



Doing and undoing risk: the mutual constitution of risk and heteronormativity in contemporary society

Katarina Giritli Nygren, Susanna Öhman & Anna Olofsson

To cite this article: Katarina Giritli Nygren, Susanna Öhman & Anna Olofsson (2017) Doing and undoing risk: the mutual constitution of risk and heteronormativity in contemporary society, Journal of Risk Research, 20:3, 418-432, DOI: [10.1080/13669877.2015.1088056](https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2015.1088056)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2015.1088056>



Published online: 01 Oct 2015.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 885



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 20 View citing articles [↗](#)

Doing and undoing risk: the mutual constitution of risk and heteronormativity in contemporary society

Katarina Giritli Nygren^{a*}, Susanna Öhman^b and Anna Olofsson^b

^a*Forum for Gender Studies, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden;* ^b*Risk & Crisis Research Centre, Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden*

(Received 4 February 2015; final version received 11 August 2015)

This paper develops the concepts of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ risk, a new approach to risk research that echoes the ‘doing gender’ of gender studies. In this way, we combine intersectional and risk theory and apply the new perspective to empirical material. To better explore the doing and undoing, or the performance, of risk, we will refer to practices that simultaneously (re)produce and hide socio-political norms and positions, played out in contemporary, hierarchical relations of power and knowledge. The aim is to develop a theoretical understanding of doing and undoing risk. The study makes use of transcripts from five focus group interviews with men and women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people of different ages living in Sweden to develop a theory of ‘doing risk’. The doing of risk of our informants takes place within the frame of a hegemonic heteronormativity. The way that risks are perceived and done in everyday life therefore always needs to be read within a frame of prevailing structures of power. This counts for all of us as we are all part of the hegemonic power structures and thereby are both subject to the intersecting doings of risk and performatively reproducing these power structures in practice.

Keywords: risk theory; doing risk; intersectionality; inequality

Introduction

In my lifetime I’ve been physically assaulted three times and hospitalised once on leaving gay venues. (Michael, 66, London)

I do report the serious ones, but the low level name calling is a horrible but everyday occurrence really – it messes with your self-confidence and affects your work and health. (Michaela, 48, South-East England)

Unfortunately I am so severely anxious about being attacked I am permanently housebound. (Ed, 24, Wales)

Numerous examples like these remind us that who we are and who we love is entangled with risk. The above quotations from The Gay British Crime Survey 2013 show how hate crimes, discrimination and social exclusion are part of everyday life for homosexual and bisexual people (Guasp, Gammon, and Ellison 2013). In this paper, we argue that it is in the interplay between heteronormative structures, sexuality and gender that these risks are created – or done and undone. Over time these

*Corresponding author. Email: katarina.giritli-nygren@miun.se

risks become embodied and lived, and we develop a framework for analysing and theorising the multiple ways in which people of different sexualities, ages and genders are doing and undoing risk in everyday life. Our main argument for opening up the ‘doing gender’ framework is that it makes it possible to create a space in which to engage theoretically in rethinking the calculations of, for example, health risks and the ways in which these intersect with, for example, gender, class, sexuality, or race. In line with an intersectional approach, this paves the way for construction as well as deconstruction. By taking intersectional theory as a starting point, the everyday understanding and practices of risk can be understood as an embodied practice – a site where social meanings and knowledge are inscribed.

During the last decade of risk research, we have witnessed an increase in diversification and a number of new creative contributions to improve understanding of risk in contemporary society (e.g. Boholm and Corvellec 2011; Hannah-Moffat and O’Malley 2007; Henwood et al. 2008; Horlick-Jones, Walls, and Kitzinger 2007; Hunt, Evans, and Kares 2007; Lupton and Tulloch 2002; Macnaghten 2003). One area that has received relatively little attention in sociology is that of inequality and risk. Risk perception studies have studied the so-called white male effect (Finucane et al. 2000; Flynn et al. 1994; Olofsson and Rashid 2011), and there are a number of other quantitative studies that take an intersectional approach to health and illness (Hankivsky 2011; Schultz and Mullings 2006; for a review see Giritli Nygren and Olofsson 2014). However, there are still very few studies within the field of risk research that integrate a process-oriented understanding of risk with other theories of inequality and power relations. For example, feminist and gender research shows how homogenisations of socio-structural categories such as gender, class and ethnicity ignore the huge variations that result from complex interactions between such socio-structural factors (e.g. Frerichs 2000; McCall 2005; Knapp 2005). Related debates have resulted in an intersectional approach that is much more effective for explaining the continuities and complexities of social inequalities in current societies (see e.g. *Signs* 2013).

The aim of this paper is to further develop the theoretical concepts of doing and undoing risk by using the example of risk in the everyday lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. The paper is divided into six sections. The second section explores the research context and background. In the third section, we develop the theoretical concepts of doing and undoing risk in relation to current theoretical debates on risk and inequality. In the fourth section, the empirical material, methodology and analytical approach are discussed; in the fifth section, our analysis and findings are presented, and in the sixth and final section our main findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical concepts that have been developed.

