

Emancipatory Potential of Naming: A Study on Church Employees' Personal Stories of Negative Experiences

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To address interactionally troublesome exchanges (e.g., bullying, discrimination, or harassment) in the workplace, giving a name to negative personal experiences is crucial. Drawing on discussions of hermeneutical injustice, we explore the emancipatory potential of naming in post-hoc tellings of these experiences, with particular attention to accountability and face-work in naming practices. Our analysis of interviews with church employees illustrates how managing discrepancies between the story world and the storytelling world, as well as the degree of dependency on the teller–recipient relationship, shapes naming practices with implications for agency and accountability. While tellings can be emancipatory for the teller, agency can become jeopardized.

Keywords: accountability, agency, hermeneutical injustice, naming, storytelling, social justice

INTRODUCTION

Negative interpersonal experiences are an unfortunate reality in many workplace settings, often leaving individuals feeling isolated and unheard. Being able to describe negative personal experiences is a central requirement for authorities to address misconduct at workplaces. Calling a negative experience by its proper name is key to gaining social recognition for the harmfulness of the experience, getting one's

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grievances handled, and warranting other people's interventions to address the root causes of the social injustice (Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat 1980/1981). The ability to name such experiences is therefore a critical issue in addressing these challenges effectively.

Yet putting a name to such experiences in an interaction situation is never straightforward. Firstly, experiencing negative treatment and telling about it afterwards are distinct situations. The recipient does not have direct access to the teller's experience; rather, the experience may be mediated via a story. How does the teller negotiate this gap? In many cases, people lack the shared concepts that would allow them to articulate their experiences clearly. But when naming does occur, it can be a profoundly empowering act, transforming isolated feelings into socially recognizable problems and linking personal struggles to broader patterns of injustice. Given that the naming studied here is a situated, interactional practice, it must also adhere to social constraints and demands. With these social aspects in mind, how does emancipation through naming become possible?

Here we study naming practices as they occur in the interaction between the teller and the recipient when sharing negative, personal, workplace experiences. We begin by situating the issue of naming within the broader discussion of hermeneutical injustice — a theoretical framework that illuminates the social conditions that enable or hinder individuals' ability to render their experiences intelligible. We then turn to the role of storytelling as both constraining and opening possibilities for empowerment. We argue that managing the differences between the story world and the storytelling world is integral to telling an emancipatory story, and naming can support this process. In addition, tellers need to negotiate face and moral concerns in their telling. After describing our interview data on the negative personal experiences of church employees and our micro-analytical methodological approach to storytelling, we present the findings of our analysis, paying particular attention to the ways in which naming operates at the intersection of the story world and the storytelling world, how social-moral aspects are negotiated, and how the workplace context becomes relevant. Finally, we discuss the implications of our study for understanding how naming as a practice links individual experiences to wider questions of social justice.

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE AND NAMING IN ITS CONTEXT

When it comes to their ability to articulate and name the problematic experiences they face, individuals are not on equal footing. Such inequalities can be highlighted by Miranda Fricker's (2007) notion of *hermeneutical injustice*, which refers to a gap in collective interpretive resources that "puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences" (Fricker 2007:1). When tools for social interpretation are lacking, certain groups may face *hermeneutical marginalization*; that is, their unequal participation in practices through which social meanings are generated (Fricker 2007:1,6). This will have a significant impact on

how to make our experiences shareable (cf. Fricker 2016:4). A prime example of hermeneutical injustice is sexual harassment in a culture that lacks that critical concept. This type of injustice leads to certain groups of individuals systematically failing in their attempts to render their social experiences intelligible (Jacobs, van De Mierop, and Van Laar 2022; Leinonen et al. 2024; Olakivi et al. 2024; Plummer 2020; Stevanovic et al. 2024; Thompson et al. 2019), which can produce two kinds of harm: firstly, concrete material harm, as exemplified by the difficulties trans people face in accessing medical care related to transition (Fricker and Jenkins 2017) and secondly, identity-related harm, as when individuals are misrepresented or miscategorized against their interests by, for example, stereotyping (Fricker 2007).

A vital step in addressing hermeneutical injustice is *naming*, as it allows individuals to articulate experiences that might otherwise remain unrecognized. Social justice depends on the ability to express both positive and negative experiences, and creating new concepts is key to this process. When shared by enough people, these concepts become collective tools for understanding and addressing previously inexpressible phenomena (Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2009; Pomerantz, Raby, and Stefanik 2013). Terms like bullying, harassment, racism, sexism, ableism, heteronormativity, and spiritual violence exemplify how naming can transform silenced behaviors into recognized injustices and foster collective action and societal change. Naming is thus a key part of linking personal experiences to social justice (Currie, Kelly, and Pomerantz 2009:31; Pomerantz, Raby, and Stefanik 2013).

However, naming experiences is risky. It involves the teller making a public commitment to what happened, solidifying a specific interpretation of the event, and forcing the teller to deal with the consequences of telling, be they positive or negative. Research has shown that these risks often become reality. For example, Hart (2019) has shown that women self-reporting sexual harassment at work are negatively viewed at their workplace and may suffer in terms of career advancement. It is, therefore, of no surprise that, instead of calling negative experiences by their proper name, individuals tend to normalize or legitimize them (Charlesworth, McDonald, and Cerise 2011; Guschke, Just, and Muhr 2022).

Given the delicate nature of naming practices, research in social and political philosophy has so far sought to illuminate some of the key conditions for successful naming, that is, how the experiences are received and become intelligible to co-participants. Essentially, successful naming has been shown to depend on the flexibility by which organizations and communities accommodate novel conceptualizations and enable agency (Medina 2012). While naming often occurs more readily within in-groups (Fricker 2016), addressing larger structural issues would require that shared understandings be broadened to include out-groups, too (Medina 2012). While Fricker's (2007) perspective highlights the importance of *testimonial sensibility*, as in adjusting one's credibility judgment with the awareness of the possible gap in collective hermeneutical resources, Medina's (2012) approach stresses openness to the plurality of perspectives and resistance, that is, developing *hermeneutical sensibility*. Yet, little is thus far known about the intricate processes

that underlie the creation and dissemination of shared concepts that would allow the reduction of hermeneutical injustice.

