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Sexualities of initial teacher education applicants in the Republic of Ireland: Addressing the hidden dimension of diversity in teaching

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Sexualities of initial teacher education applicants in the Republic of Ireland: Addressing the hidden dimension of diversity in teaching

While research and policy recommendations internationally have pointed to the need to diversify teaching populations with regard to ethnicity, social class background and, to a lesser extent, dis/ability, there is a paucity of research addressing sexualities as a diversity dimension in teaching. This article explores Initial Teacher Education (ITE) applicants' and entrants' (N=746) sexualities and the intersections of sexualities with other socio-demographic background variables and career motivations. Our analysis suggests that the topic of sexual orientation caused high levels of discomfort among respondents and that sexual minority student teachers are underrepresented in ITE cohorts in Ireland. The socio-demographic and motivational profiles of our non-heterosexual respondents generally mirrored those of their heterosexual counterparts. Non-heterosexual respondents reported a stronger motivation to affect social change and lower levels of participation in religious services. Findings are discussed within the context of persisting cultural and institutional barriers for sexual minority (student) teachers in Irish schools and in ITE.

Keywords: teacher education applicants, diversity, sexuality, social justice

1. Introduction

Despite the success of the May 2015 referendum to amend the Irish Constitution to recognise marriage equality, the enduring history of marginalisation and discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the Republic of Ireland has created a conspicuous absence of research on the value of sexual diversity, especially in education. Since Irish independence in 1922, the Catholic Church has played a central role in the provision of education. Over half of second-level schools and approximately 90% of primary schools in Ireland are Catholic run (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). These state schools have mandatory religious instruction and are guided by an explicit Catholic ethos that shapes the discourse of educational instruction (Coolahan

1981/2004; Randles 1975). Most primary schools are owned by specific religious orders and guided by Boards of Management which are accountable to religious Patrons (Department of Education and Skills 2011).

While Boards of Management of primary schools are subject to national employment legislation which prohibits discrimination across nine grounds: age, gender, religion, race, sexual orientation, marital status, family status and membership of the Traveller community, Section 37 of the *Irish Employment Equality Act* provides an exemption clause that *permits* discrimination “in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution” or “where reasonably necessary to prevent an employee or a prospective employee from undermining the religious ethos of the institution” (Government of Ireland 1998/2014). Despite the national policy on equality for LGBT citizens (Equality Authority 2002), these paradoxical exemptions to equality, combined with, and as a result of, the direct involvement of religious orders in public education, inevitably constrain LGBT teachers and school curricula (Lodge and Lynch 2004, p. 41), significantly limit the ability of schools and teachers to support LGBT students, and narrow the parameters of diversity in Irish education. Politicians, labour unions, the LGBT Teachers Group in the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO), and others have worked toward repealing this exemption clause (GLEN 2013), resulting in an amendment, which now requires the employer to prove that the employee has threatened the religious institution. This revision however is tempered by the overarching religious ethos and significant influence of religious orders in Irish schools.

In June 2015 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the U.S. Constitution provides same-sex couples the right to marry across all 50 States. It has been suggested that in the United States of America ‘public acceptance of gay and lesbian teachers is a strong predictor of state gay rights laws’ (Lewis cited in Lewis and Taylor 2001, p. 134). However, in Ireland, it seems public schooling needs to catch up to public opinion. Research by Layte et al. illustrates that since 1981, Irish people have become more accepting of lesbians and gay men (Layte, McGee, Quail, Rundle, Cousins, Donnelly, Mulcahy, and Conroy 2006). Homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland in 1993, and the recent Irish referendum on equal marriage (26 May, 2015) resulted in the majority heterosexual population

voting in favour of ensuring LGBT people are granted equal rights. And yet, these rights, and greater acceptance of sexual diversity, are not reflected in institutionalised education.

While research and policy recommendations internationally have pointed to the need to diversify teaching populations with regard to ethnicity, social class background and, to a lesser extent, dis/ability, there is a paucity of research, in Ireland and internationally, addressing sexualities as a diversity dimension in teaching (Keane & Heinz, 2015; Childs et al. 2011).

This paper provides baseline data with regard to ITE students' sexual orientations and the intersections of students' sexualities, socio-demographic backgrounds and career motivations. As such, it explores:

- 1) the composition of Irish postgraduate second-level ITE applicant and entrant cohorts in 2014 in relation to their sexualities;
- 2) the extent to which non-heterosexuals are under-represented in ITE in Ireland; and
- 3) the differences and similarities of heterosexual and non-heterosexual Irish ITE applicants in relation to their socio-demographic backgrounds, career motivations, and perceptions of teaching as a career.

This quantitative study on sexuality in ITE will compliment the available qualitative research exploring the professional experiences of smaller samples of LGBT teachers, significantly extending the evidence base for the need to include sexuality as an important, yet currently under-researched, dimension of teacher diversity. The data and discussion presented in this paper interrupt the silence and invisibility of LGBT pre-service and practicing teachers and highlight the need to re-examine teaching and teacher education policy and practice, including access to ITE, ITE curricular and pedagogical spaces, and school cultures and employment legislation, from a social justice perspective (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Zaijda et al., 2006) that includes a sexual diversity dimension.