Doing, redoing and undoing risk: theoretical concepts

Doing risk is a new approach that echoes the ‘doing gender’ of gender studies, which can also overcome the dividing lines of risk research and intersectionality (Giritli Nygren and Olofsson 2014; Montelius and Giritli Nygren 2014; Olofsson et al. 2014). It is also a theory of the middle range, that is, it does not divide the world into micro and macro as many of the so-called grand theories tend to do (Flynn 2006). Doing risk is at the heart of inequality in terms of gender, sexuality and ethnicity, structures rarely mentioned in, for example, governmentality (Hannah-Moffat and O’Malley 2007). It highlights the need for analysis of the ‘doings’ of

risk not only from the perspective of discourses that interpolate individuals into certain subject positions, but also from a perspective that acknowledges the power dimensions in the ‘doings’, and also acknowledges that the performativity of risk takes place along lines of difference.

For those not familiar with the ‘doing gender’ approach, here is a brief description: gender is a dynamic construct of social power relationships under specific historical circumstances, shaping people’s lives in fundamental and often contradictory ways, and giving rise as much to conflict as to change (Connell 2009). When we engage with the ‘doing gender’ framework we can draw attention to contestations and challenges within risk theory and create a space for engaging theoretically in a rethinking of the calculations of risk in everyday life and how it intersects with, for example, gender, class, sexuality and race. Risk, by extension, like gender, is often predefined as having fixed ‘objective’ characteristics, in terms of occurrence, frequency and magnitude, with the aim to make probabilistic calculations of historically defined and taken for granted objects of risks (Lupton 2014). At the same time, risk is intimately associated with uncertainty (Zinn 2008). Its orientation towards the future and the unknown, disguised in objective measurements that are often oriented to the past, permeates the concept and opens up possibilities for construction as well as deconstruction.

Therefore, we suggest that ‘doing risk’ is a way to construct and act in accordance with norms of risk. ‘Doing risk’ differs from understandings of risk and risk perception that are more conscious, which in themselves strengthen the norms as they also become part of doing risk. West and Zimmerman (1987) use Garfinkel’s 1967 ethnomethodological study of Agnes, a transgender person, to illustrate how gender is created through interaction and at the same time structures interaction in a taken for granted and continuous way. Agnes has to actively and consciously produce configurations of behaviour to ‘pass’ as a ‘normal woman’, that is, she adopts normative gender behaviour, something that most women do without reflecting: ‘Women can be seen as unfeminine but that does not make them “unfemale”’ (West and Zimmerman 1987, 134). In this way, doing risk is also embodied, as the norms over time are repeated, inscribed and carved in some peoples’ lives as well as bodies. It is obvious that this idea is derived from the ‘doing gender’ approach, and just as gender can be distinguished from sex, where sex is often understood and defined as a biological dichotomy according to which everyone is socially categorised as female or male, risk can be distinguished from the risk source or object of risk (Hilgartner 1992; cf. Boholm and Corvellec 2011)¹; that is, it can be distinguished from what poses the risk, such as an illness, a behaviour or an ideology.² Similarly, gender being the socially performed conduct of femininity or masculinity, risk is the social construction of the probability of getting an illness, or of being subjected to violence. And just as sex never stands alone, but is always interpreted through the web of social and cultural norms and power relations (McCall 2005), risk objects and the bodily experience of pain or emotional experience of loss or discrimination are always socially and culturally mediated (Flynn 2006; cf. Collier 1994). However, that is not to say that pain and death are not real nor that they do not exist, rather, that they can only be experienced, studied and analysed through the lenses of situated norms and experiences (cf. Turner 2000).

Yet another analogy to sex and gender is that of sex categorisation (Fenstermaker and West 2002; West and Zimmerman 1987). Sex ‘categorisation’ is intimately related to the individual and her or his performance of passing as female or male,

according to which others more or less intuitively categorise that individual as a woman or man. There are also norms related to risk objects which are intimately related to how people understand and act upon risks, or how they are 'doing' risk. Hence, some objects are defined as risky and others are not, which is closely related to hegemonic norms which alter over time and context (e.g. Lupton 2014). Or, as in the case of Agnes, passing as a woman is important (Connell 1987), but hiding the secret of her biological sex is even more important (West and Zimmerman 1987), since revealing it is not only a matter of being identified as something she does not identify with but a matter of risk: 'Hence, producing actions that would be seen as those of a bona fide female served to preserve her secret and, arguably, her life' (West and Zimmerman 2009, 119). West and Zimmerman are here referring to the killings of transgender people who had revealed their secret.

Therefore, we argue that risk objects are inter-categorised with gender, sexuality, ethnicity and other relations of power dependent on time and place. Risk is done in the interaction with others based on social norms reflected in institutional inter-categorised risk objects creating normative risk behaviour. Behaviour becomes self-regulating, embodied and ever-present; it is the doing of risk at the same time as it is the doing of gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality etc., and it creates a complex and situated understanding of risk in everyday life.

To do risk is to act in the knowledge that something unwanted might happen and at the moment one acts to pass according to the hegemonic norm to avoid the unwanted, one does risk as well as reproducing the systems of power, that is, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and age. Hence, risk is construed and (re)produced in power relationships (Heyman, Alaszewski, and Brown 2012), and when we 'do' risk we simultaneously 'do' gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality and their intersections. Furthermore, the study of 'doing risk' entails taking an intersectional approach to the study of society and of risk. Intersectionality has emerged as a vital theoretical tool to explore hierarchy, hegemony and exclusions. Many feminist researchers have provided rich descriptions of the concept's origins and the varied ways in which it has been understood and applied (Hancock 2007; Lutz, Herrera Vivar, and Supik 2011; McCall 2005; Prins 2006; Signs 2013). According to Choo and Ferree (2010), intersectionality signifies the importance of including the perspectives of multiply marginalised people; it is an analytical shift from an additive model of factors of social inequality such as race, class and gender to an analysis of their interactions, and it signifies a readiness to understand the relationships between multiple characteristics (cf. McCall 2005). It also highlights the importance of analysing unmarked categories and how power (and privilege, as much as disadvantage) is constituted.

