Foreword

This is a wonderful book with a beautiful title that addresses an essential topic: gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual worlds and rights in Eastern Europe.

My first pink experience beyond the Iron Curtain was the conference on Sexual Minorities in Tallinn, 1990. Entering the Soviet Union by way of Moscow, the male customs officer did not know what to do with the gay studies books I had brought with me for the organizers. Asking his superior, a typical "strong woman" of the former Soviet states who looked like a butch lesbian in her cute socialist uniform, she decided that "times have changed and we now have to discuss such themes." And I could continue with my luggage, containing the contraband of a very recent past. Arriving in Tallinn, the first thing the organizers offered the foreign guests was a city tour. Some Russian guys followed and we engaged in a conversation. At some point, they asked very timidly whether we, the Westerners, were ourselves homosexual. Most of us were, so we could give a positive answer, and yes, they themselves were also gay, as they subsequently confirmed at our request. The unimaginable for them was, we began to understand later, that experts on homosexual issues were openly gay or lesbian. In the former Soviet Union the specialists were mainly straight homophobic doctors.

Times have changed enormously because in this collection most authors are queer or queer-friendly. And they no longer discuss the social dangers of, and cures for homosexuality, but the oppressive situation and the rights of LGBT people. Many things have taken a positive turn. This collection shows all the new and rich developments. There are now gay bars and disco's, LGBT organizations, supportive books in most languages that discuss the past and present of gay and lesbian cultures. There are cultural festivals and parades. Internet now offers the opportunity to explore homosexuality in cyberspace before getting to the real stuff of bars and bodies. Transsexuals have rights to medical care, although it continues to be complicated to find your way in the medico-legal and financial labyrinths of sex change. Transgenders are subjects of movies; gays and lesbians have become visible in the press. A serious complaint about the media is the focus on news and soaps that originate

from Western-Europe and the USA and have little local relevance. At the same time the European Union shines like a light in the dark as it has imposed equal rights legislation for gays and lesbians in those countries of the East that have become member states or want to be included. In the West, we are very curious whether the new members will contribute to a conservative majority in the EU that opposes or neglects gay and lesbian rights, or whether they will take a sex-liberal turn and also realize the social support for sexual diversity that is now enshrined in their laws only by legal obligation.

All the glorious new developments in the new democracies should not occlude the situation where large parts of the populations have negative attitudes about homosexuals. In the West, gays and lesbians long had the impression that they were a victorious minority that was on its way to full legal and social equality. In the EU, most countries seem to be on course to eliminate the final inequalities of the past, the most important being that same-sex couples had no rights to marry or adopt children. The legal progress however, obscured that the social developments did not keep pace with the legal, or that all social institutions remained heteronormative, perhaps with a place at the table for the queer individual, but with no incentive to open up for sexual and gender diversity. In nearly all schools, families, political parties, municipalities, workplaces, care institutions, sport clubs, on the streets, heterosexuality has remained the norm and homosexuality the neglected exception while sexual pleasure remains a taboo topic notwithstanding all the media's ravenous attraction to sex. The strict gender dichotomy, problematic for both transgenders and homosexuals, remains enshrined in society. Even in Western Europe, the LGBT movement has to go a long way to create real sexual and gender diversity.

This collection shows the progress being made in Eastern Europe and the obstacles that are being faced: from Belarus where gays and lesbian have to fear for their lives via the revulsion and rejection by Catholics and nationalists in other places, to the neglect by social institutions or the general public elsewhere. Homosexuality was and continues to be seen as a danger for the social body, mistakenly proscribed in European laws, as a contagious disease that endangers young people, while all churches railed against the sinful behaviour of queers. It is a difficult, but not hopeless situation given the development of LGBT worlds and movements everywhere and the presence of allies from inside or abroad.

An interesting project for the future is to study how much has changed since the fall of the Iron Curtain. How oppressive was the situation under communism when there were perhaps few queer bars and no gay move-

ments, but nevertheless urinals and small circles of trustworthy friends? Communist states were definitely not gay-friendly, but what about the "strong women" who would now be seen as transgenders or butch lesbians? Some states had anti-homosexual laws, but others had none. How much tolerance existed for the private problem that someone had homosexual or lesbian inclinations? The story of 71-year old Thorsten from an East-German village (in Jörgens' chapter) indicates that a gay couple could live an unnoticed life. The communist states were largely organized along homosocial lines, always an interesting playground for homosexual desires. There must have been an enormous variation in the treatment of LGBT people in a situation where the relevant issues were often silenced or remained unspoken.

There is an interesting rule of history that progress made in the past may become an impediment in the present, and vice versa. It could well be that the stagnation of the LGBT movements in Western Europe, still kept alive by the gracious grants of governments, may make them fade away in the near future with no one combating social heteronormativity or a new conservatism that opposes sexual hedonism and visibility. While in Eastern Europe these still new and vibrant queer movements open up new venues and situations for queering society beyond the old sexual conservatism of a vanishing generation, hanging on to its old-fashioned communist, Catholic or Orthodox anti-gay dogmas. The future will have many surprises and it is likely that more of them come from the East than from the West as the latter is suffocating in its passive complacency about same-sex marriages, equal rights laws or being openly gay. These half baked successes may turn against Western gays and lesbians, while the abjection of the East might strengthen the queer community in its political and artistic endeavours. So it might be very worthwhile for the LGBT movements of the West to look with curiosity to their sisters in the East, instead of only lecturing them about LGBT organizing. Let them all read this book.

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Introduction: What is beyond the pink curtain?

The idea of this book was born in the Intimate/Sexual Citizenship conference in October 2005 in Ljubljana where scholars focusing on the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in post-socialist Eastern Europe were gathered to discuss the everyday life experiences of LGBT people regarding the functioning of social, political and cultural boundaries that separate the "good heterosexual citizen" from the rest.[1]

While a lot of research findings of our colleagues in the Western world on everyday life experiences of LGBT people are well documented, easily accessible, and often interpreted as having "universal" relevance, results of research projects about LGBT people in Eastern Europe are mostly unknown, and as they are coded in the local non-global languages, mostly inaccessible to broader audiences, and thus easily regarded as non-relevant or even non-existent. Therefore our main aim with this book was to bring together a variety of empirical—most often social scientific—research material from Eastern Europe for the first time and present it in "the global language." As important as the obvious academic aim of the book is the political goal of the project: to voice those whose experiences are analysed and whose everyday lives' joys and pains are mirrored in the texts presented here.

Some of the authors were participants in the Ljubljana conference, others we found through various research and activist networks—but all of them had something relevant and well-documented to say about the possibilities to live as LGBT persons in a region that is still haunted sometimes by the past experience of being locked behind "the Iron Curtain".

