

# The Right Kind of Queer

Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Contemporary Constructions of Swedishness

---

Katharina Kehl

Akademisk avhandling för filosofie doktorsexamen i Freds-och utvecklingsforskning vid Institutionen för globala studier, Göteborgs Universitet, som, med vederbörligt tillstånd av Samhällsvetenskapliga fakultetsstyrelsen läggs fram för offentlig granskning den 4 december 2020, klockan 10:15 i Linnésalen, Mediehuset, Campus Linné, Seminariegatan 1B, Göteborg.

**SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES**



**UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG**

Kehl, Katharina (2020): *The Right Kind of Queer: Race, Sexuality, and Gender in Contemporary Constructions of Swedishness*  
PhD dissertation in Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, (P.O Box 700, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden)  
Language: English, with summary in Swedish  
ISBN: 978-91-8009-098-8 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-91-8009-099-5 (PDF)  
<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/66782>

## Abstract

Recent years have seen an increased mobilisation of LGBT rights in nationalist projects of (non-)belonging. This thesis provides new insights into the role played by race, sexuality, and gender in these projects by examining contemporary constructions of Swedishness. Since attempts at defining belonging matter with regard to how we make sense of ourselves and each other, this project also investigates which subject positions are suggested and experienced as “intelligible” within the context of these constructions. Finally, it aims to look at how such normative grids of intelligibility are negotiated.

The thesis analyses discursive constructions of Swedishness through LGBT rights across three research sites: A “pride parade” organised by the Swedish populist right, Swedish Armed Forces’ marketing material, and personal experiences shared on an Instagram account for racialised LGBTQ people. The analysis shows that constructions of Swedishness rely on separating an LGBTQ-friendly Swedish Self from various dangerous and racialised Others. These separations are maintained by narratives of threat and protection, making LGBTQ people intelligible as potential victims, while locating discrimination and anti-LGBTQ violence firmly outside of white Swedishness. While these narratives seem to silence alternative ways of being LGBTQ as well as to hide anti-LGBTQ attitudes “within” Sweden, the thesis identifies various ways in which racialised LGBTQ people in particular challenge them. By manoeuvring, rather than trying to comply with normative grids of intelligibility, they carve out liveable lives for themselves in the context of exclusionary constructions of Swedishness.

Overall, this thesis combines an exploration of boundary-making and belonging with queer conceptualisations of subjectivity, read through a racialisation lens. It therefore not only contributes with a deeper understanding of how discursive boundary-making around national communities draws upon and enables normative grids of intelligibility, and how these grids are racialised. By employing a pluralistic queer logic, it also shows that these norms are inevitably unstable, and thus remain open for contestation and re-signification.

**Keywords:** homonationalism, LGBTQ, Swedish gender exceptionalism, intelligibility, belonging

**Kehl, Katharina.** 2018. “In Sweden, Girls Are Allowed to Kiss Girls, and Boys Are Allowed to Kiss Boys’: Pride Järva and the Inclusion of the ‘LGBT Other’ in Swedish Nationalist Discourses.” *Sexualities* 21(4): 674-91.

Strand, Sanna and **Katharina Kehl.** 2019. “A Country to Fall in Love with/in’: Gender and Sexuality in Swedish Armed Forces’ Marketing Campaigns.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21(2): 295-314.

**Kehl, Katharina.** 2020. “Did Queer Muslims Even Exist?’ – Racialised Grids of Intelligibility in Swedish LGBTQ Contexts.” *Social Identities* 26(2): 150-65.

**Kehl, Katharina.** 2020. “Homonationalism Revisited: Race, Rights, and Queer Complexities”. *Lambda Nordica* 25(2): 17-38.