What we are suggesting is that 'doing risk' means the socialisation of normative constructs of risk, anchored in deeply rooted but time-space-dependent power relationships, which will influence the life of the individual as well as society at large. In this way, certain individuals are ascribed certain risks and are framed (Henwood et al. 2008) as 'at risk' or 'risky', while others are not (Flynn 2006). It is a process since the notion of risk is constantly changing and negotiated, 'done', 'redone' and sometimes 'undone' (cf. Butler 2004). In the discussion on how to undo gender, various arguments have been put forward; some follow the side of the debate that argues that the gender binary can be subverted (see e.g. Connell 2009; Deutsch 2007), whereas others argue that gender can never be undone but might instead be redone (West and Zimmerman 2009). Theoretically, it might be possible to differentiate between doing, redoing and undoing by thinking of the doing of risk as the

way risks are performed, the redoing of risk as reproducing risk but reshaping the accountability structures and undoing risk as disrupting and making it irrelevant. Translated into our discussion on doing and undoing risk, we believe that it is not necessarily either/or, and that it may be possible to redo the everyday risks without challenging any structures of power, but rather to reflexively embrace the risk with the ambition to develop practices and live life in a preferred way despite the risk, putting the risk in brackets. In the following sections we will analyse these concepts further by examining some empirical examples.

Research method

Based on the aim and theoretical point of departure, a qualitative design was chosen. Focus group interviews were used to get a deeper understanding of how people identifying themselves as being homosexual, bisexual or transexual are doing and undoing risks in their daily lives. This could be identified, in line with Choo and Ferree (2010), as a group-centred intersectional study starting with the perspectives of a particular group and theorising the ways in which their lived understandings of risk cannot be separated into single issues of, for example, sexuality and gender, but are instead mutually constituted. The choice to use a focus group design is based on the theoretical assumption that risk is a result of different social processes. One of the advantages of focus group interviews is that they provide an opportunity to study the process of producing collective meaning (Wibeck 2000). Further, group interviews, and particularly focus group interviews, have been a common choice of method in previous qualitative studies of risk and related concepts (see e.g. Burningham and Thrush 2004; Horlick-Jones, Walls, and Kitzinger 2007; Macnaghten 2003).

Focusing on the individual's doing of risk means investigating his or her embeddedness in day-to-day experiences, where family, friends and work colleagues play an important role, together with the physical setting and community relations in the place where the individual lives. At the same time, this approach indicates the extent to which individuals associate different risks with shared norms and values in the social context in which they find themselves (cf. Douglas and Wildavsky 1982). The method has disadvantages as well. It does not necessarily create a situation where individual participants' views are revealed, since norms might develop within the group that determine what can and cannot be said. Similarly, some participants might not feel comfortable sharing their inner feelings or concerns with people they do not know.

Overall, our material consists of five group interviews conducted with a total of 22 respondents. The interviews were carried out in Sweden during the winter and spring of 2007/2008. To recruit participants we used a combination of methods, from contacting interest groups to asking friends' friends to suggest participants (cf. Wibeck 2000). Each group consisted of four to six people, and the sessions lasted between two and three hours. Two researchers participated during the interviews, one leading the interview and one taking notes and following up on issues that the interviewer might have missed. All of the interviews were facilitated by a semi-structured interview guide and were recorded on tape and transcribed. The respondents talked as freely as they wanted to. Although this freedom sometimes resulted in the discussion of unexpected issues, the intention was to capture the respondents'

descriptions, their words and their associations, and not, as mentioned above to encapsulate their understandings into a theoretical language.

Our ambition when setting up the focus groups was to illustrate and further develop our theoretical concepts of doing, redoing and undoing risk, and our view that risk is done when it is talked about, acted on and used, in its context (Eisenhardt 1989). To explore the doing and undoing of risk in the daily lives of our informants, and within the context of power, we will focus on practices that simultaneously (re)produce and obfuscate socio-political norms and positions, as they occur in the informants' stories. Based on the focus group interviews, we will analyse how the interaction in the interviews disclosed how the participants do and undo risk in everyday life.

Doing risk – the mutual constitution of risk and hegemonic structures of power

The open question 'What comes to mind when you hear the word "risk"?', which was asked at the beginning of each interview, prompted people to begin talking about risk. A variety of different risk objects were mentioned in the discussions, ranging from biking in a big city to illnesses and financial speculation. Rather soon, and sometimes immediately, someone in the group began to mention the kind of risks they perceived as being associated with sexual minorities, or as one of the participants put it, 'gay risks'; HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases were mentioned, but so were personal understandings and how these differ between generations and genders. From the focus group interviews, it is obvious that the link between HIV and homosexuality are very much gendered; as other studies have also highlighted, it is more common for masculine homosexuality to be entangled with sickness and sexually transmitted diseases (cf. Dworkin 2006; Svensson 2007).

