of students. It also shaped my commitment to centering norm-critical and intersectional

perspectives in the research.

My positionality, as a 26 year old, white, Icelandic, feminist academic with training in gender studies and experience in youth and activist spaces, inevitably shaped the research process. The decision of choosing to approach this positionality not as a bias to be minimized, but as a lens to be acknowledged and reflexively negotiated. This included ongoing reflection on how their background and values influenced what questions are asked, how student behavior is interpreted, and what is seen as “meaningful” within the field.

The project engages with the concept of *situated knowledge* (Haraway, 1988), recognizing that knowledge is never neutral or detached, but always produced in relation to the researcher’s standpoint and the research setting. This perspective guided my decisions to foreground marginal voices, to problematize normative assumptions, and to reflect on my own interpretive power. Ethical awareness thus extended beyond consent forms or data handling, it shaped the entire process of knowledge production.

Use of Generative AI Tools

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and Copilot were used during the thesis process for language refinement, structural feedback, brainstorming, translation and conceptual clarification. These tools were not employed to generate analytical content or write empirical sections. All AI- assisted inputs were critically reviewed, edited, and embedded within a human-led, academically rigorous process. AI tools were used to assist in the translation of Danish-language policy texts, pedagogical materials, and interview content into English. This was necessary due to the author’s limited fluency in Danish and served as a practical means of engaging with national documents and empirical data. All translated content was reviewed, interpreted, and incorporated by the author with careful attention to context and meaning. The use of AI for translation is disclosed here in the interest of transparency and to acknowledge the mediated nature of cross-linguistic analysis

4.0 Analysis

This chapter presents an integrated analysis of empirical material, combining findings with critical interpretation through the lenses of intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" (WPR) approach, the chapter examines how discourses within Danish sex education construct normative assumptions, shape subject positions, and negotiate inclusion and exclusion. Rather than separating findings from interpretation, the chapter is organized thematically to reflect the interplay of policy discourse, pedagogical practice, and structural positioning. Each section engages a different discursive domain, from institutional policy to NGO campaigns, grassroots teaching collectives, and youth workshops, and interrogates how normative framings are reproduced, challenged, or rearticulated in practice. By engaging both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices, the chapter responds directly to the thesis's problem formulation and illuminates how Danish sex education is shaped by intersecting forces of discourse, power, and institutional constraint.

4.1 Policy Documents: Danish and EU-level

Danish and EU-level policy documents on sexuality education often present themselves as progressive, inclusive, and evidence-based (Directive (EU) 2024/1385; Nordics.info, 2024). However, as this analysis will demonstrate, such texts rely heavily on normative assumptions and depoliticized framings. These framings construct an idealized, universal student subject and systematically obscure the structural conditions that shape how different students experience sexuality education (Roien, Simovska, & Nyby, 2022). This section interrogates not only what is stated in policy, but also what remains unsaid, the silences, evasions, and affective appeals that underpin the institutional logic of inclusion (Fairclough, 2013).

Inclusion as Individual Responsibility

The Danish Ministry of Education refers to "informed decision-making," "respect for diversity," and "democratic citizenship." While these signal inclusive values, they often frame sexuality education as a matter of personal responsibility. For instance:

"Der skal i undervisningen lægges vægt på elevernes udvikling af en ansvarlig holdning til sundhed, trivsel og seksualitet..."

(Translation: "Teaching must emphasize the development of students responsible attitudes toward health, well-being, and sexuality...") (Undervisningsministeriet, n.d.-b)

Such phrasing locates risk and responsibility within the individual student, echoing Bacchi's (2009) "problem representation" framework where the burden is shifted from institutional structures to individual adaptation. This logic resonates with broader neoliberal discourses of self-management and moral hygiene (Rose, 1999).

Students navigating racism, homophobia, or gendered violence are positioned as if their safety depends solely on personal boundary-setting. The student becomes a "risk subject", responsible for performing resilience, rather than receiving institutional support.

The Neutral Student

Policy texts often avoid explicit references to marginalized groups, favoring universal terms like "all students." For example:

"Formålet med undervisningen i sundheds- og seksualundervisning og familiekundskab er, at eleverne tilegner sig indsigt i vilkår og værdier, der påvirker sundhed, trivsel og familieliv." (*Translation: "The purpose of teaching health and sex education and family studies is for students to gain insight into conditions and values that affect health, well-being, and family life."*) (Undervisningsministeriet, n.d.-b)

This language suggests neutrality but masks normative assumptions. As Roien et al. (2022) argue, such universalism positions a white, cisgender, able-bodied, heterosexual student as the default. Marginalized experiences are excluded from what is recognized as legitimate knowledge within policy discourse.

At the EU level, policies are somewhat more explicit. The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 notes:

"The Strategy presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress by 2025 towards a gender-equal Europe." (European Commission, 2020)

While commendable, such strategies often stop short of mandating structural integration. Similarly, Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights prohibits discrimination "based on sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation," yet offers little in terms of educational enforcement mechanisms.

Symbolic vs. Structural Inclusion

Symbolic inclusion refers to rhetorical gestures, like referencing diversity or intersectionality, without translating these into concrete mandates. Structural inclusion, in contrast, would

entail binding commitments such as mandatory teacher training, curricular guidelines, allocated instructional hours, and accountability frameworks.

Symbolic inclusion: “All students should feel safe.”

Structural inclusion: “All educators must be trained to address racism, queerphobia, and ableism, and all curricula must be evaluated for inclusivity.”

Current Danish policies rarely cross this threshold. The concept of intersectionality appears as a “non-performative,” acknowledged but unacted upon (Ahmed, 2012).