2. Rationale

Over the last thirty years, there has been a growth of research internationally regarding LGBT youth and sexualities in school (Due, 1995; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Kehily, 2012; Unks 1995). This research has documented the hostile climate for LGBT students and the personal, psychological, social, and educational consequences of homophobic school culture (in the Irish context, see O'Higgins-Norman, 2010).

Positioned against heteronormativity, and due to the climate of homophobia, discrimination, and suspicion of paedophilia (DePalma and Atkinson, 2006; Gowran 2004; Graydon, 2011), LGBT teachers often choose to remain closeted (Connell, 2014; Jackson 2006; Russ, Simonds, and Hunt, 2002) and there is limited research available on their experiences (Connell, 2012, 2014; Ferfolja, and Hopkins, 2013; Gray 2010, 2013; Khayatt, 1992). In Ireland, there have only been two studies with relatively small samples of seven (Gowran, 2004) and eight (Neary, 2013, 2014) LGBT teachers. This research has highlighted the commitment of the participating LGBT teachers to their profession despite the weight of inequity and institutionalised homophobia and heterosexism resulting in silence and invisibility. In examining sexuality and socio-demographic backgrounds, career motivations, and perceptions of teaching, we hope to better understand and value this element of diversity in teacher education and Irish schooling.

While there are no reliable data available on the proportion of individuals identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, bicurious and/or other non-heterosexual orientations in the Irish population, an Equality and Human Rights Commission report (Aspinall, 2009) illustrates that estimates garnered from various other (mainly UK-based) studies range from 2-2.5% to as high as 10%. The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) suggest that lesbian, gay and bisexual people make up about six per cent of the Irish population (GLEN, 2015).

The homogeneity of the teaching profession is an international phenomenon (Schleicher 2014); teaching populations are generally from majority group backgrounds, frequently in contrast to student populations. Previous research in Ireland has suggested a similar situation with teachers being

predominantly white Irish, female, and of majority group ethnic and social class backgrounds (Heinz, 2008, 2011, 2013a,b; Keane & Heinz, 2015; Keane & Heinz, 2016; Devine 2011).

There is some international research available on homophobia and heteronormativity in teacher education (Britzman 2003; Clark 2010; Lee and Carpenter 2015; Schmidt, et al. 2012; Shelton 2014; Stiegler 2008; Szalacha 2004; Vavrus 2008), and on LGBT ITE students (DeJean 2010; Donahue 2007; Hermann-Wilmarth and Bills 2010). This research focuses on the silencing of LGBT teacher identities and how this inevitably mutes the potential to diversify teaching and to support LGBT youth. Schmidt et al. (2012) point out that teacher education discourses regarding tolerance and acceptance rarely go beyond the representation of LGBT youth through positive language.

To the best of our knowledge, no research exists that documents sexualities as an element of socio-demographic diversity of ITE students or indeed qualified teachers in Ireland, nor has research explored the barriers which may limit greater participation of LGBT people in Irish ITE. This is the first large-scale study, nationally and internationally, to provide baseline data with regard to ITE applicants' and entrants' sexual orientations. It is also the first study to explore career motivations of non-heterosexual ITE applicants and the relationship between sexualities and career motivations.¹

3. Methodology

This study forms part of the larger 'Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) in Ireland' national project, funded by the Irish Research Council. DITE aims to gather and analyse data from applicants and entrants to state-funded initial teacher education (ITE) programmes in Ireland to examine and compare their socio-demographic profiles, career motivations, educational experiences, and experiences with diversity. In this paper we present analyses of data collected via the anonymous voluntary (online) DITE questionnaire (cf. Keane & Heinz, 2015) from i) *applicants* who applied through the Postgraduate Application Centre (PAC) to the 2014-16 Professional Master in Education (PME) programme offered by the National University of Ireland (NUI) constituent colleges (National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, University College Cork, University College Dublin) and by Dublin City University (DCU), and ii) from *entrants* enrolling in

the 2014-16 PME programmes offered by Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and the University of Limerick (UL) (where applications and selection are administered at institutional level).

Response rates of 46.6% (N=746) of all PME (NUI and DCU) applicants and 53.9% (N=370) of all PME entrants (NUI, DCU, TCD and UL) nationally were achieved.

The PME is a 2-year postgraduate teaching qualification offered by 7 state-funded universities in Ireland as well as by one private provider (Hibernia College – not included in this study). It prepares second-level teachers for all core subject areas except for Physical Education and some practical subjects (woodwork and technical drawing). Demand for all ITE programmes has been consistently high with only 30-40% of applicants to the postgraduate second-level programmes resulting in offers (Heinz, 2011). Candidates for the PME programme are selected on the basis of their prior academic achievement (undergraduate results and further qualifications) and prior relevant experience. For an overview of ITE provision and recent policy developments in Ireland see Heinz et al. (in press) and Heinz, 2014.