While institutions and people in powerful positions are key in counteracting hermeneutical injustice, we all share a collective responsibility to facilitate the hermeneutical agency of communicators, especially if they have been marginalized (Medina 2012:215–216). Interaction contexts vary in risks of marginalization, for example, in a hierarchical workplace, criticizing the boss may be difficult, whereas a research interview is an example of a context in which many challenges and risks associated with naming can be significantly mitigated. Such contexts can support making negative experiences recognizable, especially since negative treatment may go unchallenged in the moment it occurs (Leinonen et al. 2024), and because they provide an opportunity to reflect on and theorize experiences in new ways, with minimal risk of stigmatization (Ahmed 2021). Contexts, such as the interview, become spaces where naming practices can play a crucial role in helping to make previously unarticulated experiences visible and thus to address hermeneutical injustice.

Even in contexts with low hierarchies, there are still limitations to what can be openly expressed. In any interaction, participants manage their self-presentation, or “face,” presenting a positive image of themselves to gain approval from others (Goffman 1955). Self, in this sense, is understood as situational and intersubjective, shaped by social interaction (Peräkylä 2015). Thus, when accounting for their negative interpersonal experiences, individuals often emphasize their resistance to adversity (Jefferson 1980), which can highlight their resilience and ability to manage challenges (Heritage and Clayman 2010), while also preparing the recipients to receive the account in an affiliative manner (Jefferson 1980). These moral considerations are particularly important when people are complaining about others, as reflected in their attempts to secure shared understanding within the interaction itself before voicing their complaints (Ruusuvoori et al. 2019). Tellers may always be held accountable for making their stories recognizable, and the stories’ legitimacy is interactionally negotiated (see Heritage 1984). Hence, discussing negative experiences remains a delicate issue. Therefore, it remains important to explore how these social concerns related to self-presentation are navigated in the telling and how they shape the process of naming.

NARRATIVE AND EMANCIPATION

Within the context of such research interviews, interviewees often construct their answers to interviewers’ questions as *narratives* (e.g., Sparkes 2005). Whereas a Labovian model of narratives emphasizes fully formed stories of the past (Labov and Waletzky 1967), narratives can also be viewed as situational, interactionally accomplished storytelling that may be fragmented and brief (Georgakopoulou 2007). Interview narratives tend to be characterized by a great deal of reflexivity, involving a continuous process of meaning-making, in which individuals try to make sense of some dimensions of their lives (Freeman 2006). In this “sense-giving” process

(Fairhurst 2007), versions and understandings of events can be revised over time, and even from one telling to the next.

Narratives exhibit double temporality, as they “may be about the past” but “are told in the present” (Van De Mierop and Clifton 2016:5). In other words, they are oriented both to the *story world* and to the *storytelling world*. This distinction has particular significance as regards naming. Telling about negative interpersonal experiences in narratives enables the tellers to control their problem presentation with a high level of detail, which is especially important when the problem is not easily identifiable (Heritage and Clayman 2010). It can therefore make a significant difference to the previously mentioned social threats associated with naming practices whether the introduction of the critical concepts happens through the depicted acts of the characters in the story world or whether it is done by the agents in the storytelling world of the interview. The distinction between the two possible loci for naming practices also makes it possible to scrutinize any potential discrepancies between the ways in which certain problematic experiences are conceptualized in them.

The understanding of the nuances in the practices of naming between the story world and the storytelling world can also shed light on the ways in which narratives can serve *emancipation*. Previous narrative studies have shown that narratives are not only about the past and present, but also about navigating the future (Andersen, Ravn, and Thomson 2020). As noted by Bruner (2004:692–694, emphasis in original), “narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative,” until, in the end, “we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives,” which points to the crucial influence that narratives have on our lives. While it is, of course, very difficult to tap into the ways in which narratives concretely influence people’s future actions (see, e.g., Andersen, Ravn, and Thomson 2020), we may still map the emancipatory potential of narratives more indirectly. This happens by studying how tellers “mobilize the interview (i.e. the storytelling event) as an occasion to perform a self-empowering move” (Zilberman Friedmann and Netz 2023:433) and how such emancipatory storytelling may thus “accomplish crucial things for [narrators’] sense of well-being” (Smeraldo Schell and Silva 2020:738).

Previous research on emancipation in and through narratives has focused on “stories of interpersonal tensions related to asymmetrical power relations between the narrators and different authority figures in their stories” (Zilberman Friedmann and Netz 2023:450). This research has identified various strategies — direct reported speech, address and reference terms, and code-switching — for resisting and reclaiming power in the storytelling world. In this paper, we contribute to this emerging line of research: we consider emancipatory storytelling as it emerges at the intersection of the story world and the storytelling world, while focusing on the ways in which naming practices are deployed in the narratives.

Building on the preceding theoretical discussions on emancipatory storytelling, hermeneutical injustice, and social constraints, our analysis is guided by the following two research questions:

RQ1: How are the naming practices introduced, as tellers navigate at the intersection of the story world and the storytelling world?

RQ2: What kind of emancipatory potential resides in naming practices of personal negative experiences?

DATA AND METHOD

Interview Data

The overall data of the research consist of qualitative research interviews ($N = 29$) with employees of the Evangelic Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF) (collected 2022–2023 by the first author). The church is an especially intriguing context for analyzing the naming of negative experiences because of the many tensions between conservative and liberal orientations that may shape which actions are seen as problematic, how they can be named, and whether those names are recognized. We asked employees to take part in the interview under the general theme of problematic interactions at work. We recruited interviewees through an open invitation that was distributed via the internal communication channels of the ELCF as well as through advertising the possibility through social media and using personal networks. Also, we contacted relevant trade unions for the purpose of circulating the invitation. In the invitation, participation was motivated by different circumstances in the work communities; the effect of hierarchies and person-related factors that could be a part of problematic interactions. People from different kinds of backgrounds, occupations, and different parts of the church were encouraged to participate. We invited people to talk about both everyday challenges in workplace interactions and more severe situations, such as discrimination. Sometimes naming is studied under a ready-given title that is presented to the interviewees (see for example the study on ableism by Harpur 2014), but in this case there was no requirement for participants to name their negative experiences beforehand. The interview situation was offered as a site to contemplate those experiences together with the interviewer. The interviews were conducted as a part of a research project *Accounting for interactionally troublesome exchanges: Paradoxes, biases, and inequalities in storying, perceiving, and counter-ing problematic social experiences* (2021–2025) funded by the Research Council of Finland.

