

**Tolerance from the Borderlands.**  
**Peruvian trainee teachers' standpoints on gay and lesbian people**

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**Abstract**

In 2016 a political struggle erupted in Peru. After the approval of a new National Curriculum that opened the room for the recognition of LGTBIQ+ identities at school, fundamentalist groups came out in strong opposition. Within this polarized political struggle, which can be seen as part of the current rise of anti-gender discourses across the Latin American region, the voices of young actors in the education sector were hardly heard. Based on two focus groups and eight individual interviews grounded in standpoint theory, this paper analyzes the meanings that students of pedagogy in Lima ascribe to 'tolerance' towards gay and lesbian people, and how these meanings inform their pedagogical practices. The study engages in a dialogue with the work of Wendy Brown, who argues that tolerance is a discourse of power and depolitization that mainly regulates aversion towards the Other. On the one hand, within some participants' accounts, tolerance is used to frame gay and lesbian identities as marginal/undesired within the school, especially when cisgender borders are crossed. On the other hand, within other participants' accounts, this meaning of tolerance is contested, breaking the expected equation between tolerance and aversion. In these later cases, participants commit to an *engaged pedagogy* - a concept coined by bell hooks. They confront homophobia in the classroom and open the door to the transcendence of binary gender discourses. Since these two contradictory perspectives can be present within one individual, this paper argues that future teachers can be seen as *Mestizas* inhabiting the *Borderlands* -two concepts developed by Gloria Anzaldúa. Therefore, they can embrace ambiguity and operate in a pluralistic mode, turning porous the socially constructed border between straight and queer people in classrooms.

**A note for readers**

This work-in-progress paper is based on my master thesis in Social Studies of Gender, with a major in Education. I just defended this thesis last January at Lund University (Sweden). I very much would like to turn the thesis into a journal article, as suggested by my supervisor. Thanks in advance for any feedback you can give to this paper.

## 1. Introduction

*There are so many borders  
that divide people  
but for each border  
there's also a bridge*

(Gina Valdés, in Gloria, 2012, p.107. My translation)

### A polarized political context

In 2016 a new political struggle erupted in Peru. One of its pivotal axes was the recognition of LGTBIQ+<sup>1</sup> identities in schools. In June of that year, the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) approved a new National Curriculum (NC)<sup>2</sup> which included the recognition of gender identities beyond the heterosexual dichotomy men/women. Provoked by this, fundamentalist groups related to evangelical and catholic churches, in an unprecedented alliance, came out in strong opposition to the NC. Organized through the *Don't you mess with my kids* (*Don't Mess* onwards) campaign, the fundamentalists took over the media, organized mass demonstrations and managed to destabilize the government<sup>3</sup>.

In this polarized context, two different standpoints on LGTBIQ+ identities and the role of the school became sharply outlined in the political arena: a conservative one led by *Don't Mess*, and a more progressive one articulated by the MINEDU and civil society groups. While the first standpoint argued that “the gender ideology will homosexualize students at school”<sup>4</sup>, the second stated that “the NC does not promote any sexual

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<sup>1</sup> I'll use the acronym LGTBIQ+, which refers to lesbian, gay, trans\*, bisexual, intersexual, and queer identities. The '+' represents an open end for acknowledging other non-normative identities. I chose this term being conscious of its vantages and limitations. Following Merrill et al (2016:unpaginated) this term can be seen as an umbrella, used to combine efforts of non-heterosexually and non-cisgender-identifying members in addressing problems affecting the community (as legal recognition, discrimination and violence). The acronym has been criticized for being exclusionary, white-dominated and unable to support the needs of their members in an equal way -bisexual and trans\* identities have been marginalized.

<sup>2</sup> The NC establishes the learning outcomes expected for pre-school, elementary and high school students.

<sup>3</sup> Between 2016 and 2019 three Ministers of Education (J. Saavedra, M. Martens and F. Pablo) were interpellated by the Congress. During this period, the majority of Congress was held by the political party *Fuerza Popular*, which had publicly supported the *Don't Mess* campaign. In the lists of questions that the Ministers had to answer at the Congress there were several ones related to gender and the NC. In the case of Martens, her Interpellation ended up in the fall of the whole Ministers' Cabinet.

<sup>4</sup> Gender Ideology is how fundamentalist groups refer to the “Gender Equality Approach” of the NC. *Homosexualize* (*homosexualizar*) is a verb introduced by *Don't Mess*. This is a new word. I tried to grasp this intervention in language in the translation.

orientation in particular. It educates our students to adopt values of respect and tolerance, and to reject all forms of discrimination within and outside the school”<sup>5</sup>.

### **Purpose and research question**

Given that, on the one hand, the voice of young people within the education sector has hardly heard on this polarized context, and on the other hand, the use of ‘tolerance’ within MINEDU’s discourse to defend the Curriculum from fundamentalist attacks, this study was guided by the following research question: **What meanings do students of pedagogy ascribe to ‘tolerance’ towards gay and lesbian people, and how do these meanings inform their pedagogical practices?**

The circulation of tolerance talk —as the feminist political philosopher Brown (2006) calls it— within pedagogical debates is not new. It has been a major issue in debates about multicultural education (see for instance McLaren, 2012; da Silva, 1999), especially during the last decades of the XXth century. But the use of the term tolerance has now become much more widespread, therefore one finds references to it in many different venues (Brown, 2006:4). Moreover, Brown (2006) argues that tolerance can be seen as a discourse of power and depolitization, directed primarily to regulate aversion towards the Other.

Taking inspiration from feminist critical pedagogies as well as from Chicana feminist<sup>6</sup> and queer critiques - especially hooks (1994) and Anzaldúa (2012 and 2015)- this thesis engages on a dialogue with Brown’s perspective on tolerance, by taking into account the standpoints and situated knowledges of Peruvian students of pedagogy. I argue that within these standpoints certain meanings are ascribed to tolerance, and that these meanings influence the future teachers’ pedagogical practices<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, in certain cases these pedagogies manage to break down the equation between tolerance and aversion in the classroom.

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.minedu.gob.pe/pdf/infografia-cn.pdf> Date of access: October 2019

<sup>6</sup> The term *Chicano/a* was popularized in the late 1960s during the Chicano Movement. The term aimed to affix a political orientation that sustained the need to struggle against historical oppression of people of Mexican descent in United States (De la Torre and Pesquera, 1993:xiii). Nowadays Chicana studies is an institutionalized field within social science. Some remarkable feminist scholars within this field are Chela Sandoval and Gloria Anzaldúa.

<sup>7</sup> As will be specified in Chapter 4, seven of the eight interviewed participants have teaching experience.