The interviews then moved on as a conversation where the participants exchanged views and understandings and discussed these together. Much of the discussion revolved around doing risk, which can be described as acting at risk of being judged according to the heteronormative gender order and the redoing and/or undoing of these risks in terms of resistance, which sometimes leads to new risks of, for example, violence or discrimination. To undo risk, as one participant explained it, is to overcome a kind of fear. When you do not know the reaction of others, everyday life is permeated by uncertainty, which in turn can be perceived by the individual as a constant fear, or anxiety. The skill of calculating risk was described as operating on some kind of automatic level, for example, in the quick scan of the area in order to identify where it is safe or unsafe to sit in a public transport vehicle. The kind of calculated risk of openly showing one's relationship to a partner of the same sex in risky public places is for many a risk not to be taken:

There are certain risks you just don't take, even if they're not major. I wouldn't hold hands with a girl downtown at some place where I think there are too many jerks nearby. I think then I'd prefer to just walk beside the person and not hold her hand, and not kiss a girl somewhere where I think there are jerks around.

The understandings of and risk of encountering hate crimes were widely discussed in the focus groups, and the subject appears to be something the participants often think of in their everyday lives. All of the participants calculate their risk of encountering hate crimes, mainly the risk of being victims of violence. It was usually described as unprovoked violence; for instance, just walking down the street, some

were attacked for no reason other than being gay, because of the expression of symbols and/or actions associated with being a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person. The possibility of being seen as ‘transgender’ by, for example, wearing particular clothing and occupying risky spaces, especially after dark, is constructed as a ‘high risk’ in relation to the risk of violence and therefore also something that needs to be carefully managed.

Furthermore, people who do not fit into the dual gender system are often seen as extremely provoking, but they are also ‘at risk’ in many other contexts, for example, in health care. Here, risk is a result of the interplay between societal expectations of how and with whom one should live one’s life and various risk objects. However, it is ‘not only’ the social risk of discrimination that is done in this context; we also find the risk of mistreatment and non-treatment.

I don’t know if you could call it an overhanging threat, but I believe there are many people in the trans world, most of them in any case, who have at some time felt that they consider it a threat or a risk that they may not receive the care, treatment and legal rights that they feel they more or less require in order to feel okay. That’s what the healthcare establishment promises – you’re supposed to receive this and that care, say the politicians – ‘care guarantees’. Here in my city it’s difficult for transsexuals to get any care – the situation has remained unchanged from 2003 or so.

Furthermore, this risky environment is seen as so hostile that people would rather avoid seeking care than face the risk of being mistreated. In this way, the risk of mistreatment is made bigger than the risk to one’s health and becomes a part of the larger web of discrimination and exclusion that is part of everyday life for the interviewees.

You also get this really skewed experience of health care: I had kidney stones a few years ago and it was during that time I had problems with health care. Then I was supposed to go for a follow-up visit, but in the end I didn’t go, ‘cause it was such a small part of all the other stuff, for which I don’t get help.

The health of gay people is mixed with notions of certain diseases, which in turn is associated with particular sexual preferences (Schiller, Crystal, and Lewellen 1994). This makes it difficult for gays and transgender people to seek health care, and the health care environment becomes a risky one (cf. Fish 2006; Herrick et al. 2010). However, this example not only shows how the risk of mistreatment for homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender people is done in health care, it also shows that how this risk is done by the individual might have serious consequences for her or his life and health. The uncertainty, or even fear, of being denied is the main reason, a doing of risk through the enactment and signifying of a heteronormative discourse which disciplines their silence as well as produces it (cf. Butler 1993). Hence, the informant adapts her or his behaviour according to the potential risk of discrimination.

The risks of discrimination, mistreatment and disadvantage become a part of the participants’ daily life, it is a constant companion that needs to be reflected upon, calculated and managed, comparable with what, in doing gender analyses, is described as ‘[engaging] in behaviour at the risk of gender assessment’ (West and Zimmerman 2002, 13), but here related to acting ‘at risk’ of being judged according to heteronormativity. Theoretically, the concept of doing risk here moves our attention to, and sheds light on, how social interactions operate to sustain inequalities and how these inequalities produce risk in daily life (Kitzinger 2002; West and Zimmerman 2009). Questions about family situation, spouses etc. can be hard to

answer, and it can come down to a choice between revealing one's sexuality or avoiding answering or even lying.

If you're at a job interview, for example, or on probationary employment somewhere, you get this getting-to-know-you stage – you have to deal with questions, personal questions. You actually skirt around those questions because you don't want them to influence things – you might be afraid of not getting hired on account of such prejudice, while at the same time you don't want to work at a place that is like that, but perhaps you do want the job.

Some of the interviewees had, after several years at the same workplace, still not told colleagues or their employer about their same-sex partner out of fear of discrimination or repudiation. Also, comments and jokes about gays in the workplace make some of the interviewees reluctant to tell their colleagues about their own sexuality, since they fear a negative response. The doing of risk, in this light, is the ongoing creation of affects, of unaccountable outcomes and uncertainty in relation to others.

Redoing and/or undoing risk – resisting and avoiding hegemonic structures of power

Following West and Zimmerman's descriptions of how to understand doing gender, the previous section gave examples of how risk is done, however, drawing on the same theory, taking a greater risk and challenging norms can be understood as ways to undo risk, or at least to redo risk, ways to not always be scared and risk-conscious. As the following quotation suggests, publicly showing one's sexuality when it is not in accordance with the hegemony can feel like a small protest or demonstration:

From the perspective of being gay, you can provoke by just being gay. You do not have to be an especially provocative person, just being a fag is enough. And it can lead to different types of harassment or even violence. Like last weekend when we walked hand in hand downtown, then John said that this is a little demonstration ... and it is every time you do it.