We acquired informed consent from the interviewees: They received information about the project and how their data were going to be stored and managed according to the European Data Protection Regulations. Following this information, we asked all the interviewees for their consent to participate at the beginning of the interview and to have their interview recorded. The participants represented all of the main personnel groups: first, people working in cemeteries or in services related to the care and maintenance of church estates, including sextons; second, administration; and third, parish work. Although participants varied in age, most of them were over 40 years of age, and women were in the majority. The first author conducted

interviews virtually, via phone or face-to-face. Using different means made it possible to interview people from different parts of the country. The duration of interviews varied roughly between 1 and 2 hours.

The central themes of the interviews were personal negative experiences, observations of negative treatment, leadership and pay, reconciling work and family/private life, cooperation relationships (e.g., with parish council members, local communities), understandings of equality and non-discrimination, and the needs for development.

Research interviews are particular interactional situations that construct reality, for example, through the choice of questions and time given on handling different topics. The aim of the interviews was to bring forth the understandings of the interviewees. The interview situation is not equal in the sense that the participant roles are not interchangeable, although they can be flexible and temporarily change to a limited degree. Although it is the interviewer's task to ask questions and the interviewee's to answer them, there is always cooperation involved in getting those answers to come about. Obligations also arise to the interviewer to help the interviewee express their experiences. Also, to make the interaction comfortable, the interviewer should be responsive to what has been said so as not to refrain the interviewee from expressing issues important to them and be mindful of the risks of possible epistemic objectification (see Fricker 2007; Medina 2012). In any case, the interviewees may choose what to tell and how to tell it, and thus the limits of the interview are set by their consent.

Data Selection

We scrutinized the transcribed interviews to find passages related to naming practices. After getting a general sense of naming occurring in the interviews, we applied the following selection criteria for the purposes of a focused analysis; namely, we particularly selected cases of negative experiences in which naming the treatment under some recognizable category occurred, such as for example, discrimination, harassment, workplace bullying, or spiritual violence, so there is some degree of shared understanding of the concept, although the content of which may be understood in many ways. We included cases if they could be recognized as personal stories of the interviewees and not a mere mention of a labeled negative experience. Sometimes participants described negative experiences on a general level or as hypothetical stories, but we did not include cases with exclusively this type of narration, as well as vicarious experiences, in the final analysis. Also, we left out organizational complaint processes related to negative treatment as they will be handled separately in another analysis with their distinctive features (cf. Ahmed 2021). Here, the focus is on *emancipation at the moment of the telling within a specific story* and not within the entire interview. Naming negative experiences could be offered by the interviewer in a question; it could emerge spontaneously or as a choice based on an interview

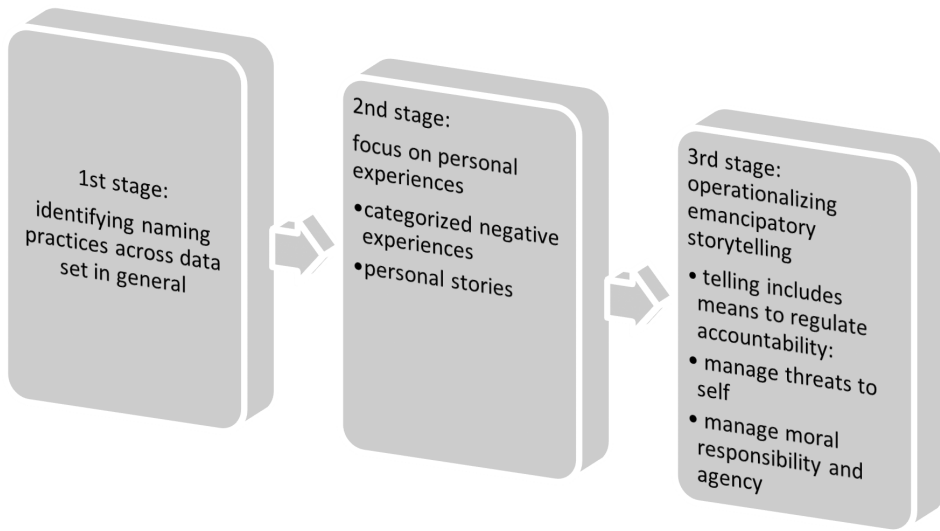


Chart 1. Data Selection Process for the Final Analysis

question. Sometimes suggested categories were negotiated between the interviewer and interviewee.

At the next stage, we scrutinized the selected stories again to find cases of emancipatory storytelling. With the understanding that telling about negative personal experiences is a sensitive matter, we operationalized emancipatory storytelling as including means to manage possible threats to self and to display oneself as a morally responsible agent. Our approach to data selection and analysis is in line with methods that identify patterns or phenomena across the data set instead of focusing on a data item such as an individual interview (Braun and Clarke 2006:81). Therefore, for example, several instances of naming could be found even within an interview, but only certain stories across the whole data set matched our criteria. The whole process led to five emancipatory stories from five different interviews. We analyze here four stories that differ from each other in terms of the level of accountability. We summarize the data selection process in Chart 1.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the naming practices, we draw attention to the ways in which credibility is supported and how storytellers manage the possible discrepancies between the story world and storytelling world. Classically, narratives are seen as consisting of five main phases: orientation, complication, evaluation, resolution, and sometimes a coda that marks the return to the present moment (Labov and Waletzky 1967). In the analysis, we consider stories in relation to the canon: a canonical story of personal experience would follow a rather straightforward

pattern in terms of time and frequency (talking about an incident in the past), perspective (one telling on their own behalf), and evaluation (assessment of the experience) that is also a key element highlighting the point of the story (Van De Mieroop 2021). In practice, though, experiences are shared in a dynamic and contextually sensitive environment involving strategic and agentive use of resources (cf. Georgakopoulou 2007), and this understanding provides a richer understanding of how the tellings are composed. Storytelling analyzed here can entail both teller-related and event-related dimensions (Van De Mieroop 2021). Teller-related aspects are relatively stable in the data because of the defining features of data selection for analysis: *ownership* typically belongs to the teller, as does *tellership*, but keeping in mind the recipient-design that is affected by interviewer comments and questions; authorship draws attention to whether the storytellers are speaking in their own name. Event-related aspects can include *frequency* of the shared experience, *time* of the shared experience as a story in the past, present, or even links to the future, and *evaluation* which will be discussed in more detail as an essential element of naming. In the findings, each analysis highlights the teller- and event-related aspects that are relevant to the argument about the emancipatory potential of naming.