At a more abstract level, and following Connell, this study is grounded in an understanding of social science as embodied practice (Connell, 2007:217), which is done by particular individuals in particular locations. Thus, while Brown (2006) carries out a remarkable analysis of tolerance discourse and builds an important theory which aims to explain a global dynamic, she focuses on cases situated in USA and Europe. In this way, her work contributes to picturing a world as seen from the perspective of the relatively rich countries that comprise the ‘global metropole’, which is still a common practice in theory-building within the social sciences (Connell, 2007). This study then aims to focus on voices that have been marginalized or excluded from Northern debates. These voices can contribute to a broader understanding of how tolerance discourses work within countries from the Global South, where the far-right and anti-gender radicalism has dramatically increased in recent years.

## 2. Conceptual framework

As noted above, this thesis engages in a critical dialogue with Brown’s (2006) work, and my arguments on this dialogue build on the analytical tools developed by hooks (1994) and Anzaldúa (2012, 2015). This section is divided in three parts. In the first, I discuss Brown’s analysis of tolerance as a discourse of power and depoliticization. The second section focusses on hooks’ (1994) concept of *engaged pedagogy* and the third one on Anzaldúa’s notions of Mestiza Consciousness and Nos/otras.

### 2.1. A critique of the liberal discourse of tolerance

#### *Tolerance as a discourse of power*

Brown argues that tolerance does not simply address identity/difference but actively contributes to its production within a certain power structure: “Discourses of tolerance inevitably articulate identity and difference, belonging and marginality, civilization and barbarism, and [they] inevitably do so on behalf of hegemonic social or political powers” (Brown, 2006:10).

The construction of identity/difference through tolerance is rooted in a dialectical production of certain identities as superior and others as inferior and undesired: “Almost all objects of tolerance are marked as deviant, marginal, or undesirable by virtue of being

tolerated, and the action of tolerance inevitably affords some access to superiority” (Brown, 2006:14). In this sense, tolerance involves managing the presence of the undesirable, and therefore it has a normative aspect: to be a subject of tolerance is to embody a presence outside the centre or norm, it is to be different and to be marked as such within a public space or social institution (Gray, 2016:423).

Furthermore, what is considered different in terms of gender, sexuality and/or race through tolerance discourse is interwoven with the public/private dichotomy. Thus, Gray states that subjects of tolerance are endured by the mainstream so long as they are not too visible, vocal or demonstrative; that is, as long as they exist within certain parameters (Gray, 2016:424).

### ***Tolerance as a discourse of depolitization***

Brown argues that “depolitization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it” (Brown, 2006:15; italics in original). In this sense, instead of presenting identity and difference as contingent products of power relations, tolerance discourse tends to naturalize these differences through the essentialization of social identities: “tolerance tends to cast group conflict as rooted in ontologically natural hostility towards essentialized religious, ethnic, or cultural difference” (Brown, 2006:15).

In addition, Brown argues that power discursively disappears when a hegemonic population tolerates a marked minoritized one. In this context, the unmarked-because-hegemonic identity aligns itself with universality and relative neutrality, while the objects of tolerance are associated with particularity and partiality (Brown, 2006:186). Following this line of argument, heterosexual people tend to present themselves as the universal identity which grants tolerance to particularized and marginalized LGTBIQ+ people.

The limits of tolerance talk within schools is also outlined by Brown. According to her, when students are urged to tolerate one another’s race, ethnicity, culture, religion or sexual orientation, there is no suggestion that the differences at stake, or the identities through which these differences are negotiated, have been socially and historically constituted. Rather than being questioned, difference itself is what students learn they must tolerate (Brown, 2006:16).

Furthermore, Brown highlights that tolerance as depoliticization discourse turns into a reduction of political action and justice projects through sensitivity training or improvement in manners: “[Tolerance] substitutes emotional and personal vocabularies for political ones in formulating *solutions* to political problems (...) A justice project is replaced with a therapeutic or behavioural one” (Brown, 2006:16; italics in original). Moreover, since tolerance involves a view of citizenship as passive, and of social life as reduced to relatively isolated individuals or groups that barely contain their aversions toward each other (Brown, 2006:88), tolerance excludes the possibility of developing a deeper knowledge among people. Therefore, following Brown, when tolerance becomes a dominant political ethos and ideal, equality is abandoned, so too are projects of community and building connections across differences.

## **2.2. Analytical tools I use to engage in a dialogue with Brown**

When analysing the participants’ accounts regarding tolerance, I found that the meanings ascribed to this word, challenged Brown’s work on tolerance. Some results seemed to confirm Brown’s line of analysis, but others just would not fit. At this point, hooks’ (1994) and Anzaldúa’s (2012, 2015) theoretical and conceptual turned key analytical tools.

### ***Engaged pedagogy: education beyond the mere transmission of information***

Engaged pedagogy, a concept introduced by hooks (1994), seeks to achieve what Freire called “conscientization” in the classroom<sup>8</sup>. Understanding this term as “critical awareness and engagement” (hooks, 1994:15), an engaged pedagogy embraces the teachers’ commitment to offer not only information in the classroom but also to address the connections between what students learn at school and their overall life experiences (hooks, 1995:19).

Additionally, engaged pedagogy is based on the recognition of students as “unique beings” (hooks, 1994:13). This implies that they need to be seen in their particularity as

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<sup>8</sup> Hooks (1994) works is particularly nurtured by two “teachers” -as she calls them: Paulo Freire and Thich Nhat Hanh. Paulo Freire is a Brazilian scholar; perhaps the most famous book of his is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which was published in the 1970s. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Vietnamese Buddhist monk. The book that hooks (1994) quotes from is *The Raft Is Not the Shore*, also published during the 1970s.

individuals and interacted with according to their needs (hooks, 1994:7). Experience then turns crucial in the construction of an engaged pedagogy. Often seen as something belonging to the private sphere, experience has the potential to illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material (hooks, 1994:21).

When teachers' work is rooted in engaged pedagogy, students should learn "to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstance" (hooks, 1994:47). Teachers themselves should also engage in a parallel process. They are expected to be actively committed to reflect on their own life as well as on the power relations operating within society. More concretely, they should unlearn categories such as racism, sexism and homophobia.

Additionally, according to hooks, one way to acknowledge people's presence is to recognize the value of each individual voice. Therefore, it is crucial that teachers keep in mind the questions: Who speaks? Who listens? And Why? To do this, two important skills need to be developed: speaking and listening.

Regarding speaking, it is important to note that although an engaged pedagogy necessarily values on the students' expressions (hooks, 1994:20), this does not imply that everything said in class should be listened to uncritically. Here Ludlow's (2004) work on the classroom as a contested space becomes relevant. For her, the feminist classroom is "a space that is not necessarily defined by conflict, but which includes room for [it]". Ludlow highlights that "contested" means both disputed and collaborative; therefore, in a contested classroom any invocation of experience is subject to critique and expectations of "accountability" (Haraway, quoted in Ludlow: 2004:48). In this sense, standpoints and experiences brought to the classroom can be discussed and analysed, through reference to issues of power and privilege. And regarding listening, it is important to note that according to hooks (1994) , listening turns crucial in the construction of an engaged pedagogy since it allows mutual recognition and respect among subjects to emerge.