Every one of the informants agrees that gays are more likely to be victims of violence than lesbians, and in one of the focus groups they even explicitly talk about how 'Men holding hands challenges hierarchies, in another way'.

Um, I don't know if I've mentioned it but gay men are somehow vulnerable in a completely different way than lesbians are in terms of violence, that's what I think. I avoid lots of places, I've experienced a number of things ... and ... so I avoid going to certain places – suppose a gang comes along – I've talked about this before, drunk guys, gangs of guys hollering on the sidewalk. I often switch over and walk on the other side of the street to avoid them, because it's enough just to be in the way, and I don't think, perhaps it's ... I mean it's my perception of myself, so maybe I don't give so many signals that I'm homosexual, like, I don't know if you can tell in different ways, I myself don't find I give such signals particularly strongly or I avoid giving such signals, of course.

Not revealing one's sexual orientation at work, for example, is a strategy to handle the risks of everyday life. Following the definition of Deutsch (2007), we do not understand this as a kind of undoing risk since it does not involve attempts to challenge the norms or the situations in which the risks are created, but rather it is a risk management strategy to make it possible to continue with life without risking discrimination or maltreatment, to put 'risk' in brackets and in this way 'doing risk' as

making it possible to live with. Learning to ‘hide’ is the process of actively monitoring behaviour in situations where it is not supported or the feeling of ‘being at risk’ is present. One way to redo risk is to move or seek contexts, or situations, which are described as ‘unrisky’:

For me, the social aspect has been greater: I’ve made more new friends than I’ve lost old friends, and all that. And then you get a kind of group belonging – a large majority has no such group belonging in the same way, I believe.

As the quotation above demonstrates, the informant somehow accepts a kind of outsider status, expressing an emotional connection and belonging to the group of similar minded people, ascribing to them a certain kind of connection which differentiates them from the majority. If we view this result in the light of Deutsch’s (2007) discussion on undoing gender then it could be interpreted both as a way to do and undo risk. It is both a way to actively resist being ‘othered’ by acknowledging their sexual orientation and to actively choose to be part of non-heterosexual communities, or at least communities where the heterosexual hegemony is weakened, but it is a kind of silent opposition. Taking a step towards trying to undo the risk, not only for one’s own sake but also for the sake of others in the same situation, is discussed in the interviews as something important. However, the fact that the consequences of undoing and challenging a risk are borne by the individual, while the benefits are collective, makes people reluctant to act on their wish to change. Nevertheless, the ‘avoidance’ strategy, on the surface similar to the way some of the informants describe how they avoid certain places at certain times, or certain people, that is, avoiding the risk of violence, also involves a kind of cost for the individual (cp. Hequembourg et al. 2015; Scheer 2002). Not being allowed to be, or to stand up for, who you are or who you love, results in feelings of exclusion, sadness and even self-loathing. One of the transgender focus group participants pointed particularly to this problem, but also to the fact that resistance, or trying to undo the risk, is in fact a risk:

... it might happen then that I raise my level of risk and maybe take higher risks by going out in make-up or dressing up the way I like to, going around in drag and cross-dressing, and so it happens ... I’m aware that I take a greater risk but I sort of look at it this way: it’s somehow worth it, or you have to stick up for yourself first and you can’t go around being afraid all the time and think about the worst that can happen, and have that as your first priority ...

However, undoing the primary risk (not being seen as who you are) can sometimes result in secondary risks (social exclusion). This is illustrated in the quotation below, in which undoing implies an acknowledgement that the heterosexual norm is no longer something to which the respondent feels accountable, as he chooses to take what he refers to as a psychological risk:

I also think there’s a difference that has to do with being a gay man. You take greater personal psychological risks if you’re out. For example, when I moved here, I had to come out all over again. I would get questions about whether my whole family was going to move here, too – it was as if it was taken for granted that I was heterosexual. If you’re openly gay, you expose yourself more. ... psychologically ...

The risk referred to above are related to their fears that family and friends will turn their backs on them, that they will be hurt and/or lose the people they love. As Ambjörnsson (2011) discusses, making their sexuality visible is a continued process, negotiated in every situation and meeting. This contributes to an understanding of

how people who belong to sexual minorities or who are transgender can both actively construct their identities, for example, by taking risks³ and contesting established risk discourses, and at the same time continue to be constrained by dominant discourses which represent them as ‘others’ (see e.g. Borgström 2011, for similar results). Therefore we find this an example of redoing risk; the risk is managed but still exists.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have developed the theory of doing risk further by conceptualising how risk, together with norms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class, is socially, performatively, and intersectionally inscribed in our minds and bodies (cp. Butler 1990; Giritli Nygren and Olofsson 2014). Risk is part of the normative power that maintains hegemonic structures of society through people’s everyday actions (cf. Heyman, Alaszewski, and Brown 2012; West and Zimmerman 1987). This means that when risk is interpreted and (re)produced in contemporary society we simultaneously ‘do’ risk as well as sexuality, gender and ethnicity, and intersections in between. To ‘do’ risk means reproducing normative constructions of risk, anchored in time- and context-dependent beliefs about society and its inhabitants, which influence both how society is organised and governed and how we as individuals live our lives. In this process – it is a process because the notions of risk are constantly negotiated and thus changing – risk is ‘done’, ‘redone’ and ‘undone’, and certain groups and individuals are attributed risk and portrayed as ‘risky’ or ‘at risk’, while others are not (Flynn 2006; Henwood et al. 2008). Those with greater power/money/privilege might have the possibility do/undo/redo risks in ways which resolve these issues fairly straightforwardly – while others face new risks as a result of this (cf. Olofsson et al. 2014).