Naming negative experiences can occur in different parts of storytelling: as a frame for the story to come, in the midst of the telling, or as a summary at the end of telling. Here we are interested in the naming practices of those sharing their negative experiences. Such practices can, however, be collaborative, with interviewers participating in the process. Naming can often be seen as *making assessments* or *doing evaluations*. By making assessments, the speaker exposes their utterances and competence to the scrutiny of others, with the possibility of being held accountable, and interactants present their experience and emotions in relation to the assessed (Goodwin and Goodwin 1987/2006). Making assessments is also making epistemic claims on issues the speaker is assessing (Pomerantz 1984:57). Interviews are delicate situations in terms of knowledge domains: for building and maintaining rapport, respect for the epistemic territory of the interviewees, and the rights attached to it (see Heritage and Raymond 2005) is consequential, and legitimate claims to knowledge vary between different domains (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). Evaluation highlights particular aspects of telling (Van De Mieroop 2021). In research interviews, the telling is typically a part of answering a question by designing the answer as, for example, a justification or an explanation, depending on what kind of evaluation the teller is orienting to (De Fina 2009; Van De Mieroop 2021).

We understand the tellings of the interviewee as actions designed in relation to their accountability; how they seem and might be characterized by participants as adequate descriptions (see Heritage 1984). To help consider the emancipatory potential of naming further, in the analysis we focus on such aspects of telling that express the connections of naming, morality, and agency. These relationships become visible at the intersection of story world and storytelling world where accountability is handled. This is crucial, as these stories are being told to an outsider who was

not present during the transgressions. Exploring these aspects of telling is essential to understand the constraints and possibilities for *emancipation at the time of narration*, when no alternative options are available. Accountability draws attention to the locally managed categorization practices; how categorizations invoke normative conceptions to which participants may be held accountable (see Fenstermaker and West 2002). In this research, the focus is on categorizing experiences. Deploying assumptions and contextual details, and simultaneously doing society and managing face (Samra-Fredericks 2010), are part of the naming practices we analyze here.

FINDINGS

Handling Separate Worlds to Invite Recognition

The first two stories we analyze here illustrate self-presented naming that tackles the invisibility of the problem and how it is left unrecognized by people in powerful positions. While story and storytelling worlds remain clearly separate, interviewees handle the discrepancy mainly through naming. The distinct ways in which the naming comes about in the stories are consequential for agency and accountability.

The first story revolves around the issue of *spiritual violence*; the use of religion and its artifacts in a way that harms a person as regards spirituality and personal relationship with God (Panchuk 2020; Tobin 2016). In the organization, spiritual violence is defined as community-driven mental or physical violence entailing questioning and harming one's religious identity through the means of, for example, intimidation, exclusion, blaming, converting, or control (Hurtig and Linjakumpu 2020).

In this particular story, interviewee Anna, who is a parish employee in a subordinate position, has told about how the problems in the parish have reflected on the employees and their behavior. In addition to this, Anna has criticized the managers for not recognizing and addressing problems. Hierarchical workplace contexts can be susceptible to negative identity prejudice and hermeneutical injustice because of credibility attached to hierarchical positions (Kwok 2021). Anna names, for the first time in the interview, the negative treatment she has experienced as spiritual violence. She does so in the evaluation phase of the story that is also the story coda (Figure 1).

Naming upgrades the harmfulness of Anna's experiences. Through naming, Anna claims authority over the concept, and silencing and exclusion become recognizable as active and intentional actions (from "silent violence" to "mental and spiritual violence" l.34–35). Thus, naming serves as an evaluation and a conclusion through which the discrepancy between the story world and the storytelling world is managed.

The emancipatory potential of naming emerges from how naming highlights the agency of the perpetrators: Anna describes the actions of the managers as intentional (l.23: "destroying" Anna's work), presenting the perpetrator as knowledgeable of the actions and herself as an outsider (l.26), and describing the negative behavior as holistic. Anna described this holistic nature of enforcing perpetrators' beliefs and

1 IE: hhh well <both_of_them> had
 2 [[background in a revivalist movement]]
 3 .hh i've said many times that (.)
 4 although it shouldn't affect
 5 but i assume that it did (.)
 6 because they somehow pushed in a way (.)
 7 their own way of believing (.)
 8 like everybody should have acted the same way (.)
 9 there was like no space for that kind of .pt ((lip smack))
 10 one's own (.) spiritual (.) life (.)
 11 m- like for one's own way of believing and presenting it (.)
 12 IE: through my [[background]] it is really easy to make
 13 my own faith public [[with certain methods]] (.)
 14 IR: mm
 15 IE: mt <sure> then i got opportunities to try [[creative methods]]
 16 but that was through other employees (.)
 17 .pt ((lip smack)) this opportunity (.)
 18 ((detailed description omitted for anonymity))
 19 .pt [[and the materials i produced]] <suddenly>
 20 just disappeared (.) from publicity (.)
 21 like everything else was restored but
 22 those produced by me suddenly just disappeared (.)
 23 ((IR additional question on the materials omitted))
 24 IE: like those personal materials were just like (.) without asking
 25 anything from me (.) destroyed
 26 ((several lines omitted with a more detailed example of the lost material
 27 and discussion on how no grounds were presented to IE about it))
 28 IE: and then many times also parishioners asked that
 29 why can't [[the material]] be seen
 30 i was like (.) now you indeed have to ask like from the manager
 31 that i have n(h)o idea ((short laughter)) where it's gone (.)
 32 so (.) it was a <kind of> (.) repelling
 33 what one had to experience there .hh
 34 IR: mm
 35 IE: like there in a way a person was broken in every way
 36 that my way of being and doing was wrong
 37 and my way of believing was wrong and (.)
 38 it was this kind of silent (.) violence so to speak
 39 a kind of mental and spiritual violence (.)
 40 IR: mm (.) well that does sound like
 41 a pretty serious issue indeed (.)
 42 IE: mm

FIGURE 1. Spiritual Violence

behavior (1.6–8) by multiple means: using the modal verb “should” and extreme case formulations (“everybody,” “no space”) and excluding other ways of believing and expressing faith (1.10–11). Anna brings her story of this holistic behavior to a point by describing how her whole being is judged as “wrong” (1.31–33).

Since there was no admittance of wrongdoing in the story world and no resolution phase in the story, the only reconciliation offered in the interview situation is in relation to the recipient of the story. Anna draws attention to the reprehensibility of the actions by indicating how she was treated differently from others (1.18–21) and

going against the norm of negotiating with concerned parties before acting (1.22–23). In all, silencing and exclusion become recognizable as active and intentional actions.