### *Anzaldúa's concepts of Mestizas and Nos/Otras*

Addressing the turbulent and violent history of the Mexican-USA border and highlighting the contingency inherent in its definition, Anzaldúa defines *La Frontera* (the border) as: "a dividing line (...) a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of

an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa, 2012:25). Moreover, the border is a geographical area that is more susceptible to *la mezcla* (hybridity), being neither fully Mexico nor fully of the United States (Cantú and Hurtado, 2012:6). In this sense, *Borderlands* are considered as a third space between cultures and social systems since: “[t]he convergence has created a shock culture, a border culture, a third country” (Anzaldúa, 2012:33).

For Anzaldúa, *Mestizas* —the ones inhabiting borderlands— are provided with a particular perspective that allows a critical view of the two cultures contributing to their life experiences<sup>9</sup>, a perspective that Anzaldúa describes as “seeing double”. Moreover, Anzaldúa argues that being exposed to two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference allows *Mestizas* to locate in what Anzaldúa calls *nepantla*, an Aztec word that means torn between ways: “Negotiating with borders results in mestizaje, the new hybrid, the new mestiza, a new category of identity. *Mestizas* live in between different worlds, in *nepantla* (...) we [*mestizas*] must constantly operate in a negotiation mode” (Anzaldúa, 2015:71).

The concept of borderlands refers not only to geopolitical borders. Anzaldúa uses the border between Mexico and USA also as a metaphor for all types of crossings: between geopolitical boundaries, sexual transgressions, social dislocations, and the crossing necessary to exist in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts (Cantú and Hurtado 2012:6). In this sense, *mestizas* can be defined as the ones who do not fit the norm (Anzaldúa, 2015:73).

For *Mestizas*, inhabiting *nepantla* means to live with clashing ideas and emotions. This is not an easy task; as Keating (2006) states: “*nepantla* hurts”. And there, *Mestizas* are compelled to develop a tolerance for contradiction and ambiguity; they learn to juggle cultures, to have a plural personality and to operate in a “pluralistic mode” (Anzaldúa, 2012:101). Furthermore, for Anzaldúa the contradictions inherent in *Mestizas* give them the ability and flexibility necessary to transform ambivalence into something else.

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<sup>9</sup> Anzaldúa developed the *Mestiza* concept mainly based on Chicana women experience (though it can be extended to anyone who crosses social borders). I’ll refer to *Mestizas* as feminine subjects in this document just like Anzaldúa (2012, 2015) does. See Cantú and Hurtado (2012:9) for a description of Anzaldúa’s focus on women experience.

Nepantla, then, is not only the place of inner-struggle and pain, but the liminal space where transformation can occur (Keating, 2006:8). Mestizas can transcend ambivalence by creating a new mythos, that is: “a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave” (Anzaldúa, 2012:102). In this way mestizas create a new consciousness, a *mestiza* consciousness, one characterized by movement towards a more whole perspective (Anzaldúa, 2012:102).

Reaching a *mestiza* consciousness demands that the dualistic logic inherent in relations of the type oppressor-oppressed is abandoned, and an attempt made to see reality from the perspective of “the other”. “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes” (Anzaldúa, 2012:100)<sup>10</sup>.

Anzaldúa’s theory of nos/otras can be seen as an enrichment and development of her reflections on the possibilities for healing social splits -that began with her book *La Frontera*. Nosotras is the Spanish word for the feminine “we”. Anzaldúa divides this word in two, nos/otras, and through this intervention highlights a tension. On the one hand, nos/otras affirms the possibility of a collectivity that the pronoun refers to, but it also acknowledges the divisiveness so often felt in contemporary societies (Keating, 2006:10). Within the first meaning of Nos/otras, the term holds out the promise of healing social divisions through the transcendence of aggressions and borders. Within this second meaning, Nos/otras makes evident the slash between “nos” (us) and “otros” (others)”, it underlines how we tend to “disregard the fact that we live in intricate relationships with others, that our very existence depends on our intimate interaction with all life forms” (Anzaldúa, 2015:76).

Anzaldúa’s notion of Nos/otras suggests that for social healing to occur we need to transcend the us-versus-them mentality of irreconcilable positions, and to move beyond us/them binaries present in divisions as men and women, queer and straight, able and

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<sup>10</sup> Following Anzaldúa, the serpent and the eagle present in the Mexican National Emblem, symbolize a gendered dichotomy with two opposite sides. “The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (the earth, the mother). Together they symbolize the struggle between the spiritual/celestial/male and the underworld/earth/feminine” (Anzaldúa, 2012:27).

disabled (Anzaldúa, 2015:77). We need to dismantle the identity markers that promote divisions, and make the slash of nos/otras increasingly permeable (Anzaldúa, 2015:88). Here it is important to underline that nos/otras does not imply or demand sameness. The differences among us still exist but they function dialogically, generating previously unrecognized commonalities and connections which Anzaldúa describes as “an unmapped common ground” (Keating, 2006:10).

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. A study grounded in standpoint epistemology**

Feminist standpoint epistemology provided me a point of departure both when conceiving this research and when taking corresponding methodological decisions. For instance, it was taken into account that for a research to take a critical view when seeking explanations of the social, standpoint scholars must focus research on “marginal lives”, the ones marginalized or excluded according to the dominant power relations (Harding, 1995; Hill Collins, 1997; Smith, 1997). The students of pedagogy I interviewed qualify as a marginal group, not only because they do not come from privileged families, but also because their voices have barely been heard during the peruvian recent political struggle regarding gender and education.

#### **3.2. Study Design**

##### ***Data collection***

Fieldwork was carried out in Lima with students of pedagogy from two different public institutions, between February and June 2019. The study was designed with a two-staged methodology for data collection. First, one focus group<sup>11</sup> was undertaken in each

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<sup>11</sup> The focus group guide had four parts. First, a group dynamic was made so participants could introduce themselves. Second, the topic was introduced through the question “what critiques has the MINEDU received for including the Gender Equality Approach in the schools?” Participants talked about the inclusion of LGTBIQ+ identities as a polemical issue. Third, an image viralized by fundamentalist groups, where a boy dressed as the red riding hood (the famous fairy tale) is depicted, was put on the wall. Participants had to create collectively a story for this character. Finally, stereotypes and previous knowledge about LGTBIQ+ identities were worked through small groups and a following open discussion, based on typical phrases from the Peruvian context, as “He’s gay because someone raped him when he was a kid”. Focus groups were inspired in my job experience, where I facilitated several workshop on the topic of gender equality with different school actors in Lima. For the thesis the data collection method is a focus group, since the accent was not put in the group of people learning, acquiring new knowledge or in problem-

institution. Following this, eight individual semi-structured interviews were carried out. This study design reflects Hill Collins's (1997) insight that members of a group do not necessarily interpret their common experiences in the same way. Focus groups allow me to map the heterogeneity of standpoints on "homosexuality" expressed by students of pedagogy, while the interviews allowed me to go into detail with respect to the different standpoints, who in a face-to-face interview could distance themselves from the group interaction held during the focus groups.