While for about four decades after its descend probably the most powerful characteristic of "the Iron Curtain" derived from the puzzling fact that no one could really know what was going on behind it—now, when we can look beyond this metaphor and have a chance to discover what was hidden before, we can see more clearly the distorting conse-

[1] The conference was part of a broader project "Intimate Citizenship: The Right to Have Rights," including the Slovenian research on everyday life of gays and lesbians and the educational programme "Diversity makes us richer, not poorer" <www.mirovni-institut.si/razlicnost>.

quences of the forcefully imposed separation and the lack of information resulting from it. Thus we also have to realise that one type of separation can conceal several others, and the initial urge of looking behind will ultimately lead us to look beyond—and challenge the existing frameworks.

Among the various veiled segments of post-socialist Eastern European reality we wanted to examine those covered by "the pink curtain"—being in fact a global rag—, and we have found similar patterns of LGBT everyday life in different countries that do not discontinue at state borders. Considering that facing the diverse manifestations of social and cultural homophobia still seems to be a unifying experience for the majority of LGBT people, "the West" is not necessarily as far from "the East" as it is sometimes suggested.

We have collected documents of desire and pain, pride and humiliation, openness and fear, love and hate, care and neglect experienced by LGBT people struggling for recognition, respect and full community membership rights in this part of the world, too. At the same time the 21 articles of this volume illustrate the increasingly conspicuous *ways of LGBT existence* being specifically characteristic to Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, East-Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

And of course, we wish to share these experiences with everyone who cares to look (not just behind but also) beyond what has been separating us from each other.

Judit Takács and Roman Kuhar
Budapest – Ljubljana, December 2006

Out We Come

Down and Out in Belgrade: An Ethnographic Account on the Everyday Life Experiences of Serbian Gays and Lesbians in 2004

Liselotte van Velzen

Introduction

It is a rainy Friday evening in February 2004 and I am Vlada's and Nikola's guest. In the kitchen of their small but cosy apartment in Belgrade's Dorćol-area Nikola has prepared gibanica for us. To the boys' delight the dough and cheese pie is my favourite Serbian dish. Vlada is thrilled about having met a Dutch girl. "We are so happy we met you," he says, opening a bottle of red wine "for special occasions. When you said you came from Holland my whole world was shaking, my legs went weak." He smiles. "We just spoke about going to Holland and getting married and the next day we met you." Over the delicious dinner we talk about gay life in Belgrade, about my research project, and about The Netherlands. Eventually I have to tell them it is only possible to get married in The Netherlands when at least one of the partners is a Dutch citizen. Vlada looks genuinely sad. He explains he desperately wants to leave the country: "I just have to get away from here. I do not want to wake up when I am fifty years old, thinking: 'what have I done with my life?' We have to live on very little money, you know," he continues, "the general income here is about two hundred Euro a month. Besides, I cannot be myself here. I cannot publicly show my love for Nikola, while that is what I so desperately want. All we have is this small apartment—it's the only place where we can really be who we are."

The story of Vlada and Nikola and the fact that their apartment is "the only place where they can really be who they are" vividly illustrates the complexity of being gay or lesbian, living a homosexual life, and maintaining a relationship with someone of the same sex in Serbian society. This chapter intends to answer the question how young gay and lesbian adults in Belgrade experience their every day social lives.

On January 15th 2004 I arrived at Belgrade Airport, determined to answer the question: which social and cultural factors influence the process of self-understanding of young gay, lesbian and bisexual adults in

Belgrade, and how do these young men and women experience their "different" sexual orientations? Through the forum of the website gay-serbia.com I met several young Serbian adults. We met for coffee down town and I started meeting their friends and the friends of their friends, got invited to parties, and threw a birthday party myself. Soon I was a part of "the scene" in Belgrade, first as a "foreign acquaintance" and later as "one of the girls."

Thirty-five men and women, the youngest being nineteen and the oldest thirty-three at the time, agreed on participating in my project. Throughout the months, the majority not only became my cooperative informants but also my friends. Although diverse in educational background, jobs, and personal interests, these fifteen men and twenty women have one thing in common. They share the realization that they are "not necessarily straight." I explicitly use the term "not straight," because not everyone was anxious to label him- or herself as gay or lesbian. For some it was not problematic, but others answered questions about their sexual identity or sexual orientation with a confused "I don't know," "I think I am bisexual," or "Maybe I am a lesbian"; "Maybe I am gay." Yet every single boy or girl realized he or she is not necessarily heterosexual and has expressed him- or herself about this to others.

My work narrates a particular moment in the lives of my informants when gay and lesbian life in the city was relatively "vibrant." Gay parties were organised twice a month by Belgrade's youngest gay and lesbian initiative *Pride* as well as by private originators. Several informal circles had come into being, created through contacts forged on-line. And by the time summer approached the city, even a gay café was opened in central Belgrade. For five months these men and women were accompanied by me, a twenty-six year old, female Dutch anthropologist who felt to be part of Belgrade's "gay population" and tried to understand the way in which they experience their sexual orientation. I tagged along with them, I observed and participated in their lives, carried out extensive interviews, and initiated group discussions. As a result the information presented in this chapter is a constructed narrative built on anecdotes, diary entries, observations, and interpretations I gathered between January and June 2004.

When discussing the way in which homo- and bisexual men and women in Belgrade experience their every day social lives we can apply Gerd Baumanns concept of "shifting identities" to their social actions. In *Contesting Culture. Discourses of Identity in Multi-ethnic London* anthropologist Baumann (1996) indicates that the shifting of identities is a process in which association and identification with a certain "community"

depends "on context and contingency" (Baumann 1996, 4). Baumann's thesis is applicable to my argument, for in action and expression my informants *do* actively "shift" their "sexual identities" depending on "context and contingency." In this chapter I will show in detail how this notion of "shifting identities" relates to the way in which my informants interact with their social surroundings by choosing to express a certain sexual orientation, depending on the context. This chapter reveals how at gay parties or among like-minded people and "gay-friendly" friends many young gay, lesbian and bisexual adults will—at least to a certain extent—openly express their homosexuality, while in public places and among people ignorant of their "sexual difference" (including family members, colleagues, or co-students) they rather choose to be fully or partly silent about it. This silence takes shape in publicly ignoring and hiding one's sexual orientation and homosexual relationship, in actively lying about it, and in structurally attempting to pass as heterosexual. The stories that were told to me over the months by my friends and informants in Belgrade shed a light on this practice of "passing," of shifting between a heterosexual, a bisexual, and a homosexual identity, which is a necessity in order to maintain your social and economical position in Serbian society. Each paragraph therefore starts off with a story which gives insight into the ways young Serbian gays, lesbians, and bisexuals negotiate their different sexual identity in relation to, and interaction with their parents (1) and their straight friends (2). The stories presented also highlight how my friends and informants can "be themselves" and meet like-minded people almost only in the virtual space provided by the Internet (3). Finally, I will focus on how my informants feel about the public manifestation of their homosexuality by presenting their views concerning the plans to organize another gay parade in Belgrade (4).