Specific questionnaire items relating to the areas explored in this paper are outlined below:

Sexualities: DITE explores ITE applicants' and entrants' self-reported sexual orientation, i.e. their 'conscious acknowledgement of sexual orientation', which is linked 'with relational and other interpersonal factors that can shape an individual's community, social supports, role models, friendships and partner(s)' (Dillon, et al., 2011, p. 650-651), as well as ITE and future teaching experiences.

Respondents' sexual orientation identity was explored using the open-ended item '*How would you describe your sexual orientation?*' While the use of a single open-ended sexual orientation question presents certain limitations, for example the possibility that the various different, yet highly correlated (Habarth 2008), domains of sexual orientation are conflated by respondents, the inclusion of sexuality as a diversity dimension in DITE depended on significant negotiation. As such, the final (open-ended) question satisfied stakeholder criteria of being "politically correct", "non-intrusive" and "non-offensive" while also allowing respondents to freely choose the language with which to express their

sexual orientation rather than choosing sexual identity labels which may be perceived to oversimplify the nature and experience of same-sex sexuality (Diamond, 2002; Golden, 1996).

We recognize that the taxonomies of sexualities are broader than LGBT, and often include queer, questioning, intersex, and two-spirited, among many others that are culturally specific. Except when referencing related research, in this article we have chosen to use LGBT, as it corresponds to the self-identification data of this research. Furthermore, we appreciate queer theorists' critique of categorisations and binary thinking and agree that the reality of desire is more fluid and complex and that dichotomies such as heterosexual and "other" can reinforce concepts of difference and power. Our analysis is motivated by our interest in exploring social justice issues in ITE, specifically the representational patterns, backgrounds and motivations of underrepresented and/or minority groups whose study and life experiences are impacted by the realities of institutional cultures and power structures; in the case of sexual minority ITE students, by the institutionalized heterocentric/sexist bias characterizing Irish schools.

Other socio-demographic background variables: Biological sex was explored using the categories of 'male', 'female', 'intersex' and 'other (please specify)'. Gender identity was explored using the categories of 'female/woman', 'male/man', 'transgender' and 'a gender not listed here, please specify'. Respondents identified their parents' current or last occupations, which were coded to describe their social class backgrounds using national census classifications (CSO, 2012). Data on nationalities was collected using open-ended items providing the option of specifying more than one nationality. With regard to ethnicity and dis/ability, the 2011 census categories were adapted. Religious affiliation and attendance at religious services were explored using categorical response options (adapted from the European Values Survey (EVS), 2010).

Second-level schooling experiences: One open-ended item explored respondents' second-level schooling experiences, and these were subsequently coded into three broad categories: those who provided 'mostly positive', 'mostly negative' and 'mostly neutral' descriptions of their school time.

Motivations and perceptions of the teaching profession: The empirically validated and internationally widely used (cf. Heinz, 2015) ‘FIT-Choice’ (Factors Influencing Teaching Choice) framework (Watt and Richardson, 2007) was used to measure the career motivations and perceptions of non-heterosexual and heterosexual respondents. The FIT-Choice framework contains antecedent ‘socialisation influences’ describing: i) positive influences of prior teaching and learning experiences, ii) the influence of significant others such as family members and/or friends and colleagues, and iii) a social dissuasion construct measuring the extent to which others had dissuaded (discouraged) individuals from a teaching career. These antecedent socialisation influences are followed by the more proximal motivators ‘task perceptions’, ‘self-perceptions’, ‘values’ and ‘fallback career’ (see all factors in Table 2).

All FIT-Choice factors are measured by multiple-item indicators with response options ranging from 1 (not at all important) through to 7 (extremely important).

Data analysis: Responses to the open-ended sexual orientation question were analyzed by grouping together same or similar responses. In this initial analysis the freely chosen sexual orientation descriptions were preserved, reflecting descriptions of conventional sexual orientation identity labels (straight, heterosexual, homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, bi-curious, pan-sexual) as well as descriptions of sexual attraction (attracted to men, women, the opposite sex/gender) and a small number of unique statements not fitting into either category. For the purpose of the quantitative analyses, sexuality categories were collapsed into heterosexual and non-heterosexual.

Quantitative analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) for Windows (version 21). Inferential procedures were carefully chosen to ensure valid and reliable analyses of the data characterized by unequal group sizes and a moderate number of non-heterosexual respondents. Chi-square tests of independence and Fisher’s exact tests were employed to explore associations between sexual orientation and other categorical variables. For chi-square tests, where the minimum cell count assumption was violated, categories were collapsed (for example “White Irish” and “Other” ethnicities).

Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for all FIT-Choice items, factors and higher order factors. Independent sample *t*-tests and, where equal variance was not verified, Welch's *t*-test were implemented to investigate potential differences in ratings between non-heterosexual and heterosexual respondents.

Similar to Fisher's exact test, the *t*-test is deemed suitable for small-sample research studies (J.C.F. de Winter, 2013). Using two types of statistical power analysis in G*Power 3.1 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang & Buchner, 2007); firstly *a priori analysis* and, secondly, *sensitivity analysis* it was determined that sample size and distribution were adequate to detect significant differences between mean values at the level of medium effect sizes (Cohen's $d > 0.5$) when the significance level α was set at 0.15 (as suggested by Stevens (1996) for small group sizes) and the desired statistical power $1-\beta$ at 0.8.