Fieldwork was designed and carried out from the perspective of the Active Interview developed by Holstein and Grubin (1995). This meant that both parties, researcher and participants, were conceived as necessarily and unavoidably involved in meaning-making work (Holstein and Grubin, 1995:3). The workshops lasted approximately two hours, and the interviews lasted one hour on average. All the material was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The results presented in this article are mainly based on the interview's results.

### ***Sampling***

Fieldwork was conducted in two public institutions that train future teachers in Lima: Institution A and Institution B. In both, the study focused on students enrolled in the speciality of "Social Sciences" who were completing the final year of their undergraduate studies. The Institutions selected represent two end points of a *continuum* of public institutions (universities and pedagogical institutes) in Lima that train future teachers<sup>12</sup>, in terms of their size (number of students) and the socio-economic situation of their students (given the neighbourhoods where they are located).

In the case of Institution A, 27 participants attended the focus group (13 women and 14 men), and in Institution B there were 11 (9 women and 2 men). Following these, eight individual interviews were conducted: 5 with participants from Institution A and 3 from Institution B. Table 1 presents some demographic characteristics of the eight participants

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solving situations (Ørngreen R and Levinsen, 2017:71) but on the interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning (Bryman, 2012:502).

<sup>12</sup> The official list of Universities was taken from web site of the National Superintendence of University Higher Education SUNEDU <https://www.sunedu.gob.pe/sibe/> (Date of access: February 2019). The list of Pedagogical Institutes was taken from the web site of the MINEDU <http://escale.minedu.gob.pe> Date of access: February 2019.

interviewed. Among them, 50% are female students and one identifies himself as gay. The group's average age is 26.1 years, with Institution B's participants being slightly older. Most of the participants already had teaching experience. Additionally, all interviewees from Institution B are parents.

**Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewed participants**

Institution A	Sex	Sexuality	Age	Teaching experience	Parent experience
Ana	Female	Straight	21	Yes (Internship)	No
Lorena	Female	Straight	24	Yes (Work)	No
Pedro	Male	Straight	25	Yes (Work)	No
Julio	Male	Straight	23	Yes (Internship)	No
Oscar	Male	Gay	27	No	No
Institution B	Sex	Sexuality	Age	Teaching experience	Parent experience
Elena	Female	Straight	24	Yes (Work)	1 five-year-old daughter
Violeta	Female	Straight	30	Yes (Work)	1 ten-year-old daughter
Antonio	Male	Straight	35	Yes (Work)	1 one-year-old son

Source: Own elaboration based on fieldwork for this study

### 3.3. Analytical Process

The analytical method employed in this study is qualitative content analysis. The analysis was done in two stages, using two different correspondent specific methods. First, a conventional content analysis was carried out, where coding categories were derived directly from the text data; then, a directed approach was applied, where codes and categories were grounded in theory (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1277). At both stages, the process of coding was made manually over hard copies of the transcript interviews.

The first stage of the analysis was done using the conventional content analysis approach, based on Mayring (2014) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Since this study is grounded on standpoint theory, this approach was preferred to others, because it allows the analysis both to be based on each participant's unique perspective and to be grounded in the actual data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1280). Data analysis started with the repeated reading of all data in order to achieve immersion and gain a sense of the whole (Tesch, 1990). A pre-coding selection was then done—as suggested by Saldaña (2009)—, so as to focus on data that seemed more relevant for the study. In these pre-coded sections, data was read word by word to derive codes, highlighting the words from the text that appeared to capture key thoughts. Side notes for registering first impressions, thoughts and initial analysis were also done.

After this analysis was done, Tolerance was found to be a relevant category of analysis, since it was mentioned by different participants as a key learning for students to acquire

regarding LGTBQ+ people. The second part of the analysis was done using a directed content analysis approach, based also on Mayring (2014) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005). This particular method can be seen as the most central (Mayring, 2014:95), since its goal is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Given this, I chose this approach in order to engage in a dialogue with Brown (2006). All interview data was read again and recoded, now using key concepts taken from Brown's work—including tolerance, power, depolitization—as initial codes. But as Hsieh and Shannon (2005) point out, I found that some parts of the text could not be categorized using this initial coding scheme. Some participants' accounts did not fit with Brown's (2006) perspective of tolerance. At this point, I found that the concepts from hooks (1994) and Anzaldúa (2012, 2015) presented in Chapter 3 became relevant for the analysis. New codes based on these concepts were then created. After the coding was done, codes were organized into themes, and themes into categories. This analytical structure is the basis for the results presented in the following section.

As Hsieh and Shannon state, the direct approach of qualitative content analysis also presents challenges that must be considered. First, when data analysis is done through theory-based codes, researchers are more likely to find evidence that is supportive rather than non-supportive of a particular theory (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1283). I tried to tackle this by engaging in a dialogue with Brown's (2006) theoretical work on tolerance. Second, an overemphasis on theory can prevent researchers from seeing contextual aspects of the phenomenon (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005:1283). This challenge was addressed by spending a relatively long time in the field and making repeated visits to both Institutions, which allowed a prolonged engagement with the context. Additionally, I organised a peer debriefing in Lima in June 2019, where teachers and students of a Master's programme in Gender Studies could give feedback to the preliminary results of the study.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations**

The “Good Research Practice” guide published by the Swedish Research Council (SRC) in 2017 was the basis for methodological decisions taken concerning ethical issues.

All participants were verbally informed of the objective of the study, how data would be collected (through focus groups and interviews) as well as the voluntary nature of their participation. They were also informed that the focus groups and interviews would be audio-recorded and transcribed, and their identities would be protected. All participants signed a written consent form where this information was described.

All the material forthcoming from focus groups and interviews was anonymized in order to prevent possible negative consequences, given the polemical political situation regarding issues of gender and education in Peru. Personal information was removed so that it would be impossible in practice to link particular answers to specific individuals. Participants were assigned a different name, which could be feminine or masculine depending on how they referred to themselves during the interviews. I am conscious that the act of naming is an act of power (Halberstam, 2018), and that no neutral new names can be given<sup>13</sup>. However, I chose to give new names to participants, instead of using numbers or other codes, in order to keep a human texture in their voices.