"I Am a Great Disappointment to My Parents"

When I was still with Ljilja we spend a lot of time together. For my parents I made up a fake boyfriend, Vlada, and Ljilja's room-mate was my cover-up. When I went to see her I always told my mum I was going to see Vlada. Then my mother would call me ten times in one evening, which was really annoying. One night my phone rang and it was my mum telling me that she felt bad, that she wanted to go to a hospital and that she needed me to come home. . . . Eventually I got home and found my mother sitting at the table, looking very bad. My father was sitting on the other side of the table. I felt ashamed, because somehow I knew I had to tell them. So I came in and my mother asked: "Are you pregnant?" "No." "Who is your boyfriend? Is he problematic?" "No." "Do you take drugs?" "No." "Are you in a cult?" "No!" "What is the problem then? Who is your boyfriend?" Then I said: "It isn't about a boyfriend, it is about a girlfriend. I am gay." My mother completely lost it at that moment. . . . My father said: "Wife, I don't

> understand these foreign words. Please translate them into Serbian to me." And I really think he didn't understand. So my mother said to him: "Husband, our daughter's nature is not to love boys. She likes girls." My father was angry and disappointed. I could see their world crushing down and for weeks they were looking at me strangely, as if I was a freak. I am a great disappointment to them, because everything they taught me I am not going to become (Kristina, 21).[1]

Besides the anti-homosexual attitudes dominating Serbian society, several reasons can be named for feelings of disappointment and guilt shared by gays, lesbians, and their parents. In the first place, homosexuality undermines traditional patriarchal values for it implies the impossibility of family creation: one's coming-out makes parents realize that their homosexual child shall not confirm to traditional values. Consequently, parents fear for their child's economic and physical well-being. Being homosexual and therefore not being able to marry means their child is not guaranteed a secure future with shared burdens, with someone to look after and who looks after them when they grow older. Parents can also feel responsible for their child's "deviance": they fear they are guilty and shall be blamed and shamed for having an "abnormal child" by their social surroundings. Žarko is one of my many informants who analysed the response of his own mother as well as of his boyfriends' parents along these lines.

> Maybe it's that they'll never have grandchildren. And they are afraid for security and that you might end up alone in the end: "Who is going to give you a hand or cook for you when you are old?" It's the generalisation of gay relationships; that they don't last. And you cannot explain that it is not like in the movies or the way it is talked about. My boyfriends' mother is worked up about grandchildren and afraid of skinheads, while my mother thinks she is responsible. I am not the perfect son any more. My mother thinks it is a cult, that I am brainwashed by gay society and the gay lobby (Žarko, 24).

Like Žarko and Kristina, Marko too, came out to his parents. His detailed account indicates that the resistance of his parents to his sexual orientation is also influenced by an anti-homosexual attitude, by heterosexual family expectations and by feelings of disappointment, guilt and shame. But although coming-out was a complicated process which resulted in a forced moving out of his parental home, Marko says to be very lucky, because he "had the best response you can get from parents in Serbia":

[1] All names mentioned here are invented. The number next to the name denotes the age of my informants.

> Before I came out to my parents I told them "just wait for my birthday," because I thought: "They cannot kill you when it is your birthday." I made a list with the worst stuff a mother can have, like having a son dying of AIDS, dying of cancer, being a junky, a killer, a homosexual, a thief, and more. . . . I gave them the list, I told them I was one of those, and I asked them to think about what they could tolerate and what not. They were reading the list for a month and in the end they told me: we can accept everything, but not homosexuality or being on drugs. So basically my parents preferred having me dying from cancer within two weeks over having a homosexual son. Anyway, my birthday came and I had written a text of twenty pages with the big story of my life. My birthday wish was for them to listen to me reading the text without any interruption. I read the text for three hours. . . . I told them I tried everything: one year of psychiatry, three years of being with Dragana, because I thought: "If I tell them I tried everything they cannot force me to try more." I simply didn't want to give them the space to suggest anything else. When I finished they told me: "Go to your room and don't come out until we call you." My mother was crying and my father had the most serious face I had ever seen. . . . Eventually they told me: "It is terrible for us that you are homosexual, but we are thankful that you told us now. . . . We won't discriminate you, we won't tell you it is bad, because we know you will have a very hard life being a homosexual in Serbia and we know you will be discriminated and shamed by other people. We'll be watching that and we will be sad. But really, it's better for you to think rationally and try to be heterosexual. Therefore you don't have the right to bring boys, just girlfriends." I tried to make them feel sorry by telling them that I will find a way for sexual activity in the future, that I know how to find sexual activity with men. When they asked me how, I said: "There are plenty of public toilets and parks and beds in strangers apartments, more then you can imagine." . . . They were terrified and came up with a solution: "We will sell this big apartment and we will buy two separate apartments. You can live in one. We want to see you and be OK with you, and the only thing we expect in return is that you don't remind us of your homosexuality." On the day I finally got the apartment I felt really happy and really sad at the same time. Economically I did very well, but emotionally I was alone, much more alone then before. . . . They locked the door and I was so terrified. When I heard them start the car and drive off I started crying. I felt like in prison; some desert island called "my apartment" and they are going away by ship, leaving me to live my terrible life. . . . They are very homophobic, but they love me very much (Marko, 24).

Although the majority of my informants say that they are on guard when it comes to manifesting their different sexual orientations, none of them experienced full social and economical exclusion by their parents. Not only Marko and Kristina, but apart from a few exceptions, all my informants frequently stressed having good, caring and loving fathers and mothers. Yet many of them also indicated having to deal with the idea that they have disappointed their parents to some extent. Not being able to live up to the expectations of both Serbian society and their family, young homosexual adults in Belgrade experience their parents' disappointment as well as, in most cases, the refusal to really accept their child's homosexuality. Twenty-six year old language student Jelena and

thirty-year old journalist Srđan also indicate that the social pressure for being heterosexual, getting married and giving birth to a child is high; for some homosexual men and women too high even:

> Zoran and I broke up, because he was under a lot of pressure from his parents. I think that has been important for the fact he has now found a girl, married her and has a child. Nobody knows he is my ex-boyfriend; nobody even knows he is gay, not at all (Srđan, 29).

> My mother doesn't know I am gay and I know she wouldn't think about me being a lesbian. It simply wouldn't occur to her. . . . I have been out with my girl for two nights now, and I can't think of anything to justify a third. I am running out of lies and I am getting scared. I never had to lie about something like this before. Now I am afraid my mother will discover that I am lying, so I am panicking. I am afraid one of my straight friends will call; that my mum will talk to them and that she will find out I have been lying about seeing them. I sometimes use my straight friends as a cover-up, but they don't know that. I mean, I can't tell my friends I am a lesbian. It's really, really difficult. And I don't want to tell my parents either. I mean, I don't see why I should shock and disappoint them by telling them I am not normal; that I am not the perfect daughter (Jelena, 26).

Jelena's story evidently indicates that lying and hiding about something as essential as being in a relationship with a person you love is a tiring and nerve-wrecking experience, because, as Ivan explained, "for one lie you have to make up twenty others." Nevertheless Jelena, and like her the vast majority of young homosexual adults in Belgrade, chooses to deal with the practice of "passing" in order to secure her social and economic position. In Queer Nationalism Kevin Moss describes this process of passing as "a kind of acting": "Almost all gay men and lesbians can and do pass as straight on occasion. In many cases we are assumed to be straight unless we specifically mark ourselves as gay by dress, gesture, and remark. But there are also cases in which we choose an active strategy not to undeceive those who assume we are straight. We may use the wrong pronoun when talking about someone we love. We may pretend interest of someone of the wrong sex. . . . Passing is thus a kind of acting, and it is something most (gay men and lesbian women) of necessity learn well at an early age" (Moss 1995).