Vagueness, Silence, and the Illusion of Progressivism

Critical actors have identified these shortcomings. The Danish Institute for Human Rights emphasizes:

"Seksualundervisning skal ruste børn og unge til at kunne håndtere grænser, samtykke og køn på en tryk og inkluderende måde. Det kræver mere end undervisning i prævention og kønssygdomme."

(Translation: "Sexuality education must equip children and young people to navigate boundaries, consent, and gender in a safe and inclusive way. That requires more than just teaching about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.") (Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023)

"Skolen skal ikke være med til at opretholde stereotype normer og forestillinger om, hvordan man skal være dreng eller pige."

(Translation: "The school must not contribute to upholding stereotypical norms and ideas about how to be a boy or a girl.") (Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2023)

Even Directive (EU) 2024/1385, while naming intersecting vulnerabilities, lacks binding educational implementation strategies:

“Victims experiencing intersectional discrimination are at a heightened risk of violence... women with disabilities, women with a minority racial or ethnic background, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or intersex persons... should consequently receive specific protection and support.” (European Parliament and Council, 2024)

Without enforceable guidelines or evaluation structures, such statements risk remaining symbolic. Policy documents invoke terms like “empowerment” or “respect,” but often fail to clarify the mechanisms through which these values should be enacted or institutionalized.

This mirrors Gramsci's (1971) theory of passive revolution: critical terms are absorbed into dominant frameworks in ways that neutralize their transformative potential. Diversity is aestheticized rather than structurally embedded.

Time, Training, and Professional Authority

In Denmark, sexuality education lacks standardized hours and certification requirements. Teachers vary in preparedness, some schools delegate responsibility to undertrained staff, others rely on NGOs (Roien et al., 2022). This creates a patchwork system in which the depth and quality of education depend on local initiative.

There is also political hesitance to institutionalize norm-critical pedagogy. Intersectionality is treated as an “add-on” rather than a foundational principle (Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009). Discussions of racism, ableism, or queerphobia often hinge on individual teacher initiative, further marginalizing these issues.

Closing Reflection

Danish and EU-level policy discourses construct an idealized landscape, progressive, inclusive, and democratic. But deeper analysis reveals how structural commitment is replaced by symbolic gesture. Inclusion is proclaimed, but not structurally enacted. Until education policies adopt binding mandates, teacher training programs, and implementation monitoring, intersectional and norm-critical sex education will remain aspirational.

A shift is needed, from symbolic inclusion to structural transformation. Future policy must go beyond stating values and move toward institutionalizing them. This means minimum hour requirements, teacher certification, integration of intersectionality in core curricula, and transparent evaluation frameworks. Without these, inclusive sex education risks being a promise never fulfilled.

4.2 NGO Material: Risk, Responsibility, and Individualization

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Sex & Samfund play a prominent role in delivering sex education across Denmark. Their flagship initiative, *Uge Sex* (Week 6), is widely used by schools and perceived as inclusive and progressive. However, a closer discourse analysis reveals a strong alignment with individualizing, risk-oriented, and depoliticized framings that obscure structural dimensions of inequality and reinforce dominant norms.

The Neoliberal Logic of Responsibility

A dominant discourse in *Uge Sex* is that of personal responsibility. Students are encouraged to make informed choices, know their boundaries, and behave respectfully online (Sex & Samfund, 2024). While valuable in intent, this reflects a neoliberal logic of responsabilization that shifts the burden of navigating inequality onto the individual (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rose, 1999). For example:

"Hvordan du har det med din krop, afhænger af de valg, du træffer online." (*Translation: "How you feel about your body depends on the choices you make online."*)

This framing assumes equal access to self-regulation and fails to address how algorithmic systems, racialized beauty standards, or socioeconomic differences shape vulnerability and exposure. The student is constructed as an entrepreneurial subject tasked with managing risk through emotional discipline.

Another quote from the *Skærmkrop* materials illustrates the same logic:

"Når du deler billeder, er det dit ansvar at sætte grænser." (*Translation: "When you share pictures, it is your responsibility to set boundaries."*)

This statement centers individual action without addressing the power dynamics of online image circulation, peer pressure, or the gendered nature of digital violations.

Depoliticized Inclusion and the Universal Student

Uge Sex materials regularly use language such as "all bodies," "everyone deserves respect," or "each person decides for themselves." While superficially inclusive, this framing abstracts difference and masks systemic inequality. It reflects what Lombardo and Verloo (2009) call "additive inclusion", where diversity is acknowledged rhetorically but not structurally embedded. As Ahmed (2012) notes, such "non-performative inclusion" can serve to deflect critique while leaving underlying power relations intact.

Instead of teaching why some students face greater risk, the materials rely on a depoliticized notion of inclusion. As Crenshaw (1989) argues, intersectionality is not about identity categories, but about how systems of power interlock. This nuance is often missing. The repetition of universal language can obscure marginalization by suggesting sameness where inequality exists.

Silences and Omissions: Power, Pleasure, and Violence

The materials rarely address structural forms of violence, such as racism, transphobia, or economic marginalization. While boundaries and consent are mentioned, they are framed in procedural or emotional terms rather than relational or political ones (Gavey, 2005).

Discussions of pleasure are marginal or absent altogether, echoing Allen's (2011) critique of the "missing discourse of desire."

Given the rise in digital sex violations and public concern about gendered violence, this silence is notable. When topics such as revenge porn or racialized bullying are not explicitly named, the curriculum risks rendering these experiences invisible. As Ahmed (2012) writes, institutional silence can function as a form of erasure.