### **3.5. Some limitations**

The study does not claim to be representative of the universe of pedagogy students in Lima. To begin with, the study focused on public institutions and excluded private ones<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, the study's results refer primarily to the students involved. However, it should be pointed out that since the study aimed to present a heterogeneity of standpoints on gay and lesbian people, the results may well be relevant in other similar contexts.

Language and translation are additional limitations that this study has had to deal with. Spanish is my native language, as it is for all participants of this study. Therefore, I have needed to translate the participants' voices and insert them into another English-speaking context. In this exercise I am aware that some things have been lost. In particular, I am aware of Widerberg's warning on how: "translating understandings of gender implies eliminating some contextual understandings and concepts that can be expressed in one's

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<sup>13</sup> This statement comes from a thesis seminar with Marta Kolankiewicz at Lund University held in December 2019.

<sup>14</sup> In Peru, the percentage of students of pedagogy that attend public (and not private) universities is 53%. And in the case of Pedagogical Institutes this percentage arises to 69%. Estimations were done by the author based on data from the official web sites of MINEDU <http://escale.minedu.gob.pe> and SUNEDU <https://www.sunedu.gob.pe/sibe/>. Date of access: January 2020.

native language, in favour of the foreign language and its concepts” (Widerberg 1998:133). To compensate for this, I have tried to contextualize every quotation that is included.

### **3.6. Reflexive considerations**

Scholars like Haraway (1988) and Harding (1997) argue that objectivity actually comes from partial and situated perspectives, and from the researcher being accountable for what she/he has learnt to see (Haraway, 1988:583). Given this, in this section I outline my own position and how this might have influenced my research results.

First, my connection to this topic is grounded in my job experience. During 2016 I was one of the panel of “experts” who wrote the NC and later I was part of a team that would give technical advice on how to defend the NC against attacks by fundamentalist groups. This work experience later came into dialogue with my recent experience of studying a Master in Gender Studies at Lund Universeity, which allowing me to reflect on my previous location as a Peruvian technocrat in educational matters. Both experiences are present in my *vision* of students of pedagogy’s discourses and experiences.

A second point is that data collection was also influenced by the fact that during fieldwork I was a 37-year-old cis-woman, who grew up in a middle-class neighbourhood in Lima. This meant I occupied a particular position in local power relations. Here I refer not only to the relations inherent in being the person facilitating the focus groups and interviews (the one who posted questions), but also in terms of my class, gender and age. Here, it is also interesting to note that students were also aware of their own positions in these power relations. For instance, when I called students to ask them for an interview many of them would say “Ok miss, I’ll help you”, making explicit their position as *helpers* and my dependence on their contribution for this research.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Crossing borders through life experience**

All participants in this study can be seen as mestizas, in Anzaldúa (2012) terms, in the sense that their life experiences have exposed them to the “in between” zones among two

(or more) different social groups, in terms of culture (family migration), class (being working class and studying) and/or parenthood.

First, most of the participants live in relatively poor neighbourhoods of Lima but they have had access to tertiary education, which is not a common experience among young people living in poverty<sup>15</sup>. Second, most of their parents have come to Lima from the provinces, some from small rural villages. Consequently, the majority belong to the first generation to be born or raised in the capital within their families. This is not a minor detail. Since discrimination in Peru is largely based on place of origin and/or perceived race<sup>16</sup>, the participants are most likely to have experienced this.

Third, only three participants (Lorena, Julio and Ana) have been able to become full-time students after leaving secondary school. Therefore, the majority of participants have been forced to stop their tertiary education at some point due to economic problems. As a consequence, they have experienced being simultaneously tertiary education students and workers; some with physically highly demanding jobs. Furthermore, three of them have experienced being students and parents at the same time, dividing their time between study activities, work and childcare. The case of Oscar has an extra layer in terms of being a *mestiza*, since besides the border crossings of class and culture, he is gay. Being an effeminate boy located him in the borderland in terms of gender and sexuality at an early age.

Participants can also be seen as *mestizas* in another sense. Given the context of the political struggle described on Chapter 2, participants have been exposed to (at least) two different, usually opposing, views regarding “homosexuality” and the recognition of LGTBIQ+ identities at school. All the participants showed during the focus groups that they were aware of this political struggle and could identify the central ideas promoted by the *Don't Mess* campaign and MINEDU.

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<sup>15</sup> In Perú, among people who are 15 years old or older only 14.3% access to non-university tertiary education, and 19.7% access to universities (INEI, 2018). The percentage of people who access to tertiary education is considerably lower among young people living on poverty. Taken from: <https://larepublica.pe/sociedad/861568-solo-3-de-cada-10-jovenes-accede-la-educacion-superior-en-el-peru/> Date of access: September 2019.

<sup>16</sup> According to a national survey, 53% of population of the country think that Peruvians are racists (Ipsos, 2018) [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-03/percepciones\\_sobre\\_diversidad\\_cultural\\_y\\_discriminacion\\_etico-racial.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-03/percepciones_sobre_diversidad_cultural_y_discriminacion_etico-racial.pdf) Date of access: September 2019.

Additionally, many participants who had teaching experience could see the consequences of this polarized political struggle in their work environments. While some colleagues and parents had expressed their support for the NC, others did not accept LGBTBIQ+ people in schools. This had created conflicts, and turned schools into places with clashing ideas and emotions which the trainee teachers had to navigate. Moreover, participants had to struggle to navigate these situations due to a lack of information. All participants agreed that neither issues of gender nor LGBTIQ+ identities had been addressed by teachers in their undergraduate classes.

#### **4.2. Evidence of Tolerance as discourse of power and depolitization**

Tolerance was part of the participants' vocabulary when describing what students should learn at school regarding "homosexuality". Tolerance was mentioned as an expected learning outcome by five participants (Pedro, Lorena and Ana from Institution A; and Violeta and Elena from Institution B).

As the following quotations show, tolerance and also respect appear as desirable learnings that presumably heterosexual students should have towards gays and lesbians. All the quotations refer to the participants' answer to the question: "what should students learn about homosexuality at school?"

"I think that students have to understand that there are preferences, and that you have to tolerate them. And if you do not like them [these preferences], then get away from the scene, but do not attack this other person (...) [to teach students,] [w]hat happens if I'm in a situation that I don't like, if I'm in the situation of meeting a scandalous couple in the street for instance" (Ana).

The first point to make is that the tolerance discourse in this quotation locates gay and lesbian people outside of the classroom/school. The trainee teachers elaborate a message for their students about people who are not present in the classroom. Through this, Brown (2006) would argue, participants engage in the reproduction of tolerance as a discourse of power that establishes a norm: the ones who grant tolerance (heterosexuals) are considered to be the universal/normal identity, while the objects of tolerance (gays and lesbians) are the particular/marginal one.