As mentioned at the beginning, our main argument for opening up the ‘doing gender’ framework is that it makes it possible to create a space for engaging theoretically in rethinking the assessment of, for example, risk in everyday life. It is clear in our material that everyday risks are done in relation to the ability to move in and between places as well as other normative power structures. Fear and apprehension of risk can also serve as a powerful mechanism of self-exclusion from public spaces and places (see also Pain 2001; Tiby 1999). The contribution of the ‘doing risk’ theory is that it shows that the construction of a single risk object, for example, sexually transmitted diseases, is ‘done’ by the majority society as a ‘gay risk’, which in fact means that for a gay person heteronormativity is a risk object per se, and at the same time recognises how risk is in fact embedded in the everyday lives of people who do not conform to heteronormativity (cf. Flynn 2006). What this means for risk, then, is that it is important not only to understand how different risks are instituted, naturalised, and established as pre-suppositional but to also trace the moments where they are disputed and challenged. By analysing how risk is done and the practices of risk performativity we can not only see the relational aspects of risk, but also how the norms that govern reality are reproduced and transformed in the course of those practices. This makes heteronormativity, and its expressions in terms of hate crimes, discrimination and exclusion, a risk object performed by perpetrators of violence, researchers for not acknowledging heteronormativity as a source of risk, and those exposed to these normative structures by acting accordingly. Hence, heteronormativity is a source for the construction of risk, ‘risky’ and ‘at risk’

individuals and groups, and the experiences of marginalisation and exclusion as well as the 'risk reputations' put into play. For our informants risk is ever present, since in the same moment that a gay person, for example, makes his preferences clear to those around him, and stops trying to pass according to the heteronormative expectations, he is at risk of exposure to ignorance, discrimination and/or violence (hate crimes). And the risk of encountering violence that homosexuals are subjected to because of their sexual orientation is dependent on how much their sexual orientation is exposed in public (see also Borgström 2011; Connell 2010; Tiby 1999).

But it is not all about 'doing' risk; risk is also 'redone' and 'undone', for example, by acting as if the risk does not exist, or in spaces which are not overly controlled and governed by heteronormativity, where some kind of 'resistance' can be practised to 'undo' the risk, or at least redo it. The 'undoing' is not to avoid what is seen as a risk – in the interviews, it was also related to how risk is circumvented, for example, by passing as heterosexual or by avoiding certain places – but rather to lay claim to what ought to be a right, the right to be treated as an equal, as 'everyone else'. Since the risk object is a belief system, 'undoing' risk is the fight against the manifestations of the norms that constitute the system with the purpose of redefining the system. This extends our understanding of the structural and interactional processes involved in the production of risk and inequality, acknowledging that they are contested, reconstituted and negotiated in everyday life. The fear of violence and discrimination in a heteronormative society results in particular everyday behaviours, behaviours that become embodied and automatic and over time part of the self and me as an individual. The result is an ever-present sense or awareness of this risk, an awareness that leads to an embodied self-regulation. To do risk is to act with the possibility that something unwanted will happen and to undo risk is to act with the intention of disrupting and making the dominant notions of normativity irrelevant. To redo risk can be to contest the established risk discourses by reshaping the accountability structures within the dominant discourses, for example by performing 'risky' acts.

Our informants define themselves as belonging to a sexual minority, and of course, in their everyday lives the doing of risk very much takes place within the frame of a hegemonic heteronormativity. However, we believe this example is of theoretical relevance for all analyses of everyday risks. The object of risk in our empirical material is about not conforming to a norm, a risk that is not always immediately recognised as a risk and in turn constitutes a complex relation between the risk object and risk subject, or object at risk (cf. Boholm and Corvellec 2011). Being gay or lesbian means being at risk of being judged according to that norm, but for those who are driven to mistreat and violate someone for not conforming to the norm the gay or lesbian are perceived as 'a risk' to the norm. The way that risks are perceived and done in everyday life always needs to be read within a frame of prevailing structures of power. People develop a situated consciousness of their position within relations of power and act strategically to reproduce or resist the specific discursive and practical relations that locate them. Hence, this counts for all of us as we are all part of the hegemonic power structures and thereby are both subject to the intersecting doings of risk and performatively reproducing these power structures in practice (cf. Butler 2004).

Acknowledgments

We would also like to acknowledge the valuable discussions, ideas and comments of our colleagues and visiting scholars, at Mid Sweden University, particularly given by Siv Fahlgren, as well as the insightful comments that we have received from the two anonymous reviewers on a previous version of this manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council [grant number 344-2011-5104]; the Lars Hierta Memorial Foundation [grant number FO2014-0202].