Limitations: Common challenges facing research exploring the size and composition of lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations have surfaced in this study also, most importantly, the significant proportion of respondents in our sample who did not answer the relevant question (20.2%). While the high level of reluctance to provide information about sexual orientation among ITE applicants represents an important finding of this study, likely signalling high levels of discomfort and/or lack of understanding of sexual diversity issues, it may also lead to an underestimation of the group's true size. Moreover, measurement errors may be further heightened as a result of possible intentional misreporting and/or the fluid, changeable and contextually sensitive nature of the construct of sexual orientation and related identity/ies (Aspinall 2009). The data presented in this paper should, therefore, be interpreted as providing indicative evidence only.

4. Findings

4.1. Sexual orientation identities of PME applicants and entrants

Of 746 survey respondents, 595 (79.8%) completed the open-ended sexual orientation item. Most responses consisted of one, two, or only a few words. An overview of responses is provided in Table 1. The great majority of respondents (91.3%) identified as "heterosexual" or "straight". Fifteen respondents described their sexual attraction and/or behaviour specifying a biological sex or gender

(male, men, female) or noting more specifically that they were attracted to “the opposite sex” or “men”/“women.” All of these responses indicated opposite-sex sexual attraction and/or behaviour (established on the basis of analysis of respondents’ own biological sex and gender identity) and were categorised as heterosexual. One female respondent identified as “completely heterosexual” and one male respondent described his orientation as “straight as an arrow”. Four male respondents and one female respondent identified as “normal” and one male respondent as “general”. These responses were, in turn, coded as heterosexual. Eight (male) respondents identified as “gay”, six (four males and two females) as “homosexual” and one (female) as “lesbian”. One (female) respondent described her sexual orientation as “bicurious”, one (male) as “queer/bisexual” and one (female) as “pansexual”. The descriptions of eight respondents could not be categorised as their sexual orientations were not identifiable; two stated that they were “in a relationship”, three that they were “single”, one “active”, one questioned the “relevance?” of the questionnaire item, and another simply entered a question mark.

Overall, therefore, the vast majority of PME *applicants* who responded to the sexual orientation item identified as heterosexual (96.1%), fifteen (2.6%) were categorised as “gay/lesbian/homosexual”, seven (1.2%) as “bisexual”/“bi-curious”/“queer/bisexual” and one (0.2%) as “pansexual”. With regard to the overall PME *entrant* cohort, 94.8% were categorised as heterosexual, nine (2.9%) as gay/lesbian/homosexual and seven (2.3%) as bisexual/bicurious/pansexual. Fisher’s exact test indicated that there was no significant difference between the application success rates (proportions of applicants who received PME course offers) of heterosexual and non-heterosexual applicants ($p=0.152$).

4.2. Correlational relationships between ITE applicants’ sexualities and other socio-demographic background variables

Sex: The sex composition of non-heterosexual respondents was 78.3% (N=18) male and 21.7% (N=5) female. A chi-square test indicates that this composition is significantly different from that of the

heterosexual ITE applicant cohort in our sample, 38.5% (N=215) of whom were male and 61.5% (N=344) female ($\chi^2(1, n=559) = 14.576, p = .000$).

Gender: With regard to applicants' gender, 78.3% (N=18) of non-heterosexual and 38.1% (N=217) of heterosexual applicants identified as male/man compared to 21.7% (N=5) of non-heterosexual and 61.5% (N=344) of heterosexual applicants who identified as female/woman. One survey respondent identified as transgender and heterosexual.

Age: The mean age of the non-heterosexual respondents to our survey was 24.13 (SD=5.59) compared to 24.73 (SD=5.92) for our heterosexual sample. A *t*-test indicated no statistically significant association between sexual orientation and age ($t(583) = .47, p = .636$).

Nationalities and ethnicities: As regards respondents' nationalities, 20 (87%) non-heterosexual respondents identified as Irish *only* and three (13%) described their nationalities as Irish (first) plus another (secondary) nationality (one American and two English). With regard to their ethnicity, 22 non-heterosexual respondents (95.7%) chose 'White Irish' and one (4.2%) 'Chinese' from the census categories. The over-representation of ITE applicants from the majority national and ethnic group (cf. Keane & Heinz, 2015, Keane & Heinz, in press) is also evident in the cohort of heterosexual applicants, with 94.7% Irish *only* nationality and 97.3% White Irish ethnicity. Fisher's exact tests showed no significant difference between the percentages of heterosexual versus non-heterosexual applicants declaring Irish nationality ($p = 0.134$) and/or White Irish Settled ethnicity ($p = 0.484$).