Anna's storytelling supports emancipatory potential by managing the risks to self and possible accountability. By drawing attention to the revivalist background of the perpetrators (1.1–2), Anna risks her position as a neutral, unbiased narrator but manages the risk by invoking a norm oriented to neutrality: "it shouldn't affect" (1.3–4) and softening her interpretation ("I assume," 1.5). Referring to a revivalist background also serves to characterize the antagonists as conservative, since this is a well-known feature of revivalist movements. Also, the placement of naming as an assessment at the end of the story serves to elicit an affiliative response from the interviewer. While this story has highlighted identifying the problem, the following story differs from this one in that it brings a redefinition of a problem to focus.

In the second story, naming redefines the problem and thus affects the accompanying accountabilities. It addresses assumptions concerning the co-participants that may collide with how they identify themselves. Teresa stresses the problematic nature of an interaction situation by invoking the concept of *heteronormativity*.

The concept refers to everyday interactions relying on the assumptions of gender and sexuality as hetero with sanctions to non-normative expressions. Moreover, understandings are moralized and legitimized as embedded in the organization. Organizational mechanisms and dynamics uphold and reproduce heteronormativity (Corlett et al. 2023). However, in the church organization, for example, the youth work, materials criticize such assumptions and highlight reflexivity (see Church Council 2021). Work among sexual and gender minorities — generally referred to as "rainbow work" — started from one parish of the ELCF over 25 years ago (Raittila 2020), but attitudes and practices vary between regions and parishes. Debates on equality and nondiscrimination (see also Furseth 2018) have increased power struggles within the church (Kouri 2024) between the active conservative revivalist and liberal movements.

In the following, Teresa, who is a parish employee in a subordinate position, names her experiences as an orientation to a story, thus framing the whole interpretation of what is to come. Similarly to the previous story, there is no resolution phase. Here, the interviewer asks about the possible negative effects of different social categories, which evokes a story about heteronormativity as an issue (Figure 2).

Naming redefines the problem source of Teresa's negative experiences from individual traits to work community: from "person-related factors" (1.2) offered by the interviewer to heteronormativity as a problem of the work community (1.9–12, 14–15) presented by Teresa. Naming frames the upcoming account as problematic. Teresa's answer is recipient-designed to consider the categories in the interviewer's question and defines possible categories, further (orienting to "some other" category, 1.3) to handle belonging to a minority.¹ Also, in this story, Teresa works through the discrepancy between the story world and storytelling world using naming.

1 IR: how about these kinds of factors like person (.)
 2 person-related factors has in your opinion for example (.)
 3 gender, age or some other had an effect on-
 4 or has it brought benefits or harm in your work or career
 ((IE tells about early career experiences, pressures and expectations))
 5 IE: w- when it comes to gender h (.) so well: mm (.)
 6 i necessarily haven't experienced (.)
 7 h- haven't noticed that i that ah i was discriminated against
 8 or anything like that like
 9 perhaps more the sexual orientation has been ((short laugh))
 10 the kind of thing that i have recently
 11 in this rainbow (.) work (.) doing rainbow work like that
 12 i've had cause to reflect on like well (.) h[ow
 13 IR: [(-)
 14 IE: heteronormatively our ((breath indicating starting laughter))
 15 o(h)ur work community and being nevertheless is viewed
 16 that (.) that well: t- that: very few people know(h) (.)
 17 that i [[belong to a sexual minority]] for example (.)
 18 but that (.) but at times i've considered that mhh (.)
 19 that one could've told it (.)
 20 at certain moments one would've felt like saying (.)
 21 (h)e that: w- do you understand what that sounds like (.)
 22 .hh a:nd and well (.)
 23 IE: because [[manager from another parish]] i- he: was tired of (.)
 24 like i mentioned [[a lot of people were complaining
 25 about a rainbow event]] and they we:re
 26 IR: °m[m°
 27 IE: [awfully displeased by it and
 28 he was ir- ce- clearly irritated a bit by ↑it
 29 IR: °mm°
 30 IE: mt .hhh and he said to me (.)
 31 because we know each other and talk a lot
 32 .hhh and somehow in his irritation he said that (.)
 33 these people don't even attend
 34 o(h)ur f(h)unctions ha ha ((laughter))
 35 .hh and i felt like saying that ↑yeah i've [[conducted service]]
 36 IR: ha ha ha
 37 IE: with y(h)ou that .hhh
 38 IR: [(mm)
 39 IE: that ho- (.) like (.) ahh ((sigh)) how to ge-
 40 like (.) like does everyone have some (.) label
 41 that i'm (.) a rainbow person

FIGURE 2. Heteronormativity

The emancipatory potential of naming emerges through the simultaneous redistribution of accountability and the management of face threats. Teresa skillfully negotiates the moral and self-presentation dilemma of not coming out to the manager by employing the concept of heteronormativity. Topicalizing heteronormativity as the problematic issue shifts the orientation from possibly problems-inducing social categories (I.3) to evoking the constant battle between representing a group through one kind of identification and representing *a person*. Teresa gives an account of how heteronormativity is locally enacted and how that has made her consider

the necessity of coming out to her colleagues, of whom only a few know about her minority status (1.9–12, 14–19). Teresa presents the antagonist² as active (reported speech 1.30–34).

Also, here the only reconciliation offered in the interview situation is in relation to the recipient of the story, and there is no resolution phase in the story world. Self-presented naming serves as a tool to problematize the need to openly identify oneself as a member of a minority to be treated appropriately.

While, in both stories, naming was important for managing accountability, emancipation through naming came about in slightly different ways: in the first one, naming stressed the agency of the perpetrators, and in the second one, naming relocated the problem-source. This relocation provided an increased potential for emancipation since it broadened the scope of individuals who could be held accountable, rather than leaving the resolution of problematic interactions solely to Teresa.

Merging Worlds for Recognition

In the upcoming stories, the elements of storytelling lend even stronger legitimation to naming than in the previous cases. Until now, the cases we presented have highlighted the differences between the story world and the storytelling world. The next two stories, however, highlight increased integration of the worlds. Interviewees achieve this by manipulating the elements of a canonical personal story in ways that considerably affect accountability in naming. In addition, these stories are cases of other-presented naming. Part of the challenge of naming is reaching a legitimate position to do so, a point that is addressed here.