Notes

1. Compared to the relational theory of risk (Boholm and Corvellec 2011), which makes an important contribution to the theoretical field of risk research, the doing risk approach both broadens the definition of what a risk is, or the object of risk, including norms as risks, and more importantly acknowledging the mutual constitution of risk and structures of power.
2. It is important to stress that a risk object can be anything from a physical object (e.g. a gun, nuclear accident or storm) to a behaviour (e.g. smoking, violence or bullying) or a societal norm (e.g. being thin, straight or white), and that the risk itself is a social construction of the object in question (e.g. whiteness, or war and violence), understood through time-/place-dependent lenses of power hierarchies and constructed, reconstructed and sometimes deconstructed.
3. To undo risk by taking higher risks might have some similarities to what has been referred to as voluntary risk taking and/or edgework (Lyng 1990), particularly the more recent developments by, for example, Lyng and Matthews (2007), Laurendeau (2008) and Olstead (2011) who argue that risk-taking activities are themselves part of the way in which individuals produce gender and identity. From their point of view, voluntary risk taking can be seen as activities through which normative notions on gender can be negotiated. These are important contributions to the field, but they are framed in relation to particular forms risks, for example extreme sport. Our point here is that by someone not confirming to hegemonic norms taking risks (edgework) is done on daily basis i.e. transgressing gendered, classed, racialised, religious and/or sexual boundaries are everyday life risks and the degree of voluntariness can certainly be questioned.

References

- Ambjörnsson, F. 2011. "Jag skiter väl i vad de andra tycker [I do not Care about What Others Think]." In *Den moderna homofobin* [The Modern Homophobia], edited by E. Borgström, 70–90. Göteborg: Kabusa.
- Boholm, Å., and H. Corvellec. 2011. "A Relational Theory of Risk." *Journal of Risk Research* 14 (2): 175–190.
- Borgström, E. 2011. "Inledningen." In *Den moderna homofobin* [The Modern Homophobia], edited by E. Borgström. Göteborg: Kabusa.
- Burningham, K., and D. Thrush. 2004. "Pollution Concerns in Context: A Comparison of Local Perceptions of the Risks Associated with Living Close to a Road and a Chemical Factory." *Journal of Risk Research* 7 (2): 213–232.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. London: Routledge.

- Butler, J. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Choo, H. Y., and M. M. Ferree. 2010. "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities." *Sociological Theory* 28 (2): 129–149.
- Collier, A. 1994. *Critical Realism. An Introduction to Roy Bhaskar's Philosophy*. London: Verso.
- Connell, R. 1987. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. 2009. *Om genus* [About Gender]. Göteborg: Daidalos.
- Connell, C. 2010. "Doing, Undoing, or Redoing Gender? Learning from the Workplace Experiences of Transpeople." *Gender & Society* 24 (1): 31–55.
- Deutsch, F. M. 2007. "Undoing Gender." *Gender & Society* 21 (1): 106–127.
- Douglas, M., and A. Wildavsky. 1982. *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technical and Environmental Dangers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dworkin, S. L. 2006. "Who is Epidemiologically Fathomable in the HIV/AIDS Epidemic? Gender Sexuality and Intersectionality in Public Health." *Culture, Health and Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care* 7 (6): 615–623.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. "Building Theories from Case Study Research." *Academy of Management Review* 14: 532–550.
- Fenstermaker, S., and C. West. 2002. *Doing Gender, Doing Difference: Inequality, Power and Institutional Change*. New York: Routledge.
- Finucane, M. L., P. Slovic, C. K. Mertz, J. Flynn, and T. A. Statterfield. 2000. "Gender, Race, and Perceived Risk: The 'White Male' Effect." *Health, Risk & Society* 2 (2): 159–172.
- Fish, J. 2006. *Heterosexism in Health and Social Care*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flynn, R. 2006. "Health and Risk." In *Beyond the Risk Society. Critical Reflections on Risk and Human Security*, edited by G. Mythen and S. Walklate, 77–95. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Flynn, B. B., R. G. Schroeder, and S. Sakakibara. 1994. "A Framework for Quality Management Research and an Associated Measurement Instrument." *Journal of Operations Management* 11 (4): 339–366.
- Frerichs, P. 2000. "Klasse und Geschlecht als Kategorien sozialer Ungleichheit [Class and Gender as Categories of Social Inequality]." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 52 (1): 36–59.
- Giritli Nygren, K., and A. Olofsson. 2014. "Intersectional Perspectives in Health Risk Research – A Critical Review." *Sociology Compass* 8 (9): 1112–1126.
- Guasp, A., A. Gammon, and G. Ellison. 2013. *Homophobic Hate Crime*. The Gay British Crime Survey 2013. London: Stonewall YouGov.
- Hancock, A. M. 2007. "When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm." *Perspective on Politics* 5 (1): 63–79.
- Hankivsky, O., ed. 2011. *Health Inequalities in Canada: Intersectional Frameworks and Practices*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Hannah-Moffat, K., and P. O'Malley, eds. 2007. *Gendered Risks*. London: Routledge Cavendish.
- Henwood, K., N. Pidgeon, S. Sarre, P. Simmons, and N. Smith. 2008. "Risk, Framing and Everyday Life: Epistemological and Methodological Reflections from Three Socio-Cultural Projects." *Health, Risk & Society* 10 (5): 421–438.
- Hequembourg, A. L., K. A. Parks, R. L. Collins, and T. L. Hughes. 2015. "Sexual Assault Risks among Gay and Bisexual Men." *The Journal of Sex Research* 52 (3): 282–295.
- Herrick, A. L., A. K. Matthews, and R. Garofalo. 2010. "Health Risk Behaviors in an Urban Sample of Young Women Who Have Sex with Women." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 14 (1): 80–92.
- Heyman, B., A. Alaszewski, and P. Brown. 2012. "Health Care through the 'Lens of Risk' and the Categorisation of Health Risks – An Editorial." *Health, Risk and Society* 14 (2): 107–115.
- Hilgartner, S. 1992. "The Social Construction of Risk Objects: Or, How to Pry Open Networks of Risk." In *Organizations, Uncertainties, and Risk*, edited by J. Short and L. Clarke, 39–53. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