An important and in Belgrade frequently used method of passing is what my informants referred to as a *cover-up*: a friend of the opposite sex prepared to convince the surroundings his or her "boy- or girlfriend" is heterosexual. In order to hide her two-year relationship with Anja, Maja has found a cover-up in Bojan. At a get-together at her place she showed me a picture of her and Bojan hugging, and laughed: "Aren't we cute together?" The she explained: "We took this photo at a party a while

ago. It's for my parents. I showed it to them, so they would know who my boyfriend is." Similarly Jelena argued that for couples who are still living with their parents, cover-ups prove to be *the* solution:

> There are couples who still both live with their parents; they never have space to be together, to have sex or to have some moments together. Like Ivana and her girlfriend. They both live at home with their parents in Kragujevac, and Ivana is still in high school. Jovan is her cover up. He is her boyfriend from Belgrade, and even went to Kragujevac to meet the parents. Now they give Ivana money to travel to Belgrade twice a month, so the girls only have the Pride-parties at which they can be together (Jelena, 26).

Hiding, passing and "shifting" between a heterosexual and a homosexual "identity" depending on the context of a situation is part of the every day life of many young homosexual adults in Belgrade. This paragraph has illustrated how many young homosexual men and women negotiate or fully hide their homosexuality from their parents, because they do not want to disappoint and shame them by confronting them with the fact they have a child who does not conform to the traditional family values. Yet, despite feelings of shame and disappointment a great number of parents in Serbia eventually learn to accept and deal with the homosexuality of their child to a certain extent. The next paragraph explains how not only parents but also heterosexual brothers, sisters, cousins and friends come round by adopting a dual attitude towards homosexuality and negotiating sexual differences within the dominant anti-homosexual discourse.

I Am a Straight Guy who Sometimes Wanders Off

> When I told my friends I am bisexual a few of them were shocked and surprised. For them I was straight. And actually I still am. I am a straight guy who sometimes wanders off. After I had come out to my best friends, two of them called me for a coffee. They asked me if I really was gay and I said "no," because I am not. But they told me that they had spoken about it and that they had decided it's unnatural. They said that they don't want to hang out with me any more. A few days later they called me again, saying: "Sorry, we overreacted." We talked about it, and they said: "Well, it is wrong, but you are doing it, so it is OK." Another guy, also one of my friends, said he was going to beat me up at the next gay parade. But two other guys responded positively. One of them was my room-mate in the students' home where I lived. I remember one night we slept the four of us in our room. . . . I shared a bed with my boyfriend, and he shared his bed with a girl. One moment I heard her whispering. Then I heard him say loudly: "If you have a problem with them being in a bed together then you'd better go to your own room!" (Ivan, 26).

Refusing to live a lie Ivan, at a certain point in his life, decided to come out and tell the people he cares about that he is bisexual. The story about his coming-out to his heterosexual friends is rather significant, for it represents a great number of stories I heard over the months. Ivan's narrative not only brings out the fact that the kind of response and the amount of acceptance he received to his coming-out varies per person, it also uncovers a rather paradoxical general attitude towards homo- and bisexual men and women in Serbia. Basically the reply Ivan got from two his friends—"It is wrong, but you are doing it, so it is OK"—is said to be a common response many heterosexual Serbian people have to the coming-out of homosexual friends and loved-ones. As Žarko explained this double standard in a conversation:

> There is a difference between general ideas and ideas concerning individuals. People here easily say: "I loathe the gay population, but you are my brother and I respect that." My best friend was very homophobic in the beginning, but his sister had a best friend who was gay. He took up a certain guarded attitude toward that friend, but when he got to know him he was cool. He changed his opinion and they became good friends. Really, people just need to meet a person and find out that there is nothing different about them. Bringing it onto their own skin will make them realize there is no difference (Žarko, 24).

Obviously there is a difference between the way people respond to homosexuality on a public level and the way they deal with its presence privately. In *Contesting Culture* Gerd Baumann (1996) distinguishes a "dominant discourse" that "defines ethnic groups in Southall as communities and identifies each community with a reified culture." Additionally, Baumann identifies a "demotic discourse," literally the discourse "of the people," which questions and counteracts the dominant one (Baumann 1996). When applying Baumann's notions of a dominant and a demotic discourse to attitudes towards homosexuality in Serbia we can argue that the dominant discourse defines homosexuals as a homogeneous group of sick or abnormal, non-Serbian people who suffer from "homosexualism"; homosexuals are stereotyped and reified as the "strange, foreign, Western Other." Nevertheless, while publicly deploying quite an anti-homosexual attitude, the stories of my informants indicate that privately people tend to negotiate and oppose the dominant, anti-homosexual discourse. Confronted with the coming-out of a loved-one people realize homosexuality is no longer an issue regarding a strange Other, but a matter that concerns a friend or family-member. Consequently they choose to partly or fully question, revise and deny their reifications. This attitude also extends to entertainment, for instance to characters on tele-

vision, like the famous Serbian female impersonator *Karamela* or Jack and Will, the two main gay-characters from the TV-series *Vil i Grejs* (*Will and Grace*). Yet, the acceptance of homosexual elements as displayed in this popular show, which during my stay in Belgrade was broadcast every weekday at six and ten pm on B92,[2] does not extend the entertainment factor. On the contrary, the presence of the series on Serbian television illustrates the dual attitude of many Serbs once more. A great number of my informants stressed that I must not mistake the popularity of *Karamela* and *Will and Grace* for tolerance:

> Will and Grace is a comedy, a movie, and Jack is just a character. He is funny and he makes us laugh; it is his part, he is an actor. But if he would be like that in real life, people would say: "Eeeew, he is a faggot" (Milica, 29).

So, as Gerd Baumanns Southallians "engage the dominant discourse as well as the demotic one" (Baumann 1997, 214), in Belgrade people generally engage in the dominant heterosexual discourse of Serbian society as well as in a demotic discourse towards their homo- or bisexual friends. Ambiguous expressions are for instance to be found among Ivan's friends who do not always take his bisexuality seriously, for they still consider him a "straight guy wandering off." Not sure how his friends really feel about his homosexuality, Žarko does not force his homosexuality on his heterosexual pals either:

> Basically I don't know what my friends think about it. They are pretty open-minded, they don't care when you're gay. Still I don't know what they really think; whether they think it is normal or just go about with it. And I am not forcing it on them. If they ask, then I tell them about it. I don't mind talking to them, but I do not like an active imposition of my ideas on them. I do like to make jokes about it, and my straight friends make jokes about it too. They are not offended by that (Žarko, 24).