In this third story, naming pertains to *workplace bullying*. It is an example of a relatively well-known concept rooted in the study of bullying among schoolchildren and connected to many organizational conditions such as leadership practices (Einarsen et al. 2011). Workplace bullying encompasses enacting or experiencing systematic negative and aggressive behaviors, including more subtle forms, directed at a peer or people in different hierarchical positions (Einarsen et al. 2011). In the church organization, inappropriate behavior or bullying is defined as intentional injury or creating a humiliating or threatening work environment that may endanger or cause harm to individual safety or health (Main Negotiation Organizations of the Church 2018).

In this case, Sam, a parish employee in a supervisory position, enacts naming in the story abstract. As previously, there is not a resolution phase as such in the story, but in the story coda, Sam links up the story with the interviewer's question and the story abstract. After the interviewer asks about possible personal experiences of negative treatment and after a short negotiation on the question, Sam states that there are no recent experiences, but there are examples in the past that he hinted at earlier in the interview (Figure 3).

Naming practices position Sam as an authority to evaluate past experiences as problematic. Naming is constructed collaboratively: Sam chooses workplace bullying (1.17) as an answer from the many possible forms of negative behavior offered in

1 IR: how much have you yourself encountered (.)
 2 that kind of negative treatment
 ((several lines with reformulations by IR and request for clarification by IE omitted))
 3 IR: it doesn't necessarily have to be defined too precisely
 4 but like (.) some kind of bullying (.) conflict (.) aah (.)
 5 discrimination (.) some th- these kinds of like negative
 6 IE: ye[a
 7 IR: [°situations° (.)
 8 IE: yea .hh well no during recent years there hasn't been (.)
 9 been practically anything so like (.) then (.)
 10 at the the beginning (of the interview))
 11 i indicated a little that in [[place x]] there was (.)
 12 maybe a few years (.) that kind of a situation
 13 before that person retired that then then there .hh
 14 indeed was like it crossed (.) perhaps (.)
 15 you could say that (.) when .h a supervisor behaves like that
 16 it crosses like (.) today it would certainly cross like (.)
 17 the line of workplace bullying
 ((IE tells about different experiences of inappropriate or disruptive behavior))
 18 IR: what in the <behavior> was in your opinion
 19 such that (.) now the line was crossed (.)
 20 IE: .hhh well to me to me as a principle
 21 <if> you come to point out something (.) that's done
 22 or left undone well a general (.) like basic principle that (.)
 23 i won't if i go and discuss it like
 24 hey there (.) seems to be [[a work phase unfinished]]
 25 so (.) i won't expect that i'm (.) i mean
 26 this person who i am giving feedback to and i .hh
 27 that we would be standing next to (.) as many people as (.)
 28 possible and then start to sh- or i start to shout about it (.)
 29 IR: mm
 30 IE: that (.) that how can you be such (.) an idiot
 31 that you've left [[work undone]] (.) compared to
 32 if i say hey listen (.) did you leave [[some things unfinished]]
 33 could you please go and check (.) like like to m- me
 34 the principle of course when there's an error
 35 then that's (.) how it is
 36 that it (.) is the supervisor's (.) job (.) to say that (.)
 ((several lines omitted with another description of telling off someone in front of other people))
 37 IE so .hh that's what i mean there's the (.) line (.)
 38 it isn't [the issue
 39 IR: [mm
 40 IE: but like the behavior
 41 IR: yea (.) how you act (.)
 42 IE: yes (.)

FIGURE 3. Workplace Bullying I

the interviewer's question (1.1–5, 7). Sam constructs an example story about what he, as a supervisor, wouldn't do to a subordinate in situations when he needs to reprimand them on their work performance. The boundaries of the story world and storytelling world appear porous in that Sam practically places himself in the position of the supervisor in the story world (1.20–28, 30–33). Bridging these two worlds becomes possible through the changes in temporal perspectives, making the positions in the now and the past interchangeable (see Deppermann 2015) and thus legitimizing the name.

The emancipatory potential of naming lies in this re-evaluation and problematization of the lived past where negative behavior was more tolerated. Sam brings together the positions of the experiencer and the legitimate evaluator of the negative treatment. By using his own current position as a supervisor as a resource to credibly evaluate proper behavior, Sam is thus able to manage potential risks of miscategorizing his experiences. Also, the temporal perspective of looking at the past from the present allows him to state that, at least in today's standards (1.15), the supervisor's behavior would be considered bullying (1.16–17). Sam is able to present himself as a moral person who acts responsibly and doesn't yell or embarrass others. He can also be argued to uphold the integrity of the perpetrator and himself by not telling on the problematic supervisor directly, but by giving an example from his own work domain in which he is competent. Also, Sam constructs the matter as complainable by contrasting (1.24, 1.30–31 vs. 1.32–33), through which he compares different ways of mediating directive power and giving feedback to subordinates, and how he doesn't use derogative expressions but a more polite manner to convey his will. So, even though it is within a supervisor's directive power to criticize subordinates' work if necessary, at the same time, Sam is reflexive about his own position and behavior.

The previous cases relied heavily on the storyteller–recipient relationship and convincing the listener of the experienced negative behavior, but here some of that burden is lifted by Sam taking on multiple positions and managing accountability through his legitimate position as both a past subordinate and a present supervisor.

As opposed to the other cases we analyzed, in the following fourth story, legitimacy issues are resolved through other-presented naming. The story world and storytelling world align in such a way that two conditions are minimized: dependency on the storyteller–recipient relationship and risks to self. As a result, the emancipatory potential of naming is at its highest compared to other cases. Before this extract, Sara, who is a parish employee in a subordinate position, has been talking about the troublesome behavior of her supervisors and how it was left unrecognized in the work community. Sara has described how a lot of her work tasks have been taken away from her without discussing the issue with her and how the top manager is the one making the final decisions on such issues. She starts framing a new story by naming negative behavior as workplace bullying, which invites the interviewer to ask a question on how the naming took place.