A second point is the construction of gays and lesbians as undesirable identities that can become objects of violence. This violence is expressed through attacks (described by Ana). Ana's quote, gays and lesbians are presented as having a gender identity that would generate a desire for aggression within heterosexuals. This violent desire, far from being questioned, gets to be legitimated in Ana's discourse. As Brown (2006) would argue, this use of tolerance underlines how difference among people is considered to be ontologically natural which, in turn, prevents a deeper knowledge of the other. In fact, what Ana envisions is that a presumably heterosexual tolerant student must leave the place (construct a physical separation based on aversion) as a way to avoid attacking the "homosexual" person.

### 4.3. Pedagogies of Tolerance from the Borderlands

*There's a crack, a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in*  
(Extract from Cohen's song "Anthem". Quoted by Anzaldúa 2015:84)

Up to this point, tolerance and respect in participants' accounts seem to corroborate Brown's argument regarding tolerance as a discourse of power and depolitization. However, some participants contest this use of the word tolerance, ascribing other meanings to this term in their current pedagogical strategies. Based on two cases, I shall show how the understanding of tolerance discourse as proposed by Brown (2006) is being expanded, enriched and questioned, and how participants' interventions concerning tolerance and respect can be linked to the development of a mestiza perspective in Anzaldúa's (2012) terms.

#### 4.3.1. *Case 1: To be the Other. Tolerance as entry to link the personal and the political*

##### *Violeta's account of what happened*

A problematic situation arose in one of Violeta's high school classes. One of her 1<sup>st</sup> grade students, Nicolás<sup>17</sup>, was being constantly bullied by his classmates. Nicolás had a lesbian

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<sup>17</sup> I am using fictional names for narrating Violeta's story.

sister, Mariana, working at the school as part of the cleaning service. Her sexuality was the main reason why Nicolás' peers started bullying him. They would make fun of his sister in the corridors, and would call her and Nicolás names. This upset him, making him very angry with his sister, who he blamed for the bullying. 'When I get home, I want to hit her because I'm so angry, but I don't want to do that' Nicolás told Violeta.

Violeta decided to do something about it. She asked the school psychologist to help her, and together they made a plan. Violeta called all the class parents to a meeting, to inform them about the problem and have their approval in dealing with it at class. She told the parents that this would allow them to see: "What level of tolerance and respect we have among us, in the classroom". Though some parents were hesitating, and others were directly opposed, Violeta managed to gain their consent.

Next, a role-play dynamic was performed<sup>18</sup>. Students would recreate a scene of Nicolás being bullied because of Mariana's sexuality. Everyone had to play a role different from him/herself. Some students, Violeta remembers, didn't want to take part in the activity: "No, I don't want to. Are you crazy? I don't wanna be the lesbian!" Then Violeta told them that if the role-play dynamic could not be done, everyone would have to write an essay as homework. Then, all students agreed to do the activity.

After the dynamic was over, Violeta asked the students how they had felt, encouraging them to value the experience of being the Other: "Each of you, when you were acting as another person, got a chance to feel what your classmate was feeling. How did you feel?" In the end, Nicolás could release his feelings and came to see that his sister was not 'the problem', but the people who insulted her. Violeta remembers him telling his classmates: 'I felt free when I said all those insults (...) I unleashed my anger, what I had inside. And now I think that when I listen to someone talking about my sister, seeing her or me as different, I should understand that something must be going on with this person, and that's why he's saying these insults'.

### *Linking the personal with the political*

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<sup>18</sup> This dynamic resembles much of the Theatre of the Oppressed method, developed by Boal (2008). However, Violeta did not describe this role-dynamic in these terms.

As described in Section 2, according to Brown (2006), tolerance as a depoliticization discourse not only naturalizes the power relations that produce the difference but also substitutes emotional, behavioural and personal vocabularies for political ones when it comes to formulating solutions to political problems. Brown then creates a dichotomy between what can be considered as personal or emotional, and what gets to be considered political. Violeta's case provides evidence as to how these divisions can be questioned, by connecting the two elements of these dichotomies in line with one of the most important feminist claims: the personal is political.

Violeta as a teacher took the decision to not turn a blind eye to Nicolás's situation, but to actively intervene with a pedagogical strategy. She knows she will have to juggle between different demands and reluctances coming from both parents and students. In the case of the parents, she explains her decision to intervene in the classroom by underlining that students need to learn and practice tolerance and respect at school. She chose to use this vocabulary with parents, seeing this as an entry point to working with a more polemical topic (homophobia) while having the parents' approval. This was not an easy task given the polemical context, where some parents had already told Violeta about their aversion to "homosexual" people.

Therefore, one can see how Violeta makes use of a 'behavioural' code-word — tolerance— but does not reproduce or legitimize the homophobic violence against Nicolás or his sister. Instead, she was able to intervene in this by using a role-play dynamic. This allowed students to revise their own standpoints on gays and lesbians<sup>19</sup>, and in this sense it becomes a pedagogical strategy leading to greater conscientization, by bringing greater awareness and engagement as hooks (1994) argues.

Violeta's choice of this pedagogical strategy is far from being based solely on academic or intellectual knowledge. It is grounded in the students' experience, and more concretely, in Nicolás and Mariana's experiences. Their experiences move from a marginal position of being the target of the bullying, to become the centre of a collective work of reflection. Space is opened up for both Nicolás and his sister to become recognized in their 'uniqueness' and particular needs. Moreover, Nicolás' and Mariana's experience is taken

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<sup>19</sup> Elena, Ana and Pedro also mentioned role-play dynamics as a way to help heterosexual students to "put themselves in the place of the other" -as Elena described.

out of the semi-private sphere of what happens in corridors or at school-breaks, to occupy a central role in the public sphere: to be addressed seriously as the main topic of a classroom session. In this way, Violeta -without mentioning bell hooks (1994) or any other critical pedagogy scholar, puts into practice an engaged pedagogy.

In addition, the role-play dynamic where each student has to perform and embody someone else's subjectivity and experience presents a special opportunity to bring what hooks and Scapp (on hooks, 1994) call a radical consciousness of the body. Violeta designed the role-play in such a way that all the persons involved in the story were represented, including Mariana. Therefore, through the role-play dynamic, students not only were made aware of the existence of bodies with gendered identities that might be different than their own, but they also had to actually *be* this body/subject. Someone then had to give his voice to represent Mariana's, and also his body to represent hers. In this way, a boy not only got to be a girl, but a lesbian girl. Through this, Violeta's classroom becomes one of the most radical spaces for a pedagogy of freedom, since it transcends the heteronormative boundaries that Violeta herself is herself struggling with. She stated in different points of the interviews how she disapproves "homosexuality" and male effeminacy in particular (See section 6.2.1.). In this sense, Violeta seems sandwiched between two visions regarding gays and lesbians, juggling between two standpoints, which is characteristic of people inhabiting the Borderlands in Anzaldúa (2012) terms.