Even when digital behavior is addressed, it is often through behaviorist language:

"Du bestemmer selv, hvem der må se dine billeder." (*Translation: "You decide who gets to see your pictures."*)

The implication is that risk management is entirely within the student's control, again ignoring coercion, unequal power, or gendered harassment dynamics online.

Institutional Outsourcing and Structural Blind Spots

Sex & Samfund fills a significant gap in Danish sex education, but its status as an NGO also limits its structural impact. While the *Uge Sex* campaign reaches tens of thousands of students, its materials must remain broadly palatable to secure school participation and public funding. As Simovska (2018) and Roien et al. (2022) argue, NGOs in this position often avoid politicized content in order to maintain institutional legitimacy.

This creates a paradox: NGOs are expected to innovate, yet constrained from directly challenging dominant educational logics. Norm-critical pedagogy is encouraged in theory, but often diluted in practice. Inclusion becomes about emotional awareness rather than structural critique.

In contrast, smaller initiatives like Normstormerne demonstrate a more direct engagement with structural power. Their facilitators use dialogical exercises and draw on their own experiences as racialized, queer, or disabled individuals to model what Lykke (2010) and Ladson-Billings (1995) describe as situated and culturally relevant pedagogy. One facilitator explained:

"Vi taler ikke bare om respekt, men om hvordan normer omkring krop og køn påvirker, hvem der bliver hørt og taget alvorligt." (*Translation: "We don't just talk about respect, but about how norms around body and gender affect who gets heard and taken seriously."*)

Normstormerne's workshops, by inviting discomfort and debate, reflect what Mouffe (2005) describes as agonistic pluralism, where learning emerges through conflict and recognition of difference.

Expanding Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony

Building on Gramsci's (1971) concept of cultural hegemony, the positioning of NGOs like Sex & Samfund can also be understood through Althusser's (1971) notion of ideological state apparatuses. NGOs operating within education serve not only as pedagogical actors but as part of the broader apparatus that reproduces dominant ideologies, such as individualism, normativity, and depoliticized responsibility, under the appearance of neutrality.

This perspective helps explain why norm-critical initiatives like Normstormerne remain structurally peripheral: they disrupt rather than reinforce hegemonic norms. Their counter-hegemonic pedagogy risks being sidelined or co-opted unless integrated into institutional frameworks that support sustained structural critique.

Concluding Reflections

The analysis of NGO materials illustrates how even well-intentioned education campaigns can reinforce normative assumptions. By emphasizing individual responsibility and universal respect while omitting references to systemic oppression, *Uge Sex* aligns with dominant cultural discourses of depoliticized inclusion.

To move beyond this, sex education must be understood as a political practice. Structural inequality must be named, intersectionality must be embedded, and pleasure must be reclaimed as part of holistic sexual well-being. While NGOs perform vital work, they cannot carry this responsibility alone. Only through institutional reform, political commitment, and structural mandates can intersectional, norm-critical pedagogy become central rather than supplementary in Danish education.

4.3 Sexualisterne: Norm-Critical Pedagogy in Practice

Sexualisterne is a municipally funded youth-led initiative based in Aalborg, Denmark, offering norm-critical sex education to eighth-grade students across the municipality.

According to Liv, the current project coordinator and trained midwife (Liv, interview, 2025), the group was established to provide a complementary alternative to the healthcare nurse's biologically-focused lessons on disease prevention and contraception. While the healthcare nurse covers anatomical and preventive aspects, Sexualisterne's two-hour sessions focus on consent, emotional awareness, and student-directed themes framed through structural understandings of power and identity.

Student-Directed Themes and Dialogical Structure

Sexualisterne's approach centers youth agency through participatory design. When the team enters a classroom, students use a QR code to vote on which of three pre-designed topics they wish to explore: "The First Time," "The Body and All Its Wonders," or "It's Only Cool to Squeeze a Lemon", the latter focused explicitly on consent and boundaries (Liv, interview, 2025). This voting occurs at the start of the session, allowing the sexualister to dynamically tailor their content while maintaining consistency with pedagogical goals. As Liv noted:

"I think it's very important to meet them where they are, but also that they are equal and that they have a saying in what's important for them in their life" (Liv, interview, 2025).

This flexibility is framed not only as a pedagogical strength, but as an ethical imperative, responding to the diversity of student experiences and developmental stages across Aalborg Municipality. Liv explained that prior materials assumed sexual experience among all students, despite most being 13 or 14 years old. Recognizing this disconnect, she redesigned the materials to better match students actual developmental needs (Liv, interview, 2025).

Anonymous Questions and Emotional Safety

A core component of the sessions is the anonymous question activity at the end. Originally conducted via handwritten notes, this process is now digitized through QR code submission, allowing students to type private or sensitive questions directly on their phones. This digital shift reflects a conscious commitment to accessibility, particularly for students with literacy challenges or disabilities:

"We wanted it to be a QR code, because everybody can just write on the phone... If we go to a class where they are having difficulties with... a handicap or anything, then it could make them feel that they couldn't participate in that exercise" (Liv, interview, 2024).

Yet the anonymous nature of these disclosures has generated an affective and ethical

challenge. Liv encountered a large volume of anonymous disclosures relating to sexual assault or abuse, prompting her to create a formal procedure for mandatory reporting. As she put it:

“There were a lot of questions where I would normally send a notification to the kommune, but I couldn't know if anything was done with it. So now I made a whole procedure... If you got an anonymous question, what the sexualist should then do..” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This institutional response underscores the emotional labor carried by facilitators, many of whom are university students aged 19 to 25, and the blurry boundary between education, support work, and safeguarding. Liv personally handles disclosures, contacting the school and municipality when needed. This layered responsibility highlights the need for structural support beyond the classroom.