By doing so Milica, Žarko and a great number of my informants seem to conform to the idea that homosexuality is a private matter, and respect the attitude of a great number of Serbs who "do not care" about homosexuality as long as homosexual men and women "do not interfere in their lives."[3] Many young homosexual adults in Belgrade feel less free among their straight friends then among gay, lesbian and bisexual friends. Consequently, a great number of my informants indicate that

[2] B92 was founded in 1989 as youth radio broadcasting to Belgrade audiences and has since grown into a company which includes—among other things—a national television network. B92 Television at present reaches more than ninety per cent of the total population of Serbia. It is know for its independent journalism and advocacy of human rights.

[3] Interview with a female gender advisor, 29 February 2004.

they neglect their heterosexual acquaintances, because they feel better understood by, and more connected to their homo- and bisexual friends. Žarko for instance admits he tends to fail his straight friends:

> In the gay world there is no censorship. I am not evoking my gay and lesbian friends and I don't feel like I am imposing my ideas on anyone. You can talk about anything sexual, while with my straight friends that would be grotesque. I feel much more open among gay people; I am a lot looser and more comfortable in that environment (Žarko, 24).

Similarly Tijana says this about her gay and lesbian friends:

> With them I feel good. We all share experiences; experiences of hiding and being fed up with hiding for instance (Tijana, 22).

Ana too, pays less attention to her high school friends then she did before she had met other homo- and bisexual people. She explains that she prefers spending time with "the girls" over being with straight people, because it is "so much more relaxed":

> I am in touch with my gay and lesbian friends every day now. I hardly see straight people from high school any more, maybe once in two months. Before, I saw them every day. But if they call me and one of the girls calls me, I choose the girls, because that is so much more relaxed. For my straight friends I often think of something, like: "No, I am busy, I have things to do." And when it becomes really critical, I get in my car drive around and sit with them. That's easier then to explain what I am really doing. I always find some excuse, but I don't know how long before someone asks: "Ana, what are you really doing?" (Ana, 25).

Marko, Milica and Jelena admit feeling less relaxed among heterosexual people too. They sense they can not be "openly gay" in front of their straight friends and talk about their sexual orientation, because they do not want to shock them or, as in Jelena's case, because they have not informed their friends at all:

> I have straight friends, but I can't talk with them about everything; I can't tell them I had that guy in my bed one night and another guy the next. That would be a shock to them; it is freaky (Marko, 24).

> I just can't feel relaxed here. If I make a party there is always somebody who doesn't know about me and about my relationship with Marija. Then I cannot relax. And even if everybody knows they are not too relaxed if I hug Marija. Well, maybe if they were drunk they would be. . . . With gay people it's different; we are all the same, they don't look strangely at you (Milica, 29).

> A while ago I went to a dinner party of one of my straight friends. It was so silly, all those couples and me. The girls can just bring their stupid husbands who have no money or education, but I cannot bring my girlfriend (Jelena, 26).

A final story concerning the dual attitude of straight friends comes from Marko. He indicates that he is his best [female] friend's "freaky friend" for whom there will be no space once she gets married and has a child, for she is afraid her child will grow up as a homosexual too:

> My best friend is cool about me being gay. She even advises me on my homosexual relationships. But she is not OK with my boyfriend and with me kissing him for instance in front of a child. She is afraid the kid will grow up as a homosexual. So basically I am her freaky friend, and for now that's OK with me. But I do wonder, what happens after graduation? She will have a job, a husband, and she would want to have a child. There will be no place for me in her life any more. . . . I know my friend will even give me the child in my hands to hug and kiss, but the child must not know that uncle Marko is a homosexual (Marko, 24).

Evidently, as illustrated in the previous paragraphs, very few gays and lesbians in Belgrade are eager to fully come out and express their homosexuality in public, for they fear shaming their family, loosing their parental support and being deserted by their friends. The following paragraph illustrates why my informants unanimously voted for the Internet as their "saviour"; their "liberation."

"I Would Be All Alone if It Wasn't For The Internet"

> I've known I am gay since I was eight, but I was all alone and on my own. And I still would be if it wasn't for the Internet. . . . Originally I am from Bosnia, but when all the shit came down there my mother and I moved to a very small village in Serbia. It was the kind of village where if you kissed one girl you had kissed the whole village. So until I discovered Internet chat I lived in a black hole. I knew nobody. You can see a lot of people on for instance gay-serbia.com who are not from Belgrade, but from the villages in the country side. They have neither money nor suitable reasons to travel to Belgrade and meet people. The chat is the only thing they have. When I came to Belgrade in 1998 I didn't know where to look, where to go and what to do. I knew not a single gay person before the Internet, not one. I had suspicions: "Maybe he is," but then I thought: "No, it must be desire that rears its ugly head." Basically I had the impression that there weren't so many gay people here. But then I went on-line. I met people and heard about Klub X, and things changed. I had always thought that I would never find anyone, but I was not pessimistic, I didn't despair. I planned on going out of the country one day to find my happiness there; to have my fun somewhere else. Then there was the Internet, and it became the most important thing of all, although all the time I had the impression someone was watching. My mother used to work in a high position, and she always told me to be careful; not to drink drinks that haven't been opened in front of you, stuff like that. It was very paranoid during the Milosevic times, and since it is always possible that someone monitors your logs on-line I felt slightly paranoid too. So

> I started off slowly, by checking websites with men's underwear. Later I downloaded some things, and I peaked at gay-serbia.com. I left some anonymous posts on the gay-serbia forum, and a year ago I decided to register. When I heard there had been a forum meeting, I posted and said to be disappointed not to have been invited. A little later I got a message from one of the boys who wrote: "I heard you wanted to come to a forum party. Well, the next one is on April the 26th." So I went to that gathering; it was the second party of forum members ever, and I met my boyfriend there. He was a forum member too. Actually his mother thinks he is in a cult. There are a lot of cults in Serbia, and one of them is called Forum. Forum. . . . Forummers. . . . You see? (Žarko, 24).

Evidently the Internet changed a lot for Žarko and his fellow gay, lesbian and bisexual Serbs. The World Wide Web suddenly granted people access to information on homosexuality, and also enabled them to get in touch with like-minded people in a rather simple way. Communication became more simple, easy and safe then ever before. As sexologist Tea Nikolić explained in an interview: "Internet changed a lot, not only for gays and lesbians, but also for instance for fetishists, SM-lovers, etc. Making anonymous contacts suddenly was much easier because of the Internet."[4]

Not only Žarko but all my informants, whom I too had met on-line or via the people I knew from the message boards of *Gayten–LGBT*[5] (gay-serbia.com/forum) and *Dečko*[6] (decko.campware.org/forum), indicated that the Internet had changed their lives. Unanimously they mentioned the net as the number one source for information on homosexuality, on gay and lesbian life, and on parties and events as well as the best opportunity for getting in touch with other gays, lesbians and bisexuals from all over Serbia. The references made to the Internet being someone's rescue were numerous. Tijana once exclaimed that internet was "her liberation!": "Fifty percent of gays I met through the Internet." Ana too argued more than once that the Internet was "her saviour." Before she logged on she said to "never have met gay persons," she "only went out with straight people." That changed when she discovered gay websites in

[4] Interview with Tea Nikolić from Deve, 27 January 2004.