1 IE: we:ll in my case the word workplace bullying has been said
 2 now (.) now for the first time last autumn s[o like-
 3 IR: [how yea
 4 how did it come about or in wh- wh- what con[text
 5 IE: [() it yeah
 6 it came in the heat of the final collaborative negotiation
 7 the:re (.) in that context (.) it's (.) it's like (.)
 8 in that context for the first time
 9 the occupational health physician said that
 10 have you †considered that this is workplace bullying (.)
 11 i then said that it has crossed my mind
 12 but i haven't dared to think (.) think (.) about it
 13 like the treatment by the (.) [[the top manager
 14 and by the immediate supervisor]]
 15 (wh' she) said that she has been listening to you here (.)
 16 here the time she has been the occupational health physician
 17 -physician here and we've been in contact
 18 so she's been listening that that sounds pretty bad
 19 but now she saw and heard it herself
 20 by those employe- emp- supervisors that
 21 IR: .hh[h
 22 IE: [she's been contemplating it (.)
 23 IR: why has it perhaps been difficult(h) to like (.)
 24 think that workplace bul°lying° is the issue (.)
 25 IE: well when one's thought that is this now hh (.) or
 26 like like i said at the beginning from <my> perspective
 27 IR: m[m
 28 IE: [that is () what have i now done wrong and and (.)
 29 like is this my fault(h)

FIGURE 4. Workplace Bullying II

In this personal story, naming is done in the orientation phase as a topicalization, and, again contrary to other cases, there is a resolution phase regarding naming. As in the previous case, this story pertains to workplace bullying (Figure 4).

Naming practices validate Sara's experience through the relationship between her and an expert authority ("the occupational health physician" 1.9). Naming is self-initiated and supported by its placement as a first position assessment (1.1–2) that topicalizes workplace bullying and frames Sara's experiences. Even though the ownership ("in my case," 1.1) of the experience clearly belongs to the narrator, Sara indicates altered authorship already in the passive form of the statement "the word workplace bullying has been said" (1.1). Authorship is attributed directly through reported speech in the doctor's words "have you considered this is workplace bullying" (1.10). A partial resolution to the situation is found: Sara is now able to

conceptualize the treatment she has to undergo at her workplace not as the result of her own doings, but as the result of transgressive behavior by others. This is, thus, the only story in our analyses in which there is a resolution to the issue, to a degree, thanks to the naming in the story world itself, rather than only in the storytelling world. The circumstances of naming bring about the alignment of story world and storytelling world.

As opposed to other cases, here there is no need to convince the recipient through personal argumentation. Even if there hasn't been a complete resolution indicated by changes in the behavior of the perpetrators, Sara has an expert witness to her treatment, and therefore her experiences are validated. The emancipatory potential of naming is thus both in the name "workplace bullying" and the fact that it is presented by an outsider expert.

Through elaborate use of time and frequency, Sara presents workplace bullying as an objective evaluation by an external authority and a thorough evaluative process. Firstly, the significance of naming is enhanced as a first-time experience, and it marks the start of a new period in which the narrator's experiences have a name (1.2). Secondly, the physician's evaluation is based on a longer observation and contemplation (1.15–18, 22) that leads first to an intermediate evaluation (1.18) and finally to a conclusion by contrasting that evaluation with the story world time ("but now"; 1.19) after a single incident when she personally witnessed the supervisors' behavior toward the protagonist (1.19–20).

In addition to atypical authorship, Sara manages accountability and a morally acceptable self by highlighting acting considerably in the handling of the issue of blame. The interviewer's second question pertains to the problematization of workplace bullying and relates to Sara's earlier statement that she hasn't dared to name what's happened herself (1.23–24). The answer tackles moral issues as an account of self-blame. Considering an issue in terms of bullying entails a crucial shift in perspective on and responsibility for the events. In all, Sara is able to convey that she doesn't jump to conclusions and is willing to consider her own possible part in negative experiences, highlighting the morality of her stance. Using all the resources described makes it possible for her to convey that she is not merely complaining but that her experiences are to be taken seriously.

In both stories, emancipation through naming becomes possible by appealing to authorities. In the third story, Sam's agency is in the foreground as a supervisor who is in the position to legitimize the name, whereas in the fourth, Sara's experiences are validated by an expert outsider authority. This altered authorship alleviates Sara's self-blame by emphasizing her low accountability in the situation. Various narrative techniques, which deviate from the canonical personal story, helped legitimize the naming of negative behaviors. In the third story, these techniques supported the narrator's legitimate position to evaluate negative behavior, while in the fourth, they emphasized the legitimate position of the expert witness.

DISCUSSION

Looking into naming practices highlights both the ways tellers make their negative personal experiences intelligible and how hermeneutical justice can be realized. This research can also help understand the difficulties large-scale social movements may encounter when promoting their macro-level mission in micro-level interaction situations, where novel conceptualizations are put into practice and subjected to social constraints.

In the first two cases, interviewees self-presented the name (*spiritual violence*, *heteronormativity*) and guided the interpretation, underlining the seriousness of the experience, but a lot of storytelling work was required to match the name and the occurrences together. In the last two cases (*workplace bullying I & II*), interviewees paired naming with appealing to authorities. While these are all cases where recognition by and reconciliation with the perpetrators or organizational authorities hasn't actualized, legitimizing the name is entangled with the degree of integration of the story world and the storytelling world. In the first two stories, the story world and storytelling world remain separate. In the *spiritual violence* story, naming is supported by descriptions stressing the agency of the perpetrators. It is situated as an evaluation at the end of the story, whereas in the *heteronormativity* story, naming is placed as an orientation that guides the interpretation of the following story. In the *heteronormativity* story, naming provides a shift in the problem-source from a personal issue to a work community issue. In both cases, the named issues are left unrecognized in the story world; but in the storytelling world, they make experiences visible and understandable as problems. These cases highlight the recipient-design of the stories in the placement of naming (in *spiritual violence*, seeking affiliation from the recipient) and in Teresa's case, how the participant uses the interviewer's question as a platform to elaborate on an issue important to her (heteronormativity).

In the last two stories, participants use person- and teller-related aspects of storytelling in exceptional ways to increase the integration of the story world and the storytelling world. In the story, *workplace bullying I*, Sam uses temporality in a manner divergent from a canonical personal story: Sam legitimizes naming by evaluating a supervisor's negative behavior in the past from a current temporal perspective and by using his current supervisory position as interchangeable with that of the supervisor in the past. Thus, Sam bridges the story world and the storytelling world. In the *workplace bullying II* story, the integration of the story world and the storytelling world is taken even further through altered authorship when a character in the story names Sara's experiences. As opposed to the other cases, here naming occurs in both worlds. In both cases, naming is done at an early stage: either in the story abstract (*workplace bullying I*), after some suggestions made by the interviewer in a question, or as a first position assessment that also serves as a topicalization (*workplace bullying II*).