Performing Authority: Between Peer and Professional

The facilitators are selected for their relatability and trained in performance, communication, and ethical responsibility. While some are studying psychology or social work, Liv emphasized that sharing personal experiences is discouraged:

“We want them to be professional and tell on a broader perspective, but they cannot say, 'I have also tried to have... whatever'... because that's too vulnerable, also for the educator” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This approach reflects a nuanced balance: facilitators must be approachable, yet maintain professional boundaries that shield both themselves and students from overexposure. This careful performance of authority aligns with Goffman's dramaturgical framework, where educators navigate the frontstage of pedagogical engagement while managing backstage vulnerabilities.

Representation, Recruitment, and Marginalization

Liv expressed awareness of the limitations in team diversity. All current facilitators except one are white, female, and university-educated. Although the desire for more gender and ethnic diversity is present, Liv noted:

“There are not that many boys applying for the job... and some of the boys we have had applying are not cut out for the job” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This homogeneity poses a representational dilemma. While the team is deeply committed to norm-critical pedagogy, the absence of lived diversity may inadvertently reproduce narrow inclusivity. Liv's comments reflect a clear awareness of this tension and a desire to change it, yet systemic barriers to diverse recruitment persist.

Institutional Constraints and Structural Inequality

Although the program is municipally funded in Aalborg, it is not available elsewhere unless schools pay out of pocket. As Liv described:

“For Aalborg Kommune, it's financed. But for others, they have to pay. We've been at a gymnasium in Silkeborg and Hjørring... but then they call me and I tell them how much it costs” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This funding model means that access to norm-critical education depends on geography and school resources, creating an uneven landscape of inclusion. Some schools have opted out due to religious objections, and in one case, parents attempted to privately seek out the sessions after their school declined participation (Liv, interview, 2024). The fragility of this model exposes how progressive pedagogy can be undermined by institutional discretion and political sensitivities.

Additionally, the compressed two-hour format severely limits pedagogical depth. As Liv explained:

“It would be really beneficial to come more than one time... It could be relevant to both have the healthcare nurse and the sexualists in sixth grade, and then again in eighth grade, and again in youth education” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This comment underscores that norm-critical transformation cannot be accomplished in isolated sessions, it requires longitudinal, integrated presence across school years.

Intersectionality, Inclusion, and Pedagogical Pragmatism

Liv discussed her revision of the prior material's overly abstract language around gender and identity. While maintaining a commitment to inclusivity, she sought to make intersectional themes more digestible for eighth-grade students:

“The material before me... really focused on not saying ‘him’ or ‘she’... but they (the kids) couldn't really absorb it. So we made a video that's about gender and how you express

yourself... and then we talk about marginalized groups, ethnicity, disability, poverty” (Liv, interview, 2024).

She clarified that this material is typically presented only when the class selects the “Body and All Its Wonders” theme, emphasizing student readiness and pedagogical relevance. In doing so, she balances critical engagement with developmental sensitivity, acknowledging students exposure to online influencers like Andrew Tate and incel communities.

“You need to talk with them about seeing everybody as a person... if it’s a woman that you see down on, or if it’s someone handicapped or transgender - it doesn’t matter. You need to be open-minded to everybody” (Liv, interview, 2024).

This pedagogical pragmatism illustrates how norm-critical content can be responsibly adapted without compromising on core values. It also reflects the adaptive ethos of the project, a responsiveness not only to structural issues but also to the lived realities of youth.

Concluding Reflections

Liv’s account reveals the transformative potential and institutional precarity of Sexualisterne’s work. Their model challenges normative scripts by centering student voice, digital accessibility, and affective care. But it is also dependent on a small team, vulnerable funding, and informal recognition.

This mirrors Gramsci’s concept of the “war of position”: a slow struggle to shift cultural hegemony from within. Sexualisterne does not simply resist dominant discourses; it infiltrates institutional spaces, subtly reconfiguring them through counter-hegemonic pedagogy. Yet without structural backing, consistent funding, national mandates, teacher certification, this resistance risks remaining symbolic rather than systemic.

As Liv’s reflections show, norm-critical pedagogy is not just about challenging norms through content, it is about holding space for ethical ambiguity, emotional truth, and developmental complexity. These sessions are not merely lessons, they are interventions into how education can function as care, resistance, and recognition.

4.4 The FIERCE Workshop: Intersectionality in Action

This section presents an analysis of two bystander workshops conducted at the Danish Youth Democracy Festival in September 2024. The sessions were facilitated by the Everyday Sexism Project Denmark (ESPD) and Aalborg University as part of the FIERCE Action.

Using an intersectionally framed dialogue card game, the workshops offered a space for students to engage with real-life dilemmas involving sexism, racism, and bystander responses. The sessions provide unique insights into how youth navigate, resist, or reinforce dominant discourses around discrimination in educational settings.

Workshop Format and Pedagogical Design

Each workshop began with a short introduction to the FIERCE project and a framing of sexism through an intersectional lens. The ESPD facilitators explained the rules of the dialogue card game, where students drew cards presenting dilemmas involving harassment or discrimination. Each card prompted the group to discuss appropriate bystander responses, ranging from confrontation to distraction or support. Importantly, facilitators emphasized that the responsibility for harassment lies with the aggressor, not the bystander, and reminded students that they could step out if the conversation felt overwhelming (Observation Notes, 2024).

The design of the workshops reflects key elements of norm-critical pedagogy: student agency, dialogical engagement, and emotional safety. The game-based structure enabled students to navigate complex social issues in a low-stakes environment while facilitators maintained a balance between open dialogue and normative grounding.