Social class backgrounds: To facilitate comparative analyses, the seven original social class groups were re-categorised. Social class groups 1 and 2 (Professional workers & Managerial and Technical), 3 and 4 (Non-manual & Skilled manual), and 5, 6 and 7 (Semi-skilled, Unskilled & Homemaker) were combined. 47.6% (N=10) of our non-heterosexual and 43.3% (N=205) of our heterosexual respondents came from a Professional/Managerial/Technical background. A lower percentage of non-heterosexual (28.6%, N=6) than heterosexual (40%, N=189) applicants fell into the Non-manual & Skilled manual groups and 23.8% (N=5) of non-heterosexual and 16.7% (N=79) of heterosexual respondents came from a Semi-skilled/Unskilled background. A Chi-square test indicated no

significant relationship between sexual orientation and social class background (χ^2 (2, n=494)=1.34, $p=.511$).

Dis/ability: Twenty of our 23 non-heterosexual respondents provided answers to our dis/ability questions. One of them specified a ‘difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating’ and two stated that they suffered from a chronic illness (specifying Asthma and HIV). Overall, 15.0% (N=3) of non-heterosexual versus 9.8 (N=47) of heterosexual respondents stated that they had a disability. Fisher’s exact test ($p=0.438$) indicated no significant difference between the percentages of heterosexual versus non-heterosexual respondents declaring a disability in our survey.

Religion: The majority of non-heterosexual respondents (N=18, 78.3%) identified as Roman Catholic. One non-heterosexual respondent chose ‘other religion’ from the closed-item menu and specified “personal spiritual belief” in the following open-ended item. The remaining four (17.4%) non-heterosexual respondents stated that they had ‘no religion’. The distribution looks very similar for our heterosexual respondents, with a slightly higher proportion (85.0%, N=437) identifying as Roman Catholic and a slightly lower proportion stating that they had ‘no religion’ (10.1%, N=52). Chi-square test (‘Roman Catholic’ vs. ‘Other or No Religion’) indicated no significant relationship between sexual orientation and affiliation with the very dominant Roman Catholic religion (χ^2 (1, n=536) = .769, $p=.375$).

Religious attendance: Chi-square tests were performed to analyse potential differences in terms of the attendance of non-heterosexual compared to heterosexual Catholic ITE applicants at religious services. Results indicate that a lower percentage of non-heterosexual Catholic respondents (27.8%, N=5) than heterosexual Catholic respondents (44.6%, N=190) attended religious services ‘more than once a month’. Reversely, a higher proportion of non-heterosexual (33.3%, N=6) than heterosexual (15.3%, N=65) respondents stated that they attended religious services ‘less than once a year’ or ‘never’. While there was no significant relationship between sexual orientation and attendance at religious services overall (χ^2 (2, n=444)=4.648, $p=.098$), z-scores indicated that the proportion of non-

heterosexual Catholic respondents attending religious services ‘less than once a year’ or ‘never’ was significantly higher than the equivalent proportion of heterosexual respondents (z -score=2.0).

4.3. Correlational relationships between ITE applicants’ sexualities and second-level schooling experiences

The majority of non-heterosexual respondents (N=13) provided positive descriptions of their second-level schooling experiences. Four respondents provided mixed accounts, with one of them reporting being bullied severely because of his sexual orientation. The remaining two non-heterosexual respondents provided purely negative accounts, both stating that they were bullied, with one describing that “the teachers didn't know how to deal with it so they ignored it.”

The school experience accounts of heterosexual respondents provide a similar picture overall with 76.5% of responses categorised as ‘positive’, 18.0% as ‘mixed’ and 5.5% as ‘negative’. Five heterosexual respondents stated that they were bullied.

A chi-square test indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the evaluations of heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents with regard to their post-primary school experiences (as mostly positive, mixed, or mostly negative) ($\chi^2(2, n=436)=1.0458, p=.593$).

However, Fisher’s exact test indicates that a significantly higher proportion of non-heterosexual (15.8%, N=3) than heterosexual (1.2%, N=6) respondents reported personal experiences of bullying ($p=0.005$). It is interesting to note that a further seven heterosexual respondents made general references to bullying, with three of them explaining that bullying “wasn’t very prominent,” or that it was “minimal in their schools”, and one specifying that she “never had any issues with bullying” while four heterosexual respondents highlighted that their schools “had had bullies” and/or they had “observed an increase in bullying”.

4.4. Correlational relationships between ITE applicants’ sexualities and career motivations and perceptions

On the FIT-Choice factor level, *t*-tests indicated no significant differences in the career motivations of heterosexual compared to non-heterosexual (all and males) respondents (see Table 2). The highest rated motivational factors for all groups were ‘interest in teaching subjects’, ‘intrinsic career value’ and ‘perceived teaching ability’. Similarly, mean scores for all ‘social utility value’ constructs were significantly higher for heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents than those for the ‘personal utility value’ constructs.

Furthermore, *t*-tests indicated no significant differences in ratings of socialisation influences with prior teaching and learning experiences rated as an important motivating factor by non-heterosexual and heterosexual respondents. Both, heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents had received more discouraging (‘social dissuasion’) than encouraging (‘social influences’) advice from significant others. With regard to perceptions of the teaching career, all independent groups rated the ‘task demands’ of the profession higher than the ‘task returns’.