[5] Gayten–LGBT Centar za promociju prava seksualnih manjina (Centre for the Promotion of LGBT Human Rights; <http://www.gay-serbia.com/gayten-lgbt>) that started to operate from the beginning of 2002. Its premises are located in Belgrade. In July, 2002 Gayten–LGBT, together with Lesbian Human Rights Group Labris, received the European Pride Award for the Gay pride 2001 in Belgrade (see Veur 2003).

[6] *Dečko – Straight Friendly Magazine* is a monthly magazine issued by the Novi Sad-based LGBT organization New Age/Rainbow. It is the only gay magazine published in Serbia-Montenegro. Although in Serbian *dečko* means "boyfriend" the magazine is not merely directed at gay men, but deals with issues that concern the entire Serbian LGBT population.

general and the message board of gay-serbia.com in particular; a forum which she now secretly visits on a daily basis:

> My father and I use the same pc, but he doesn't speak English. On the Internet I found the site of Diva, an English magazine for lesbians. They had a link to gay-serbia.com, so that is how I found the forum. For a long time I used the site of Diva magazine as a link. But now my father has his own pc, and I have a perfect room to myself. My computer is on the one side and the door on the other, so I can quickly click the x when somebody comes in. Because the big letters that say Gay Serbia are stupid. On the homepage it is okay, but on the forum. . . . In an internet café there is no way you can use it (Ana, 25).

The Internet changed Kristina's and Goran's life too:

> When I got a computer I discovered there were other girls like me. I remember exactly when I got it: it was on the 21st of February 2001. I discovered gay-serbia.com and I found my first girlfriend over the Internet. My mother even blames the Internet for everything that she thinks is wrong with me. I started to live and found information on everything I was interested in. Not just girls, also piercings, tattoos, music and on my future job in TV-production. Of course I was afraid to be discovered, so when I got my PC I started to lock myself in my room. My parents were afraid I was taking drugs, and when they eventually forbade me from locking my door I started surfing at night. Before all that I was kept in the dark. We had only one TV in the house and my parents are very, very religious and traditional. Even with the scenes of straight people kissing they change the channel (Kristina, 21).

> The Internet was very, very important, because it made me feel better and more relaxed in contacts with people and it got me to meeting so many others like me. All the people I met on-line are so different from the ones I met before, face-to-face. The people I had met in Karađorđe Park and in Klub X showed such narrow interests; their interest was mostly sex-related. The people I met on the Internet show a wider interest, and I find it easier to relate to people rather than to sex. And I met so many more of them on the Internet, than in the X-klub. It so much is easier to communicate on-line then eye to eye. All the people I know and hang around with I met through the Internet (Goran, 20).

Besides providing Serbian gays, lesbians and bisexuals with information and social contacts difficult to obtain elsewhere, the Internet offers them recognition, freedom and above all, inclusion. In a society where homosexual people are confronted with heterosexual dominance and an anti-homosexual attitude and where the majority of gays, lesbians and bisexuals fear socio-economical exclusion to a certain extent, forums and chat rooms on gay websites serve as scenes for inclusion. Meeting like-minded people on-line and assembling with them in cyberspace as well as in real life opposes feelings of alienation and exclusion from soci-

ety. It not only offers recognition and the conviction that one is "not alone," but also provides a certain extent of independence and the freedom to move beyond the restrictions of heterosexual society. As Marija explains her motivation to search for other homosexual women and men on-line:

> I had never met other gay persons before, except my girlfriends. I no longer wanted to feel totally strange in a heterosexual world. I always felt like a stranger, even with my straight girlfriends. They adore me, but I always have some feeling like I am an alien. I wanted to meet some other people (Marija, 27).

The threshold to entering gay cyberspace is low; every person can subscribe to a forum or chat room anonymously. Consequently, the Internet provides Serbian gays and lesbians with an alternative space where they can be who they choose to be. And although the majority of the members of, for instance, the gay-serbia.com forum know each others' real names, forum nicknames remain important in interaction, even outside cyberspace. The first time Žarko contacted me, for example, no "real names" were mentioned. Answering my mobile phone with "Hallo?" the caller responded with: "Hello, its Adrenochrome, is this Destiny speaking?"—Basically nicknames offer an alternative identity; a name to a double life, actively deployed by the people involved in it. The use of them not only guarantees mutual recognition, it also enables safe communication which cannot be understood by eavesdroppers. This importance of anonymity and nicknames is even reflected in two events organized by *Gayten—LGBT* in 2000 and 2003 called *Coming Out With Nick*. According to *Gayten*-activist and COWN-organizer Deivan the name of the event was inspired by "the influence of the Internet" and "the fact that you can't be openly gay" in Serbia: "Lots of people here live double lives and use nicknames. They are afraid of coming-out, for instance because of the economic consequences it can have."[7]

On the other hand, only a very small percentage of the Serbs has Internet access.[8] For the majority of homosexual men and women in the Serbia, especially in the country side, the Internet is inaccessible. Consequently both the on-line- and real-life gay scenes in Serbia are very small, and gay life is characterized by tight social control, an "everybody-knows-everybody mentality," and a *lot* of talking and gossiping. Many informants pointed out these restrictions and, inherently, the difficulty of meeting a potential partner.

[7] Interview Gayten—LGBT, 9 January 2004.

[8] In 2004 24.4% of households in Serbia and Montenegro had Internet access. See <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/mexico04/doc/doc/14_BIH_e.pdf> (10 October 2006).

> The gay scene is so small. It is a little circle. At the Pride-parties in Can Can are all the people that have Internet access or that can find about it some other way. That is a maximum of about seven hundred people; the biggest party attracted seven hundred people. While in the whole of Serbia live 10 million people and in Montenegro another 450,000. We all know each other. After four years I know of all girls with who she was, and I can't stand it any more, everybody is talking (Tanja, 22).

> I am so fed up with the scene; it's so small. A while ago I put an ad on-line. I got four responses, but three of the guys I already knew (Ivan, 26).

Evidently, the Internet was the most important way for meeting people for many young gay, lesbian and bisexual adults in the year 2004. But where should you go to meet like-minded people in Belgrade if you do not have Internet access at all? How to meet other gays, lesbians and bisexuals outside of cyberspace? In the next paragraph I will indicate the limited options available for living a gay life in the Serbian capital, and show how above all how, according to the vast majority of my informants, the *Association for Promotion of Human Rights of Sexually Different People—Pride* and their so-called Pride-promo-parties stirred up gay life as well as the discussion on publicly coming out in the Serbian capital.