Workshop 1: 10th grade students

The first workshop was attended by a 10th grade class composed of 16 girls and 4 boys, predominantly from ethnic majority backgrounds. Students were divided into four groups for the card game, and teachers (one male, one female) actively participated at the discussion tables. Most students were engaged and able to relate the dilemmas to personal experiences, particularly those involving gender (Observation Notes, 2024).

A recurring theme was the perceived social risk of intervening as a bystander. Many students expressed that they would act if the aggressor was someone they knew but were less likely to do so online or with strangers. This pragmatic framing reveals the tension between ethical intention and social consequence. Some groups had extended discussions, while others focused on moving quickly through the cards. One or two students tended to dominate their group's dialogue, pointing to internal hierarchies of voice even within participatory models.

Importantly, the dialogue card game enabled students to voice reflections that they reportedly do not usually discuss with peers. As noted in the facilitator debriefing, some students said

that they “liked to discuss these issues but do not usually talk about it with friends” (Observation Notes, 2024). This illustrates the workshop’s capacity to open space for reflection on topics often left unspoken in peer culture. A few boys initially appeared dismissive, but one ESPD facilitator successfully engaged them, demonstrating how facilitation style can shape participation.

Despite early engagement, attention declined after 30 minutes. This drop in focus, echoed in the second workshop, underscores a limitation in format duration. While card games promote accessible engagement, they may lack the temporal depth needed for sustained reflection or critical interrogation. The workshop concluded with each group presenting a key takeaway, with facilitators emphasizing “distraction” and “support for the victim” as particularly effective bystander strategies.

Workshop 2: 1st class in High school (Gymnasium)

The second session involved a first-year high school class made up entirely of ethnic minority students (15 girls and 5 boys). This group exhibited more consistent engagement throughout the session. Unlike the previous workshop, the teachers (three male) chose not to sit at the tables, believing that their absence would facilitate freer student participation. Their intuition proved accurate: students appeared more candid and confident in expressing divergent views (Observation Notes, 2024).

Racism-related dilemmas in the game provoked especially strong identification. According to facilitators debrief notes, students recognized nearly every racialized dilemma as reflective of personal or peer experience. This high degree of affective recognition illustrates intersectionality not just as a theoretical tool, but as a lived reality. In contrast, gender-related dilemmas elicited more debate. One boy’s remark, “I’m not sexist, I’m just realist”, during a discussion of online harassment toward a bikini-clad girl on Instagram, reflects what Connell (1995) would describe as hegemonic masculinity cloaked in commonsense discourse (Observation Notes, 2024).

Facilitators chose not to confront the comment directly, instead keeping the space open for dialogical engagement. This pedagogical choice exemplifies Mouffe’s agonistic model: disagreement is not seen as failure but as an opportunity for learning. By holding space for dissonance rather than rushing to resolution, facilitators affirmed that norm-critical pedagogy is not about consensus but about grappling with competing truths.

Interestingly, students often expressed support-oriented strategies, such as standing with the victim or using distraction, rather than direct confrontation. This preference underscores a relational ethics model of intervention, one attuned to context and safety. The facilitators observed that some boys tended to reference or align themselves with the male ESPD facilitator, e.g., “I would do like [facilitator’s name],” indicating that gender congruence may influence how students internalize messages. This highlights the importance of facilitator diversity in creating resonance with different student demographics.

Teachers requested and received two decks of the card game to continue using the material at the school. Their feedback emphasized that the intersectional dilemmas felt particularly relevant for their students and enabled meaningful discussions around everyday challenges of discrimination.

Concluding Reflections

The FIERCE workshops reveal the complexity of applying intersectional pedagogy in practice. Recognition, disagreement, and discomfort were all present, each signaling pedagogical potential rather than failure. In both sessions, students navigated hegemonic discourses, personal boundaries, and peer dynamics. Intersectionality became tangible through students lived experiences, while resistance, often gendered, underscored the persistence of dominant scripts.

As the analysis shows, dialogical methods like the FIERCE card game can foster critical reflection and solidarity. However, their transformative potential depends on skilled facilitation, institutional support, and adequate time. Short workshops can plant seeds of awareness, but deeper norm disruption requires sustained pedagogical engagement.

These sessions do not offer easy narratives of change. Instead, they exemplify the entangled, contested nature of intersectional education, where learning unfolds through recognition, friction, and co-created meaning. The FIERCE workshops therefore function not only as data points but as experiments in democratic pedagogy, spaces where young people rehearse what it means to witness, intervene, and reimagine justice together.

4.5 Synthesis: Reproducing and Resisting Normativity

This final section synthesizes insights from the preceding empirical analyses and connects them back to the central problem formulation. It draws together findings from institutional policy, NGO campaigns, municipal teaching collectives, and student-led dialogue workshops

to assess how discourses of normativity are reproduced, resisted, or negotiated within Danish sex education. Through the combined lenses of intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony, this synthesis highlights both the persistent limitations of current approaches and the fragile openings carved out by counter-hegemonic practices.

Reproducing Normativity Through Policy and Practice

Across Danish and EU-level policy documents, the analysis revealed a consistent reproduction of normative frameworks, often masked by universalist rhetoric. Terms such as "all students," "well-being," and "democratic citizenship" invoke inclusivity but obscure the structural inequalities that shape students' experiences. Intersectionality is referenced in principle but rarely embedded in enforceable mandates, training structures, or curricular guidance. This reflects what Ahmed (2012) calls "non-performative inclusion," where institutional discourse gestures toward diversity without disrupting hegemonic norms.