- Horlick-Jones, T., J. Walls, and J. Kitzinger. 2007. "Bricolage in Action: Learning about, Making Sense of, and Discussing Issues about Genetically Modified Crops and Food." *Health, Risk & Society* 9 (1): 83–103.
- Hunt, G. P., K. Evans, and F. Kares. 2007. "Drug Use and Meanings of Risk and Pleasure." *Journal of Youth Studies* 10 (1): 73–96.
- Kitzinger, C. 2002. "Heteronormativity in Action: Reproducing the Heterosexual Nuclear Family in after-hours Medical Calls." *Social Problems* 52: 477–498.
- Knapp, G.-A. 2005. "Race, Class, Gender: Reclaiming Baggage in Fast Travelling Theories." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 12 (3): 249–265.
- Laurendeau, J. 2008. "'Gendered Risk Regimes': A Theoretical Consideration of Edgework and Gender." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 25: 293–309.
- Lupton, D. 2015. "Quantified Sex: A Critical Analysis of Sexual and Reproductive Self-tracking Apps." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 17 (4): 440–453.
- Lupton, D., and J. Tulloch. 2002. "'Risk is Part of your Life': Risk Epistemologies among a Group of Australians." *Sociology* 36 (2): 317–334.
- Lutz, H., M. T. Herrera Vivar, and L. Supik. 2011. *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Lyng, S. 1990. "Edgework: A Social Psychological Analysis of Voluntary Risk Taking." *American Journal of Sociology* 95 (4): 851–886.
- Lyng, S., and R. Matthews. 2007. "Risk, Edgework, and Masculinities." In *Gendered Risks*, edited by K. Hannah-Moffat and P. O'Malley, 75–98. Milton Park: Routledge-Cavendish.
- Macnaghten, P. 2003. "Embodying the Environment in Everyday Life Practices." *The Sociological Review* 51 (1): 63–84.
- McCall, L. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (3): 1771–1800.
- Montelius, E., and K. Giritli Nygren. 2014. "'Doing' Risk, 'Doing' Difference: Towards an Understanding of the Intersections of Risk, Morality and Taste." *Health, Risk & Society* 16 (5): 431–443.
- Olofsson, A., and S. Rashid. 2011. "The White (Male) Effect and Risk Perception: Can Equality Make a Difference?" *Risk Analysis* 31 (6): 1016–1032.
- Olofsson, A., J. Zinn, G. Griffin, K. Giritli Nygren, A. Cebulla, and K. Hannah-Moffat. 2014. "The Mutual Constitution of Risk & Inequality: Intersectional Risk Theory." *Health, Risk & Society* 16 (5): 417–430.
- Olstead, R. 2011. "Gender, Space and Fear: A Study of Women's Edgework." *Emotion, Space and Society* 4: 86–94.
- Pain, R. 2001. "Gender, Race, Age and Fear in the City." *Urban Studies* 38 (5–6): 899–913.
- Prins, B. 2006. "Narrative Accounts of Origins: A Blind Spot in the Intersectional Approach?" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 13 (3): 277–290.
- Scheer, S., C. A. Parks, W. McFarland, K. Page-Shafer, V. Delgado, J. D. Ruiz, F. Molitor, and J. D. Klausner. 2002. "Self-reported Sexual Identity, Sexual Behaviors and Health Risks." *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 7 (1): 69–83.
- Schiller, N. G., S. Crystal, and D. Lewellen. 1994. "Risky Business: The Cultural Construction of AIDS Risk Groups." *Social Science & Medicine* 38 (10): 1337–1346.
- Schultz, A. J., and L. Mullings, eds. 2006. *Gender, Race, Class and Health: Intersectional Approaches*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Signs. 2013. "Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38 (4): 785–1060.
- Svensson, I. 2007. *Liket i garderoben – en studie av sexualitet, livsstil och begravning* [The Corpse in the Closet – A Study of Sexuality, Lifestyle and Burials]. Stockholm: Normal förlag.
- Tiby, E. 1999. *Hatbrott? Homosexuella kvinnors och mäns berättelser om utsatthet för brott* [Hate Crime? Gay Men and Women Stories of Victimization]. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, Akademistryck.
- Turner, B. S. 2000. "The History of the Changing Concepts of Health and Illness." In *The Handbook of Social Studies on Health and Medicine*, edited by A. Albrecht, R. Fitzpatrick, and S. C. Scrimshaw. London: Sage.
- West, C., and D. H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1 (2): 125–151.

- West, C., and D. H. Zimmerman. 2002. "Doing Gender." In *Doing Gender Doing Difference: Inequality, Power and Institutional Change*, edited by S. Fenstermaker and C. West. New York: Routledge.
- West, C., and D. H. Zimmerman. 2009. "Accounting for Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 23 (1): 112–122.
- Wibeck, V. 2000. *Fokusgrupper: om fokuserade gruppintervjuer som undersökningsmetod* [Focus Groups: Of Focused Group Interviews as Research Method]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Zinn, J. O. 2008. "The Contribution of Sociology to the Discourse on Risk and Uncertainty." In *Social Theories of Risk and Uncertainty*, edited by J. O. Zinn, 1–17. Oxford: Blackwell.