"It is Like Marching Against Milošević"

> I am definitely not going to the Pride parade. After the murder of our prime-minister Zoran Đinđić in March 2003 the political situation in Serbia worsened. There is more fear, more frustration. The Pride on July 17th would not only attract ten queer people and a hundred cops, but also over a thousand hooligans. Maybe I would go if the event was organized in a private space, like Sava Center or Dom Sindikata, the biggest cinema in the city that can fit in a thousand to fifteen hundred people. Of course there is a chance your face will be on television when you go there, but that is also possible when you go to the Pride in the streets. A closed space would prevent a massacre. Actually it is like marching against Milošević: I would like something to happen, but I don't know if I would dare to go (Marko, 24).

In 2004 *Pride* gives a new dimension to gay life in Belgrade. From January 2004 onwards the association organizes what quickly becomes know as "Pride-parties"; large-scale, police-protected parties meant to promote and raise money for a second gay parade to be held in Belgrade on July 17th 2004. These promo-parties not only offered an addition to the limited options in Belgrade for meeting friends and flirting with strangers, according to Marko they also provided an unprecedented freedom:

> Pride is doing something. Their promo-parties are a chance to walk into a disco in Belgrade among hundreds of people and feel free. There are other parties, private parties, but they are much more risky, because there is no police (Marko, 24).

Yet, contrary to the positive responses to the popular Pride-promo-parties, my informants' attitude towards Pride's main goal, i.e. organizing a second Pride parade in Belgrade, was much less enthusiastic. The displayed reserve is not necessarily to be explained only from a fear of another violent sequel as happened after the previous Belgrade Pride, although for Marko and Goran fear of alleged brutality *is* an important reason not to participate:

> No way am I going to the Pride in July. It is going to be another massacre (Marko, 24).[9] I am convinced that if Pride were to go through that it would be the same or worse then last time. If I was to attend a parade and the shit would come down I would run as fast as I can. Of course, in spite of that, I would want to be as violent as the attackers, but I know I can't. I'm quite gentle and fragile (Goran, 20).

Risking a coming-out to the entire country by participating in the Belgrade gay parade is also an explanation for resilience among my informants:

> I am not going to the Pride, because I do not want to be seen on television by my relatives. I do not want my parents to be ashamed by seeing me on TV in a gay Pride, so it is a part of responsibility to my parents (Kirstina, 21).

Early in 2004 there came an end to the discussion on who would and who would not go, on why or why not. By the end of April 2004 Pride decided to cancel their Parade. Pride-member Tanja explains the cancellation of the Pride can be brought back to a lack of money and a lack of substantial support:

> We had to decide to cancel the Pride. Although the majority of the gay organisations in Belgrade supported us, they did not give us enough substantial help. Besides, we did not have enough money to pay for security and offer people coming from abroad places to stay (Tanja, 22).

Pride-Chairman Boris Miličević argues the main reason for cancelling the Pride was that the organization "didn't manage to get funds for private security": "That was eighty percent of the reason. The other twenty percent is a lack of resources, basically human resources. We can't organize a secure and real parade in which everything would go smoothly

[9] The first (and so far the only) pride parade in Belgrade was organized in 2001. The participants of the parade were attacked by nationalists, football fans, Church leaders and others. The organizers of the parade reported around 40 injured civilians, 11 of them sought medical help. The police reported 8 injured policemen. 32 men were detained by the police (six of them under 18), but were not charged or found guilty. See <http://www.labris.org.yu/en/index.php?optionfiltered=com_content&task=view&id=84&Itemid=57> (10 October 2005).

with the four people who are involved full-time at this moment; we would need fifteen to twenty people to work for Pride full-time. There are two problems though. In the first place there is a coming-out problem. Soon everyone will know you are organizing a gay pride. Another problem is that there simply is not enough money to pay people."

As a result of the cancellation of the Pride Parade an end came to the Promo-Parties as well. The final party organized in *Can Can* on May 21st 2004 was therefore called *The Last Party on Earth*. Although the Pride initiative rooted a great number of private alternatives, the cancellation of the police-protected *Pride* parties is much to the regret of for instance Marko:

> Pride now also wants to stop the parties. At the last party in Can Can there were only 350 people. That is only one-third of the place's capacity. I'd say "Fuck the Pride"; I don't care about a Pride parade, but the parties. . . . My social life has been much improved by the parties, and not by a Pride. Maybe some social and judical stuff is coming from Pride, but I need the police. . . . I've heard that skinheads on forums are trying to figure out where gays hang out, so they can go there to beat them. It happens often enough that they wait in front of Klub X for gays and lesbians to leave the place, so they can follow them and assault them. And security doesn't do anything about it as long as they don't damage the club. Nobody cares about us, except for the police. At Can Can skinheads won't come near, because they can see there is police protection (Marko, 24).

Nevertheless the vast majority of my informants agreed it was a smart decision to cancel the Pride parade. For example, Žarko believes that a Pride parade in July 2004 would result in a violent clash:

> On a forum a skinhead actually wrote: "Now with the situation in Kosovo people need to release their anger.[10] The gay parade would be the perfect opportunity." For once a piece of scum said something smart (Žarko, 24).

[10] On Wednesday March 17th 2004 fights between Serbs and Albanians in the Kosovo city of Mitrovica resulted in the death of at least ten people. Over three hundred people were reported wounded. The fights were the heaviest since 1999. The reason for the riots was reporting in the Albanian media about the drowning of two Albanian children. Serbian kids would have chased them into the river Ibar. A third Albanian child was reported missing. The story was recounted by a fourth child, who was said to have made it ashore. After hearing the news hundreds Albanians from Mitrovica's south bank stormed to the north bank of the city which is inhabited by Serbs. The situation escalated rapidly, and lead to a wave of violence throughout Kosovo, which in the evening also spread to Serbia. Tens of thousands of people demonstrated in the streets of Belgrade, angry about the intolerable situation for the Serbs in Kosovo. The mosques in Belgrade and Niš were set on fire. In the city centre, which was blocked for in and outgoing traffic from nine PM onwards, the façades of MacDonalds and the American Embassy were defaced. Ultra-nationalistic leaders called for the Serbs to support their fellow country men and women in Kosovo, and the following days several remembrance ceremonies were organized on

In a conversation Milica, Marija and Ana advocate that their fellow country men and women are not at all ready to deal with the presence of homosexuality in their country, let alone with the public expression of it in a gay parade. While deliberating, they unintentionally describe the core of the civilization debate by picturing Serbia as a homophobic Balkan-country as opposed the modern, gay-friendly West:

> Ana: We've had war for fifteen years and people think we don't have time for the gay and lesbian issues now. Maybe in ten years we do, but now it is all about finding food. People here need more time for other issues. It is a part of Europe that eventually will come to us.
> Milica: But until then we are a Balkan country, a communist country, and people here think everything bad comes from crazy Europe, from the West. The "gay problem" is one of the ways for fucking up the population.
> Marija: Yes, people here think the US and the West hate Serbs, because of the war etc.
> Ana [nods]: Hmm-mmm, we are butchers.
> Milica: And Western-Europe brings misery. Having homosexuals in Serbia means we will not have an increasing population, because gays don't give birth. It's a conspiracy theory: gay people all over the world are part of that conspiracy. Accepting homosexual relationships would destroy our culture.
> Ana: Basically people do not want to deal with homosexuality. We have been in isolation for so long, there are already problems enough. People don't want to deal with one more thing. It is bad for us, but what can we do? If Pride can't even manage to do a Pride parade, then how can they expect us to come out and say: "Hey I am a lesbian?"