The NGO campaigns, particularly *Uge Sex*, reinforced this trend. While attempting to speak to all students, the materials rely on individualistic framings of risk and responsibility. Youth are encouraged to set boundaries, make informed choices, and regulate their online behavior, but structural dynamics of power, such as racism, sexism, or class-based inequality, are largely absent. The student is constructed as a self-governing, emotionally disciplined subject, echoing neoliberal ideals of responsibilization (Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rose, 1999).

This shared framing across public and civil institutions creates a patchwork landscape in which normativity is subtly but consistently reproduced. Even progressive rhetoric can conceal structural omissions when delivered without accompanying institutional mandates, educator training, and evaluative follow-through.

Resistance Through Norm-Critical Pedagogy and Dialogical Intervention

At the margins of institutional discourse, initiatives like *Sexualisterne* and *Normstormerne* demonstrate the possibility of pedagogical resistance. These actors engage directly with intersectionality, invite emotional truth, and center student voices. Their approaches are dialogical rather than didactic, affectively attuned rather than procedural, and structurally aware rather than purely behavioral.

Liv's account of *Sexualisterne* revealed how even within municipal frameworks, peer-led and co-constructed pedagogy can disrupt normative assumptions and invite alternative modes of

learning. Similarly, Normstormerne's facilitators leveraged their lived experience and participatory formats to create epistemically safe spaces where marginal voices could speak.

The FIERCE workshops further illustrated how dialogical tools like the bystander card game can engage students in discussing gendered and racialized power. These moments of tension and disagreement should not be seen as failures but as agonistic disruptions, sites of learning through struggle (Mouffe, 2005). However, these counter-hegemonic efforts remain precarious: underfunded, not mandatory, and often reliant on individual charisma, institutional goodwill, or external project cycles.

Negotiating Normativity: Between Gaps and Innovations

Between institutional reproduction and pedagogical resistance lies a space of negotiation. Educators like those in Sexualisterne continuously adapt materials and methods to match student readiness while attempting to address broader systemic issues. This requires pragmatism without compromise and emotional labor without structural support.

While some schools and municipalities embrace norm-critical initiatives, others opt out, either due to resource limitations or cultural discomfort. The absence of national mandates allows local variation to perpetuate educational inequality. As a result, norm-critical pedagogy becomes both a pedagogical experiment and a political act.

This terrain reflects Gramsci's (1971) notion of the "war of position": change occurs not through direct confrontation alone but through cumulative, situated practices that rearticulate what is seen as legitimate knowledge. Yet, as Althusser (1971) reminds us, institutions like schools also function as ideological state apparatuses. Without structural change, norm-critical interventions risk being neutralized through co-optation or marginalization.

Final reflections

To move beyond this fragile balancing act, intersectionality and norm-critical pedagogy must shift from the periphery to the core of Danish sex education. This requires more than optional workshops or campaign weeks. It demands mandatory training, certified teaching modules, integration into national curricula, and mechanisms for accountability.

Inclusivity must become structural, not symbolic. Power must be named, not abstracted. And students must be recognized not as neutral subjects to be instructed, but as situated agents capable of co-creating meaningful and emancipatory education.

Only through such alignment between policy, pedagogy, and practice can Danish sex education live up to its democratic promise, not by proclaiming equality, but by structuring it.

5.0 Discussion

This chapter revisits the findings of the analysis in light of the problem formulation: How do Danish sex education policies and teaching materials reproduce, challenge, or negotiate discourses of intersectionality and normativity, and how can these insights inform policy development toward more inclusive and equitable sexuality education?

The discussion interprets findings in relation to the theoretical framework, particularly intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony. It is structured thematically to unpack the broader implications without preempting the conclusion chapter.

5.1 Reproducing Normativity Through Institutional Neutrality

The analysis reveals a recurring reliance on the trope of the "neutral student" across policy documents and NGO materials. This figure is implicitly white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and emotionally self-regulating. Although language like "respect," "well-being," and "informed decision-making" is pervasive, it is framed within individualist paradigms that sideline structural power relations (Ahmed, 2012; Roien et al., 2022).

Through Bacchi's WPR approach, it becomes evident that policies problematize sexual education as a matter of individual knowledge gaps, not as a product of institutional inequity. This depoliticization aligns with neoliberal responsabilization logics (Rose, 1999), whereby students are expected to manage risk, set boundaries, and self-regulate, without addressing the cultural, racial, or socioeconomic systems that shape vulnerability. Such framings fail to operationalize intersectionality as a guiding principle in pedagogy, training, or evaluation (Ahmed, 2012; Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009).

5.2 The Fragile Work of Resistance

Despite institutional inertia, initiatives like Sexualisterne and FIERCE represent counter-hegemonic efforts that challenge dominant norms through dialogical, student-centered, and intersectional approaches. These educators facilitate spaces where marginalized identities are recognized, not abstracted. Methods such as anonymous disclosures and student voting on lesson content foster emotional safety and agency.

However, the fragility of these efforts must be underscored. As Liv's interview shows, facilitators face ethical dilemmas and institutional indifference, navigating disclosures of sexual violence without comprehensive support structures. Moreover, the absence of national

mandates or certification pathways leaves norm-critical education dependent on municipal goodwill or external funding. While the pedagogical work is innovative, it remains structurally precarious and often gendered, relying on young women to shoulder the affective and ethical labor of care work within under-resourced systems.

These challenges resonate with Mouffe's (2005) concept of agonism, educational spaces that invite disagreement and discomfort as part of democratic learning. Yet, without institutional backing, this agonistic potential is easily neutralized or marginalized.