At individual item level, *t*-tests revealed significant differences in the ratings of three statements (see Table 3). Non-heterosexual respondents rated the statement ‘I am interested in teaching’ significantly higher than heterosexual respondents ($t(41.68)=4.78, p=.000, d=.540$). Non-heterosexual respondents also endorsed the statements ‘I want to make a difference to the lives of children and teenagers’ ($t(30.56)=3.74, p=.001, d=.524$) and ‘I want to fight inequality’ ($t(520)=2.28, p=.023, d=.466$), with significantly higher ratings than heterosexuals. Finally, the data suggests that non-heterosexual applicants have thought more (and extremely) carefully about becoming a teacher compared to heterosexual applicants ($t(26.64)=3.11, p=.004, d=.591$).

5. Discussion

Findings from this study illustrated that, overall, 3.9% of respondents to the sexual orientation question self-identified as “gay/lesbian/homosexual”, “bisexual/bicurious” or “pansexual”. The significant proportion of survey respondents who chose not to answer the relevant question (20.2%) may indicate high levels of discomfort with the topic of sexualities among ITE applicants and/or strong resistance to disclose this information. Considering the covert and overt social, institutional

and religious barriers and the continuing discriminatory employment legislation affecting LGBT teachers in the Irish context it would not be surprising if LGBT ITE applicants preferred to keep their sexualities hidden, even in an anonymous questionnaire, similar to many LGBT teachers who remain silent and invisible in Irish schools (Neary 2013). In this context of a high non-response rate to the sexual orientation questionnaire item and the relatively small number of non-heterosexual study participants (N=23) readers need to be reminded that findings and interpretations presented in this paper can provide only indicative evidence and a starting point for further research and discussion.

While sexual orientation and/or behaviour questions have become common in health surveys in the past decade leading to improved response rates and increased sexual minority identification over time (Jans et al., 2015), DITE is the first study in Ireland, and internationally, to include a sexual orientation item in a national ITE applicants' questionnaire. Hopefully, over time, routine collection of sexual orientation data will lead to improved response rates and contribute to greater appreciation of sexuality as an important dimension of social justice in ITE.

A small number of this study's participants who responded to the open-ended sexual orientation item provided descriptions that categorise heterosexual individuals as "normal". While we may consider it a positive sign that such descriptions were rare (especially in the context of the heterocentric culture and predominantly Catholic ethos of the Irish education system), it is nevertheless troubling that future teachers perceive of their sexuality within such a heteronormative framework implying that non-heterosexual orientations are abnormal and/or subordinated. Indeed, the positive schooling experiences described by the vast majority of heterosexual respondents likely position many more heterosexual ITE applicants to uncritically accept and perpetuate heteronormative cultures in schools and universities. As such, ITE has a significant role in challenging and interrupting marginalisation and discrimination embedded in everyday schooling and life.

Analyses of socio-demographic backgrounds illustrated little to no significant difference between heterosexual and non-heterosexual ITE applicants with regard to age, nationality/ethnicity, social class, and dis/ability. In relation to the intersections of biological sex and gender identity with

sexualities, it is worth noting that a significantly higher proportion of gay men than lesbians applied to and entered postgraduate second-level ITE programmes in Ireland in 2014. Further research exploring the intersection between sexuality and gender with career choice processes and perceptions of opportunities and/or barriers related to a teaching career can contribute to a deeper understanding of the career decisions of LGBT (student) teachers.

While this research found no significant differences in religious affiliations with the vast majority of both heterosexual and non-heterosexuals identifying as Roman Catholic, the frequency of church attendance by non-heterosexual Catholic respondents was notably lower than heterosexual counterparts. It has previously been reported that LGBT people often decrease their involvement in religious activities if they do not affirm their identity (Lease, Horn and Noffsinger-Frazer, 2005). Considering the continuing importance of religious (and predominantly Catholic) denomination in Irish schools, teacher educators in Ireland need to be extremely sensitive to the tensions, discomfort and, possibly, fear that non-heterosexual ITE students are likely to experience in their placement schools.

A significantly higher proportion of non-heterosexual than heterosexual respondents reported personal experiences with bullying at second-level school. Heterosexual respondents' references to bullying were mostly impersonal, either negating bullying or recounting observations of bullying. Given that previous research suggests that those who become teachers often have positive experiences with schooling (Heinz, 2013b, 2015; Lortie, 2002), while LGBT youth experience regular harassment and homophobia (Epstein and Johnson, 1998; O'Higgins-Norman, 2010), this finding may signal that personal experiences of bullying can represent a further barrier for non-heterosexual individuals, who may be suited and interested in teaching but not inclined to return to an institutional space that harbours harmful memories. For sexual minority students who enter ITE programmes, the confrontation with their own past experiences of marginalisation, discrimination, and possibly harassment, in heterosexist school environments together with the challenge of recognising and reacting to homophobia and bullying in their classrooms may add yet another layer to the multifaceted

challenges facing non-heterosexual (student) teachers in their everyday practice and identity development.