In all, tellers include the co-participant by recipient-designing their storytelling, while also offering ways to diminish the reliance on the storyteller-recipient relationship in legitimizing the name. In both *spiritual violence* and *heteronormativity*

cases, naming tackles invisibility and serves to make experiences understandable as problematic and serious to the recipient of the story. In *workplace bullying I*, the emancipatory aspects are not only dependent upon the storyteller-recipient relationship, but an important source of emancipation is the personal understanding and experience of supervisory work and appropriate methods applied. Sam's chosen ways of conducting supervisory work contrast with the supervisory work of the past, making his own principles a sufficient argument for the reproachability of the previous supervisor's conduct. In the last story, the legitimation of the name isn't at all dependent on the relationships in the storytelling world. In the *workplace bullying II* story, Sara's experiences are validated in the story world by an expert witness through a careful evaluation process. Sara finds a partial resolution in that she can conceptualize her treatment as a transgression since the naming of workplace bullying has already become established.

Considering the contingent relationships between agency and accountability in storytelling raises important questions about the emancipatory potential of naming negative experiences. The first three narrations highlight the storytellers' necessity to address accountability in connecting the negative treatment to the chosen name and their active agency in making their experiences understandable. The third case, *workplace bullying I*, accentuates Sam's agency in the present: how Sam supervises others is relevant both for legitimizing his claims about experienced bullying and as an opportunity to act differently, even though no compensation for past injustices is possible. As a contrast to the other cases, the fourth narration, *workplace bullying II*, presents the lowest level of accountability, paired with a lower level of agency. When Sara is not accountable for an external expert evaluation, she can legitimately assess it, and her interpretative work as a teller is correspondingly reduced. Does this seemingly low agency challenge the possibility of making a self-empowering move (Zilberman Friedmann and Netz 2023) and envisioning a future where one can affect one's circumstances and develop them beyond negative treatment? In the stories we analyzed here, there is no admission of guilt or chance of justice in the story world, so the significance of self-emancipation and agency is stressed. While of course "agency and negotiation power in the evaluation of [...] experiences" (Medina 2012:205) is given in the storyworld to an outsider expert, this is done by Sara's choice. The limitation pertains to the name given as something that adequately describes Sara's experiences or whether there would be space and need for "semantic innovations" (cf. Medina 2012:208) that would capture the issue more precisely.

Our data stressed the challenges of minorities, and those otherwise undermined by power relationships, in creating social meanings. *Heteronormativity* showed the challenge of hermeneutical marginalization that indicated, firstly, unequal participation in the generation of social meanings (Fricker 2007) at the workplace, and secondly, the burden a minority member is put under to be able to make an experience shareable. Conceptually, heteronormativity can be used to resist conservative interpretations and highlight differences that may not be immediately apparent in a given situation. Such conceptual tools may indeed open pathways

to resistance and, in Medina's (2012) terms, to the development of hermeneutical sensibility. While in the storytelling world, the concept of heteronormativity helps to redefine the problem-source, in the story world the issue of whether coming out to members in the work community would have helped to raise their awareness and develop their communication is left open. This puts minority members under pressure. The situation is especially tricky because of the conservative traits of the ELCF that could lead employees, regardless of their degree of openness to minorities, to consider it unlikely that co-workers could belong to gender or sexual minorities. Thus, heteronormativity remains unchallenged. Hermeneutical marginalization can be a locally defined phenomenon, as in *spiritual violence* in which the powerful perpetrator's background in a conservative revivalist movement is problematized as a part of the problem of excluding other kinds of approaches to faith and religion at the workplace. The story itself of how the employee was constrained from expressing her faith could be read as an example of pre-emptive silencing characteristic of hermeneutical injustice (see Fricker 2007; Medina 2012). While both aforementioned concepts are fairly new in their use, workplace bullying is a long-term and widespread concept with accumulated understandings that allow more easily for a re-evaluation of the past.

We investigated interaction dynamics as part of realizing hermeneutical justice (Medina 2012) here as a multifaceted phenomenon: we need to consider names not only as an issue of how responsive the recipient of the experience is to the name but also with an understanding of other obligations attached to the situation. This means that accountability and face are considered as something the sharers of negative experiences need to manage. Thus, it is not merely about the intelligibility of the name but also about its legitimation. Participants did this legitimation work even in interview situations, where the interviewer had no power to affect or correct the situations at the workplace. Of course, we may consider interview situations as situations to give feedback to the organization and address wider audiences through research, which further argues for elaborate descriptions in sharing personal experiences. Additionally, considering that spreading the name across boundaries requires developing awareness (Medina 2012), it is necessary to negotiate the name and its associated contents to complement the collective resources of the workplace.

Hermeneutical (in)justice theorization (Fricker 2007; Medina 2012) emphasizes the ethics of the teller-recipient relationship. It is a chance to enact agency in the storytelling world when it has been denied or obstructed in the storyworld. Of course, in the cases we analyzed, this is done in the context of research, and while the interaction situation is a space for the interviewees to make sense of their experiences, that sense-making is both enabled and constrained by the interviewer's questions. The analysis has pertained to narrative-discursive elements in the data, and it is in no way an evaluation of the truthfulness of the experience or the name given. By discussing the contingent nature of accountability-agency relationships we have shown that under the social and narrative requirements it may be difficult for sharers of

experiences to maintain their agency and their status as knowers (cf. Medina 2012) in their efforts to tell a convincing story. Additionally, while there may be good chances of self-empowerment through naming and shifting accountabilities, as in the *heteronormativity* case, such moves may inhibit correcting the problems of the workplace by excluding the tellers themselves from the relevant group of agents to act against injustice.

The limitations of the study relate to the data selection process: the richness of the named categories is not fully captured; the variety of names given could itself be an informative object of study concerning issues of credibility and legitimation. Additionally, because the cases we analyzed were based on the transparency and recognizability of experiences as personal, some personal experiences may have been overlooked. Considering the diverse ways in which people tell about their personal experiences could offer important insights into the hierarchies between personal and general forms of telling stories.

To complement the perspective of the research done here, another way of approaching the significance of naming would be to analyze descriptions of personal experiences where they remain difficult to name and categorize. Both perspectives foreground the importance of the interaction context and sympathetic listeners who increase the credibility of what they are told to benefit the realization of hermeneutical justice (see Fricker 2007).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None of the authors have a conflict of interest to disclose.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Interview data are currently in use for the project and have not yet been archived.

NOTES

1. It is known to the interviewer beforehand that Teresa has a minority status in relation to sexuality.
2. L.33 “these people” refers to gender and sexual minorities.

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