Violeta's case therefore challenges Brown's (2006) argument of tolerance as a strategy to merely cope with individuals we cannot imagine ourselves to be. In Violeta's story, tolerance is not only employed by individuals to regulate their aversion towards others, but also as an entry point for transcending straight/queer borders. Tolerance talk therefore allowed students to embody what they consider a marginalized, or even an undesirable, subject in terms of sexuality. It also provides an opportunity for students to see their own sexuality, and heterosexuality in general, as a particular (not universal) one, and for a moment see reality through lesbian eyes. In this way, presumably heterosexual students were given the chance to see how the personal (like sexual orientation) becomes political (as contested). As Anzaldúa (2012) would argue, students get to see reality from two different perspectives —as mestizas in Borderlands, through serpent and eagle eyes at the same time—.

### 4.3.2. Case 2: Tolerance as an entry to resistance

#### *Pedro's account on what happened*

Pedro is doing an internship teaching Social Science at a high school in Lima. In each class he always tries to make a connection between a current problem of ‘reality’ and the scheduled topic. When teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students and the scheduled topic was Tolerance, he decided to use a pedagogical strategy which included an open discussion of how gays are seen by society. When Pedro taught this class, the political struggle over the inclusion of LGTBIQ+ identity in schools had already begun.

To stimulate discussion, Pedro pinned two big images to the board, one next to the other. Both were reproductions of advertisements recently set up along the main avenues in Lima<sup>20</sup>. One image had been produced by Bethel, a TV channel run by a Pentecostal church. This included a biblical message directed at men: “God says, you will not lay down with another man as [you do] with a woman; it’s an abomination”. The other image presented two men dressed in elegant clothes and showing affection for each other. The message here was: ‘#MoreLoveLessHate. Absolutely’; the ad was part of a publicity campaign aimed to support same sex marriage in Lima during 2018.

**Table 2. Images Pedro used at his 2<sup>nd</sup> grade class, on the topic of Tolerance**



Source: 1<sup>st</sup> Image taken from <https://www.connuestroperu.com/actualidad/miscelanea/42493-homosexual-pretende-prohibir-cita-de-la-biblia-contra-la-sodomia-en-panel#!/ccomment-comment=231742>. Access on October 2019. 2<sup>nd</sup> Image taken from <https://capital.pe/actualidad/fotos-paneles-publicitarios-a-favor-del-matrimonio-igualitario-invaden-las-calles-de-lima-noticia-1160192>. Access on October 2019. Pedro sent me both images through WhatsApp communication.

<sup>20</sup> Pedro also used another image from a fundamentalist church, where a gay man was “transformed” into a heterosexual one as a consequence of the power of God or religion. Pedro, though, couldn’t find this image on Google after the interview -which is why I’m only using these two.

Pedro's objective was to stimulate group discussion where students could reflect on tolerance and the right to Freedom of Speech. He wanted his students to critically analyse the conservative interpretations of these images. First, they would reflect on why the picture showing the gay couple had provoked conservative people, who demanded it be taken down on the grounds that it was inappropriate and would corrupt children. The students would then reflect on how the other image had been disseminated, using the arguments of Free Speech and of reproducing a biblical text. The discussion, Pedro argues, would allow students to question what society tolerates and why.

According to Pedro, the children were eager to discuss this topic and none of them thought of it as inappropriate for their class. However, the person most troubled by Pedro's session was a school teacher. Entering the classroom for the following session, she saw the images. Her response was to take a piece of paper and cover up the faces of the gay couple. Then the children started asking: 'Why are you covering them up?' Pedro said he smiled and told the children that his class was now over. He told his colleague they would talk about this later. "I know why she covered it" he said. Later in the interview he told me that this conflict did not escalate.

According to Pedro's account, he is engaged in a mission: "The children already see homosexual people, they already know about this, and I want them to see [homosexuality] as something normal". The group discussion he facilitated in the class points to this. He also recalled that before starting his class, he had heard the students shouting at each other, and using the term 'fag' as an insult. Pedro told me he also used to do this when he was young. Reflecting on his own experiences, Pedro wants his students to change their view of "homosexuality".

### ***Group discussions in class: connecting tolerance to resistance***

Brown (2006) argues that tolerance discourse can be seen as being integral to governmentality in Foucauldian terms. But it should be remembered that Foucault's theorization of power includes also resistance. As he states, they are both inherent in the other, "where there is power there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978:95). From this perspective, Brown (2006) undertakes a remarkable analysis but her work focuses on tolerance as enacted by rather privileged social groups, leaving little room for addressing tolerance as a discourse that provokes resistance or contestation.

Pedro's case illustrates how the liberal discourse of tolerance can be resisted in situations found in countries from the Global South. Pedro's resistance to this discourse can be seen at two levels. First, he contests the homophobic discourses displayed in the public space of the city through advertisements. Second, he contests the school's internal implicit rules that censor the expression of love among gay couples. Pedro positions himself in a different location from other teachers, like the one who covered up one of the images. In this sense, he is using his class to contest a situation of silence about these topics in schools.

Pedro is committed to an engaged pedagogy as described by hooks (1994). He is not talking about tolerance and the different ways it can be critically interpreted at a theoretical level. On the contrary, he takes his material from public space, and in this way, makes a connection between what students learn at school and their daily life experiences outside the classroom.

When Pedro puts the two images together, he creates a dialogue between them. With this he demonstrates that it is possible to adopt different standpoints regarding gay people, and not accept a universal one. One image equates gays with being an abomination and constructs a border, as well as a hierarchy, between "heterosexual/homosexual" people. Furthermore, the advertisement re-produces a normalization of male heterosexuality, since its message is directed to an implicit heterosexual man. Heterosexuality then becomes "the universal" subjectivity (which the image talks to), while gays are presented as an object (who men should not lie down with). But this homophobic perspective is no longer an isolated or unquestioned one, since it is put in tension with another one, that is equally important, both in terms of the size of the image and its location on the class' board. Through this engaged pedagogy strategy, students are pressed to think critically about themselves (and their identities) in relation to their specific political circumstances (i.e. the hierarchization of heterosexuality over "homosexuality"). In this sense, Pedro's pedagogical strategy concerning tolerance contests the use of this term as a depolitization discourse. In particular, he is resisting what Brown (2006) warned concerning the liberal tolerance discourse: the presentation of the ones who tolerate as the universal subjects.

Additionally, the image of the gay couple contests—in Ludlow’s (2004) terms—the message given by the first one. It does so, by a questioning and re-arranging the lines between what is considered public and private. According to other participants, such as Antonio, Violeta and Julio, children are not supposed to see gay couples kissing each other, since it could affect and confuse them. Pedro contests this. He takes gay affection and love experience out of the private sphere where conservative discourses want to confine it, and re-locates it on a school board, an iconic public place where society displays what children should learn.