5.3 Beyond Pedagogy: Toward Structural Realignment

The findings point to a clear misalignment between inclusive rhetoric and structural realities. Policies invoke intersectionality and diversity, yet fail to provide binding commitments, such as curricular integration, teacher training, or minimum instructional hours. Here, binding refers to enforceable standards anchored in policy, with accompanying funding, monitoring, and accountability structures. This mirrors Gramsci's concept of "passive revolution": the absorption of critical language into dominant structures without altering power relations (Gramsci, 1971).

NGOs like Sex & Samfund partially fill this policy vacuum, but their materials often reproduce individualizing discourses, omitting references to systemic power or embodied difference. Structural transformation requires intersectionality to be institutionalized, not as a rhetorical gesture, but through enforceable standards, funding mechanisms, and pedagogical support.

One domain where this absence is especially visible is the digital sphere. As youth navigate increasingly complex online environments, from social media to pornography to influencer cultures, they are left largely unprotected by current educational frameworks. Despite clear links between digital life and issues of body image, consent, harassment, and sexualization, sex education rarely engages this terrain beyond procedural advice. This leaves students to manage affective, social, and moral dilemmas on their own, reinforcing the neoliberal narrative of self-responsibilization while ignoring the structural, algorithmic, and cultural forces that shape their online experiences. For example, references to online influencers such as Andrew Tate or content spread through incel communities emerged during field observations but remain unaddressed in formal curricula. This silence contributes to a discourse vacuum that is increasingly filled by regressive or misogynist narratives.

Local opposition to norm-critical approaches, including religiously motivated resistance, also poses a barrier to structural integration. While not the central focus of this thesis, such dynamics warrant further examination in relation to educational equity and democratic access. Their presence illustrates how structural change requires not only pedagogical will but cultural negotiation.

Finally, the findings raise conceptual questions about terminology itself. The term "sex education" may insufficiently capture the affective, relational, and political dimensions discussed throughout this thesis. Alternative framings, such as "relational education" or "inclusive life skills", may better communicate the field's broader aims, potentially reducing stigma and expanding public understanding of its scope. This linguistic shift could serve as an initial policy gesture toward structural reform.

5.4 Disciplinary Reflections and Knowledge Contributions

This study contributes to gender studies and critical pedagogy by demonstrating how intersectional and norm-critical frameworks reveal the limitations of symbolic inclusion in Danish sex education. It also shows the importance of analyzing the affective and political labor involved in norm-critical teaching.

Methodologically, the integration of CDA and WPR, combined with abductive, adaptive analysis, offers a template for critically engaging with both policy and practice. The empirical inclusion of student voices, facilitator perspectives, and workshop observations enriches the field's understanding of how discourse materializes in lived educational contexts.

Finally, the authors situated epistemology, rooted in feminist reflexivity, grounds the analysis in a commitment to both critique and transformation. This thesis does not aim to be detached but engaged, echoing Haraway's (1988) call for situated knowledge that is partial, embodied, and politically invested.

5.5 Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

The decision to focus this study on policy documents, NGO-led initiatives, and norm-critical pedagogical interventions was a deliberate one. Rather than centering individual attitudes or experiences, the research aimed to critically examine how institutional discourse constructs, regulates, and potentially transforms sexuality education. Guided by the theoretical framework, the project prioritized a structural and discursive analysis of how norms are embedded in systems, teaching materials, and pedagogical formats. This approach provided a

strong foundation for interrogating power and representation, yet it also introduced certain limitations.

First, the study concentrates on a small number of empirical sites and actors. While the material is rich in detail, it does not reflect the full diversity of educational settings across Denmark. Future research could expand this scope, particularly by including schools that resist or reinterpret norm-critical initiatives.

Additionally, the research was shaped by temporal and linguistic constraints. As the author is only partially fluent in Danish, official translations and secondary sources were used to access Danish-language policy and pedagogical materials. This may have limited the depth of engagement with certain discursive nuances and institutional framings. More broadly, it illustrates the challenges of conducting cross-linguistic research within nationally specific educational contexts. The limited time frame of the thesis further constrained the number of interviews and field observations that could be conducted. These situated limitations underscore the partial nature of the knowledge produced, while pointing toward opportunities for future inquiry.

Another important gap is the absence of direct youth perspectives. Although the thesis analyzes NGO workshops and pedagogical materials aimed at young people, it does not include interviews or surveys with students themselves. Engaging youth directly about their experiences, expectations, and understandings of sex education would have added depth and immediacy to the analysis. Their voices are especially critical in a study concerned with normativity, affect, and lived educational experiences. Future research should therefore prioritize youth-centered methods to explore how sexuality education is received, interpreted, and negotiated by those it seeks to serve.

Likewise, the study does not include perspectives from educators working within the formal school system. While external teaching collectives like *Sexualisterne* are analyzed in detail, the everyday realities of school-based teachers, their practices, constraints, and pedagogical judgments, remain outside the empirical scope. Their insights could have provided valuable context on how policies are interpreted, where tensions arise, and how structural limitations shape what is taught. Including these perspectives would contribute to a fuller understanding of the cultural and institutional conditions that influence sexuality education in Denmark.

Moreover, intersectional dimensions such as disability, class, and migration status deserve more sustained and focused exploration. Future studies could also benefit from comparative

cross-national analysis, identifying which structural conditions and pedagogical strategies enable more inclusive, norm-critical practices.

Despite these limitations, the study underscores a central claim: meaningful inclusion in sexuality education is not achieved through rhetorical gestures, but through structural design. Without systemic commitment, even the most innovative pedagogical efforts remain vulnerable to marginalization or co-optation. These insights directly inform the policy recommendations outlined in the following chapter.