With regard to heterosexuals' and non-heterosexuals' career motivations, scores for all FIT-Choice factors indicated very similar ratings. Some significant differences were apparent at item level. Accordingly, it is likely that the experience of being marginalised influenced a greater number of non-heterosexuals to consider education as a vehicle for social change, and therefore teaching as a career that has the potential to 'fight inequality'. It is important, however, to acknowledge that heterosexual respondents also indicated that they were strongly influenced by social utility (altruistic) factors in their career choice (cf. Heinz, Keane & Foley, in press).

6. Conclusion

The Diversity in Initial Teacher Education (DITE) study addresses the data collection vacuum with regard to ITE students' sexual orientations and the intersections of ITE students' sexualities, their socio-demographic backgrounds and career motivations. Given the call for greater diversity in the teaching profession, the small number of non-heterosexual respondents in this sample of 2014 applicants to postgraduate second-level ITE programmes suggests their under-representation in the ITE cohort in Ireland.

LGBT people who, despite the considerable covert and overt social, institutional and religious barriers apply for and enter ITE programmes in Ireland are highly motivated and committed to a teaching career. Their strong desire to 'fight inequality' and to 'make a difference to the lives of children and young people', together with their personal experiences of schooling uniquely position them to challenge and disrupt heteronormativity and sexual discrimination in schools and in ITE.

The prospect and experience of entering a third level programme that will likely require non-heterosexual ITE students to spend prolonged periods of time in a learning space that will cause considerable conflict between their personal (sexual and spiritual) and professional (student) lives, and that can effect their psychological well-being and identity development (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2004) pose clear equity issues at ITE access, participation and outcomes levels. Findings of this study

have shown that non-heterosexual ITE applicants have thought more (and extremely) carefully about becoming a teacher and it is likely that the careful consideration of the described institutional barriers and risk to personal wellbeing act as deterrents for LGBT people, who may be interested in and suited for but ultimately decide against a teaching career. For those non-heterosexual applicants who enter ITE programmes there is a high likelihood that their participation, their personal identity development and, as a result, educational outcomes will be compromised by a pedagogical space that openly rejects (and through the explicit Catholic ethos condemns) a central part of their identity and in which they are likely to have experienced discrimination and suffering as young learners.

Policy makers and teacher educators concerned about diversifying the teaching profession need to recognise the injustice experienced by LGBT teachers in the Irish education system and initiate open discussions about obstacles and possible affirmative action strategies. Applications from non-heterosexual applicants (together with those from other underrepresented groups) may be explicitly encouraged in promotional materials and events and ongoing support assured. This support could consist of, firstly, taking more action to provide respect, recognition and care for non-heterosexual ITE students in third-level institutions and by committing to the inclusion of sexuality as a core dimension of diversity in ITE programmes' social justice syllabi. Secondly, the provision of support with regard to identifying placement schools where the school ethos (and/or its implementation) is more accepting of LGBT teachers may lead to more positive course experiences for non-heterosexual ITE students.

The recent marriage referendum, the increased visibility of LGBT equality issues and the amendment to Section 37 of the *Irish Employment Equality Act* are promising first steps towards greater equality and quality of life for non-heterosexual students, teachers, and Irish citizens generally. However, their impact on the educational and professional experiences of student and practicing teachers will remain small if there is little significant engagement with the problematic intersection of sexuality and the predominantly Catholic (and heterocentric) school system in Ireland. Given the systemic impediments to diversifying teacher education with regards to sexualities, teacher educators as transformative

intellectuals and caring educational professionals, should do more than analyse stereotypes, more than acknowledge and support ‘others’ to navigate and/or survive in the system.

A commitment to diversity and social justice will necessitate that teachers and teacher educators become active agents who understand, engage, and transform the educational institutions that produce heterosexism and other forms of discrimination. Recognition, equity and wellbeing for sexual minority teachers and students are two sides of the same coin. Greater and more overt diversity of teaching staff will better meet the needs of, and prepare, both straight and LGBT students for life in a society that affords dignity and respect to all its members.

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Table 1		
2014 PME Applicants		
Overview of qualitative responses and <i>categories</i>	N	%
Heterosexual	316	53.83
Straight	225	38.33
Male/men/females (opposite sex)	7	1.19
Attracted to opposite sex/other gender/women/men	8	1.36
Completely heterosexual	1	0.17
Straight as an arrow	1	0.17
Normal (5), General (1)	6	1.02
<i>Categorised as heterosexual</i>	564	96.08
Gay	8	1.36
Homosexual	6	1.02
Lesbian	1	0.17
Bisexual	5	0.85
Bicurious	1	0.17
Queer/Bisexual	1	0.17
Pansexual	1	0.17
<i>Categorised as non-heterosexual</i>	23	3.92
Total number of responses where sexual orientation can be identified	587	100
In a relationship	2	
Single	3	
Relevance?	1	
Active	1	
?	1	
<i>Not categorised (sexual orientation unclear)</i>	8	
No response to the sexual orientation question	151	
Total Number of 2014 PME Survey Respondents	746	