Furthermore, the image of the gay couple opens a way for students (whatever their sexuality) to build a commonality with the people represented there. The image connects gay affection with romance and love, feelings that most students might see themselves as capable of nurturing—at least later, and that are seen as socially positive and desirable feelings. The possibility of building commonalities between people regardless their sexuality during a class dedicated to tolerance, enriches Brown’s (2006) perspective on tolerance as a political ethos that forsakes projects of community and connections across differences.

Finally, Pedro’s class on tolerance can be seen as an example of an engaged pedagogy in one more respect. It had been inspired by both Pedro’s and his students’ experience when using sexualised words such as ‘fag’ to insult another person. As Violeta did in the previous case, Pedro decided not to turn a blind eye to this homophobic violence but to intervene in it through his choice of pedagogical strategy. As he recounts during the interview, this cannot be detached from his own life experience.

Here it is important to note that Pedro sees himself as someone who has overcome his earlier position of belonging to both “conservative” and “more liberal” (in his words) groups of friends. Previously, he used to see himself as a “hypocrite” because he shared homophobic jokes with his conservative friends but would not do this when he was among his “more liberal” friends at the Institution where he studies, where additionally some of them were gay. Then he decided to stop making these kinds of jokes anywhere. Following Anzaldúa (1985), one can suggest that by belonging to both groups simultaneously, Pedro came to hold a mestiza perspective and this allowed him to render both cultures (or social groups in this case) transparent: “Getting to know gay people also has helped me to see

how I can have friends who are narrow-minded or conservative, and friends who are a little bit more liberal”. Moreover, this experience that locates Pedro as a mestiza inhabiting a Borderland—in Anzaldúa (2012) terms—has become fundamental for him when experimenting with an engaged pedagogy.

## 5. Conclusion – Final reflection

Acknowledging the polarized current political context of Peru, where fundamentalist groups and the State have engaged in a political struggle over the inclusion of LGTBQ+ identities in the school, this study has explored the meanings that students of pedagogy in Lima ascribe to tolerance and respect towards gay and lesbian people, and how these meanings inform their pedagogical practices. The study took a two-stage methodology grounded in standpoint theory, where focus groups and later individual interviews, paid special attention to participants’ life experiences and embodied knowledge.

By doing so, this thesis has engaged in a dialogue with Brown’s (2006) work on tolerance, where this term is seen as a discourse of power and depolitization, that aims to regulate aversion towards the Other and forsakes projects of community and connections across differences. In this line, this thesis has argued that the way tolerance is used by future teachers in a developing country like Peru can enrich a theory of tolerance developed within the Global North academy, which aims to explain a global use of tolerance discourse.

On the one hand, some participants’ accounts confirm Brown’s (2006) theory of tolerance discourse. In these cases, tolerance discourse contributes to the idea that gays and lesbians are outsiders—as located outside the school—and undesirable identities who are unquestionably the target of homophobic school violence. Simultaneously, heterosexual people are seen as the normal, unaccountable and universal identities.

The analysis found that while tolerance discourse tends to be used under the premise that students are/will be heterosexuals, respect discourse is used when trainee teachers are confronted with the possibility of having gay or lesbian students or colleagues. That is, while tolerance is used to regulate an aversion that locates the Other as outsider, respect is used to regulate the coexistence of gay, lesbian and heterosexual people in the same

environment, like in the classroom or the school. In this context, the meanings ascribed to respect vary deeply according to the sexual orientation of the person. While for presumably heterosexual students this would be understood as ‘not to use violence’ against homosexual people, for gay and lesbian students it would mean ‘conceal your gender identity’, especially when cisgender borders are crossed. In this sense, what mostly troubles participants is not a non-normative sexuality (being homosexual) but a non-cisnormative gender expression (like an effeminate boy or an effeminate male teacher).

On the other hand, other participants’ accounts show that these previous meanings ascribed to tolerance are also being contested. Moreover, this contestation manages to pervade the participants’ pedagogical practices, breaking down the equation between tolerance and aversion in the classroom. Through these pedagogical interventions, some participants are opening the door to allow the transcendence of the binary logic that divides “heterosexual/homosexual” people; and in this sense, they hold out the promise of social transformation that makes the slash that divides *Nos/otras* porous as Anzaldúa (2015) would argue.

In these pedagogical practices, tolerance is used as an entrance or as key word to actually work with an engaged pedagogy, as described by hooks (1994), one that connects what is learnt at school with everyday life experiences, where homophobia can be contested. Through these pedagogical practices, homophobic actions of students or homophobic statements circulating in public space —exemplified by the advertisements in city streets— get to be analysed and worked through, and so become accountable. As a result, heterosexuality is no longer held out to be a universal/normal identity. Gay or lesbian embodied experiences —whether expressing affection/love or suffering homophobic bullying— get taken out of the private sphere where fundamentalist groups would like them to stay, to become an integral part of the public space that is the classroom.

These two contradictory standpoints (one rather conservative and the other rather progressive) coexist in a single individual. In this sense, participant accounts based on everyday life experience and embodied knowledge —coming for instance from friendships or parenthood—, show that the meanings ascribed to tolerance and respect to gays and lesbians, are far from being fixed, and can indeed embrace ambiguity and

operate in a “pluralistic mode”. In this sense, future teachers can be seen as Mestizas in Anzaldúa (2012) terms, as the ones who inhabit a Borderland (where physical or social borders are built, like the dichotomy of straight/queer), and as the ones who negotiate between two cultures or standpoints concerning gay and lesbian people, from a rather conservative one to a rather progressive one.

In her ground-breaking essay, *The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house*, Lorde (1983) invites us to think critically about the tools we use as scholars, and how they might contribute to reproduce patriarchal structures. She argues that “[the master’s tools] may allow us to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (Lorde, 2003:27). Following Lorde’s line of argument, this article has tried to show how some participants are using the master’s tools of tolerance discourse in order to beat homophobia and the “heterosexual/homosexual” dichotomy at its own game. It is most likely that new concepts and vocabularies (tools that no longer come from “the masters’ house) will be needed to dismantle binary gender discourses that divide straight/queer people in educational settings and society. But in the meantime, future teachers are grappling with their different life experiences and knowledge they possess. In a context where their undergraduate education has by passed the teaching of gender and of LGTBIQ+ identities in the school, trainee teachers seem to be pushing their own limits — “going against my own previous principles” as one said— in order to contest homophobia in their schools. Through this, they commit to an engaged pedagogy that struggles to transgress binary gendered social boundaries, and that looks for commonalities that can transcend the binary logic of a heterosexual *us* versus a “homosexual” *them*.

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