6.0 Conclusion

This chapter revisits the central findings and analytical contributions of the thesis in direct response to the problem formulation: How do Danish sex education policies and teaching materials reproduce, challenge, or negotiate discourses of intersectionality and normativity, and how can these insights inform policy development toward more inclusive and equitable sexuality education? The conclusion is structured into three sections. First, a brief summary of key findings synthesizes how discursive and institutional dynamics shape the current state of sex education in Denmark. Second, a set of policy recommendations is offered to structurally embed intersectionality and norm-critical pedagogy. Finally, the chapter reflects on broader implications, methodological contributions, and directions for future research and advocacy.

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This thesis has demonstrated that while Denmark presents itself as a pioneer in sexuality education, dominant institutional and pedagogical practices continue to reproduce normative assumptions and structural exclusions. Drawing on a theoretical framework combining intersectionality, norm-critical pedagogy, and Gramscian hegemony, and using Critical Discourse Analysis and Bacchi's WPR approach, the analysis revealed how inclusive rhetoric often masks structural omissions and normalizes a limited conception of the student: implicitly white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and emotionally self-regulating.

Although intersectionality is referenced in EU and national policy documents, it is rarely operationalized through binding standards, curricular guidance, or teacher training. Symbolic inclusion remains the norm, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent implementation. NGO-led efforts like Uge Sex further reinforce depoliticized framings of risk and responsibility, emphasizing individual behavior while neglecting systemic inequality.

In contrast, initiatives such as Sexualisterne, Normstormerne, and FIERCE embody counter-hegemonic practices. These programs center student experience, foster dialogical learning, and engage with the emotional and ethical dimensions of sexuality education. Yet their structural position remains precarious: reliant on local funding, voluntary participation, and institutional goodwill.

The findings suggest that norm-critical and intersectional approaches must transition from the periphery to the core of sex education. This requires systemic alignment between pedagogy,

policy, and practice, not as rhetorical aspiration but as institutional mandate. Moreover, the current situation reveals a significant democratic deficit: when dominant norms are left unexamined and marginal voices are sidelined, education fails in its role as a democratic and emancipatory force.

6.2 Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings above, this thesis proposes foundational reforms to structurally integrate intersectionality and norm-critical pedagogy into Danish sex education:

- **Institutionalize Intersectional and Norm-Critical Frameworks:** Require curricular standards that explicitly address racism, queerphobia, ableism, and structural inequality. Treat norm-critical pedagogy as a core professional competency.
- **Make Sexuality Education a Standalone Subject:** Ensure that sexuality education is taught regularly, across developmental stages, as an independent subject rather than an interdisciplinary add-on.
- **Reframe and Rename the Subject:** Consider alternative titles, such as "relational education" or "life skills education", to reflect its broader scope and reduce stigma.
- **Implement Mandatory Teacher Training and Certification:** Develop national training programs and certification pathways grounded in intersectional, norm-critical, and trauma-informed pedagogies.
- **Sustain and Scale Peer-Led and Grassroots Initiatives:** Provide long-term national funding and professional recognition for initiatives like Sexualisterne and Normstormerne, ensuring equity in access and pedagogical innovation.
- **Develop Intersectional Evaluation Tools:** Design assessment frameworks that evaluate structural responsiveness, not only behavioral change, and measure how well curricula address marginalization.

These recommendations are not incremental adjustments but structural interventions. They acknowledge that the labor of norm-critical educators must be formally recognized, supported, and embedded into institutional frameworks. Without such change, educational inequalities will persist under the guise of inclusion.

6.3 Concluding Reflections

This thesis has argued that sexuality education is never neutral. It is a political site where norms are reproduced, challenged, or reimagined. The institutional marginalization of norm-critical educators and the reliance on universalized student imaginaries reflect deeper struggles over legitimacy and recognition in public education. As such, the transformation of sexuality education is not merely a pedagogical concern but a democratic imperative.

The contribution of this thesis lies in its integration of empirical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. By combining CDA and WPR within an abductive, adaptive framework, and grounding the analysis in a situated feminist epistemology, the research offers a layered account of how discourse, policy, and practice interact. It also highlights the undervalued emotional and ethical labor performed by facilitators of norm-critical pedagogy, work that should be supported institutionally and not left to individual commitment.

The findings show that sexuality education serves as a mirror of democratic life: it reflects whose bodies, identities, and experiences are legitimized or erased in the public sphere. If intersectionality is invoked symbolically, and if inclusive pedagogies remain structurally unsupported, the result is a hollow promise of diversity.

This thesis thus issues a call to action. Intersectionality must be institutionalized as a guiding principle for policy and practice. Norm-critical educators need systemic support, not just praise. Students must be seen as co-creators of knowledge. Without this shift, the risk is not simply pedagogical stagnation but the reproduction of social inequality through education.

While the empirical focus is Danish, the implications reach beyond national borders. Across Europe, anti-gender movements and superficial diversity narratives threaten the institutionalization of intersectional education. Denmark, often seen as a progressive model, must not settle for rhetorical inclusion. The insights from this thesis resonate wherever education claims inclusivity but fails to enact it.

Future research might explore longitudinal effects of norm-critical education, cross-national comparisons of intersectional pedagogy, or the influence of digital media on youth sexual socialization. Equally important is continued advocacy: this work must extend beyond academia into teacher training institutions, policy spaces, and youth-led movements.

This thesis does not end with definitive answers but with an urgency: if Danish sex education is to fulfill its democratic promise, intersectionality cannot remain rhetorical. It must become the foundation of inclusive, responsive, and socially just education.

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