FIT – Factors and Higher Order Factors		All heterosexual (N=475-483) & heterosexual male (N=177-182) PME appl.	All non-heterosexual (N=21) & non-heterosexual male (N=16) PME appl.			
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	p
CAREER MOTIVATIONS						
Ability <i>Alpha: 0.783</i>	All	6.024	0.947	6.040	0.820	.940
	Males	5.856	1.048	5.990	0.679	
Intrinsic career value <i>Alpha: 0.650</i>	All	6.141	0.958	6.325	0.655	.384
	Males	5.898	1.063	6.281	0.704	
Teaching Subject <i>Alpha: 0.823</i>	All	6.360	0.938	6.349	0.974	.956
	Males	6.191	1.013	6.229	1.073	
Fallback career <i>Alpha: 0.625</i>	All	1.614	0.905	1.381	0.626	.245
	Males	1.734	0.935	1.437	0.696	
Personal Utility Value <i>Alpha: 0.900</i>	All	3.566	1.230	3.531	1.171	.902
	Males	3.548	1.216	3.498	0.987	
Job security <i>Alpha: 0.886</i>	All	4.526	1.549	4.222	1.777	.382
	Males	4.535	1.503	4.020	1.728	
Time for family <i>Alpha: 0.851</i>	All	2.984	1.439	3.021	1.505	.908
	Males	2.927	1.328	3.053	1.409	
Job transferability <i>Alpha: 0.727</i>	All	3.572	1.567	3.667	1.585	.788
	Males	3.600	1.507	3.687	1.341	
Social Utility Value <i>Alpha: 0.933</i>	All	5.616	1.046	5.716	1.057	.667
	Males	5.380	1.021	5.524	1.126	
Shape future of children adolescents <i>Alpha: 0.822</i>	All	5.785	1.098	5.857	1.172	.769
	Males	5.614	1.114	5.583	1.214	
Enhance social equity <i>Alpha: 0.881</i>	All	5.266	1.408	5.429	1.609	.608
	Males	5.086	1.382	5.187	1.743	
Make social contribution <i>Alpha: 0.844</i>	All	5.821	1.142	6.134	0.767	.213
	Males	5.725	1.112	6.031	0.761	
Work with children/adolescents <i>Alpha: 0.896</i>	All	5.586	1.302	5.444	1.415	.628
	Males	5.103	1.339	5.291	1.460	
Prior teaching and learning experience (as pupils) <i>Alpha: 0.875</i>	All	5.815	1.296	5.460	1.396	.221
	Males	5.590	1.358	5.354	1.395	
Social influences <i>Alpha: 0.862</i>	All	3.211	1.692	3.317	1.899	.778
	Males	3.329	1.731	3.333	1.809	
CAREER PERCEPTIONS						
Task Demand	All	5.656	0.809	5.590	1.003	.717

<i>Alpha: 0.765</i>	<i>Males</i>	5.454	<i>0.941</i>	5.425	<i>1.078</i>	
Expertise	All	5.444	1.037	5.476	1.156	.891
<i>Alpha: 0.643</i>	Males	5.369	1.151	5.312	1.223	
Difficulty	All	5.797	0.885	5.667	1.269	.518
<i>Alpha: 0.763</i>	Males	5.506	0.997	5.500	1.414	
Task Return	All	4.653	<i>0.955</i>	4.714	<i>1.037</i>	<i>.786</i>
<i>Alpha: 0.845</i>	Males	4.577	<i>1.001</i>	4.578	<i>1.109</i>	
Social Status	All	4.923	1.066	5.095	1.114	.470
<i>Alpha: 0.841</i>	Males	4.821	1.136	4.917	1.167	
Salary	All	3.858	1.104	3.571	1.207	.247
<i>Alpha: 0.878</i>	Males	3.850	1.113	3.562	1.250	
Social Dissuasion	All	3.763	1.477	4.159	1.665	.233
<i>Alpha: 0.675</i>	Males	3.760	1.407	4.042	1.703	
Satisfaction with choice	All	6.510	0.760	6.587	0.674	.646
<i>Alpha: 0.832</i>	Males	6.335	0.886	6.500	0.740	

FIT-Choice Scale Items		All Heterosexual & Heterosexual Male Respondents		All Non-heterosexual & Non-heterosexual Male Respondents		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
		M	SD	M	SD				
I want to fight inequality	All	4.65	1.784	5.55	2.064	520	-2.284	.023	.466
	Males	4.46	1.682	5.35	2.234	202	-1.607	.044	.450
I want to make a difference to the lives of children and teenagers	All	6.26	1.028	6.68	0.477	30.559	-3.744	.001	.524
	Males	6.12	1.064	6.65	0.493	200	-2.003	.046	.639
I am interested in teaching	All	6.55	0.895	6.91	0.294	41.684	-4.776	.000	.540
	Males	6.42	1.007	6.94	0.243	87.317	-5.472	.000	.709
How carefully have you thought about becoming a teacher?	All	6.55	0.815	6.86	0.468	27.171	-2.906	.007	.466
	Males	6.37	0.937	6.82	0.529	26.644	-3.107	.004	.591