That same night Jelena calls to inform me about the political discussion on *Klopka*, a talk show broadcast on BK Television. Summarizing the show, she says:

> Klopka was on last night, you know, that political talk show on BK. A few of the candidates for the Presidential Elections spoke about the Pride, because a student from the audience asked about it. It was really bad. One candidate, who is a famous kick boxer, the vice-president of Arkan's Party of Serbian Unity, the Stranka Srpska Jedinska and Ceca's kum, her best man, actually said that he is going to beat the gays on July 17th. Another candidate was the president of the Party of Serbs living outside Serbia. He currently lives in France. He said that although in France it is normal, he does not like it. The third person was the president of the peasant party. He said that although homosexuality is not normal he would allow the Pride to take place, because he is convinced it would not change anything. Well, at least the presenter opposed them. She said: "How can you say that? How can you be against them? They are also voters." And when they said: "No, they're not," she replied: "Are you really saying that they are not

Belgrade's Studentski Trg (Students Square) as well as in front of the temple of Saint Sava. Sunday March 21st was declared a day of national mourning in Serbia.

citizens, like us? How can you be so intolerant?" Then the show ended and the kick boxer guy said: "See you on July 17th." He didn't know the Pride was cancelled.

From the course of the political discussion in *Klopka*, and the cancellation of the Belgrade Pride-parade to the necessity of negotiating and hiding a different sexual orientation in front of friends, colleagues and costudents, and the dual, resigned acceptance by parents of their homosexual child; from the limited options available to meet gay friends, flirt with like-minded strangers or be intimate with your lover and the worries to be publicly labelled as homosexual to the violent course of the Pride in 2001 and the insults and attacks on homosexual men and women in Belgrade; the many stories and examples presented in this chapter suggest that Ana, Marija and Milica's analysis might be rather close to the Serbian truth.

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The Family Secret: Parents of Homosexual Sons and Daughters

Roman Kuhar

Introduction

In post-modernity important social changes are taking place: traditional patterns of everyday life, while trying to resist these changes, are giving way to new modes of living, new lifestyles and—maybe most importantly—new identities (Giddens 1991, 1992; Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1999). Giddens (1991) suggests that nowadays our identities are constantly in the process of formation and deconstruction in the presence of ever-changing potential identities. Everyday life of individuals and their biographies increasingly turn out to be their own responsibility rather than subject to societal influence—however, this is not to say that tradition no longer plays any role.

Plummer (1995) stresses that each new narrative we tell about ourselves, about our new lifestyles and our new identities, implies moral and political changes. Take the story of one young man I interviewed, who lived in a partnership with two other men. He came out to his parents during a Sunday lunch. He told them he was gay and in a relationship with *two* boyfriends. The fact that the story was "new" for his parents and implied change in their understanding of the world became obvious much later, when they asked him whether all gays live in *such* partnership arrangements.

However, "old stories" are not willingly giving way to new ones. It seems that every "new story" creates a platform, where counter-stories can be told. These are told by those who endeavour to preserve a morality, norms and ways of live that rest on traditional beliefs. In the process of new narratives encountering their opposite images in counter-narratives and counter-discourses post-modern society is crystallizing out.

It would be inaccurate to claim that coming out narratives about homosexual identities are new. According to Foucault homosexual identity was "discoursively constructed" at the end of the 19th century, when in a medicalised context the homosexual with his/her own unique sexual identity "became a personage, . . . in addition to being a type of life, a life

form" (Foucault [1976] 2000, 47). Since then the story of this "personage" has been told—between the lines or explicitly—in literature, letters, private conversations, media, and so on. The coming out narratives of gays and lesbians, the public (and private) "manifestations" of homosexual identities were and continue to be an important contribution to the social changes. Each coming out story of a single non-heterosexual person calls into question not only the heteronormative suppositions of people one comes out to, but also the heteronormativity of society and its institutions. The notorious example of homosexual marriage shows how these new narratives and lifestyles give rise to new institutions and in the process the existing institutions also undergo changes.

Scholars have tried to capture the process of coming out narratives and the construction of homosexual identity since the 1970s. Various ideal-type stage models of the formation of homosexual identity have been proposed to explain the trajectories of individuals dealing with feelings which do not match the societal expectations about heterosexual identity (Dank 1971; Cass 1979, 1984; Ponse 1978, 1998; Troiden 1988; Plummer 1996; Eliason 1996 and others). These developmental or stage models deal with individuals' considerations of their own same-sex orientation, the translation of these feelings into identity, and the adoption of that identity which then becomes an important point of reference in individual life (La Placa 2000). The models—some of which are based on predominantly essentialist understanding of sexuality, while others either combine essentialist and constructionist interpretations, or are based in social constructionist perceptions of sexual identities—suggest an understanding of coming out as the ultimate stage when internal conflicts are resolved by external declarations. These models presuppose linear transitions from one stage to the next, creating an impression that the formation and acceptance of homosexual identity progresses in simple steps from the initial stage to the final, fixed and unchangeable identity. Some authors, however, stress that this linear progression can be disturbed, stopped or even reversed. Critics of stage models, especially queer theorists, point out the problematic implicit suggestion that the endpoint of each stage is the only and the best outcome of identity formation. Additionally, other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity, gender, class, and culture, which might interact with or influence sexual identity and are therefore of key importance for the understanding of identity formation, are often neglected. As critics indicate, sexual identity is constructed within the system of power based on race, gender, class and other socially constructed categories. Gonsiorek (1995), for example, argues that the inclusion of ethnicity and gender into the developmental models

would shift the presented stage scheme considerably. They fail in explaining the fluid and dynamic nature of sexuality: "Sexuality does not exist in a vacuum but rather in a changeable societal context. Declaring one's sexuality to another creates new dimensions to relationship" (Mosher 2001, 164).

Coming Out (to Parents)

This paper deals with the new dimensions, which emerge after one's declaration of his/her non-heterosexual identity, focusing mainly on the coming-out to parents. I draw on the findings of a two-year research project on the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia.[1] I suggest that despite the fact that coming out is mostly understood as a process rather than an act, this process is implicitly analyzed as a series of coming out *acts*. The *process* therefore refers to the fact that one has to come out continuously as one enters new social settings where heterosexual identity is unconditionally assumed. In the popular (media) discourse it is understood that once one comes out, one is out of the closet. This paper suggests a more fluid understanding of this process. According to our research findings, every coming out of the closet does not necessarily place one *outside* of the closet. This seems to be especially true within the immediate family setting.

Coming-out is, as Baetz (1984) states, a crossroads with different risks. An individual is faced not only by his/her own decision, but also with social and cultural obstacles. Similarly, Markowe (1996) claims that coming out is a process, which is affected not only by one's personal character but also by the cultural and societal context. Vincke and Bolton (1994) suggest another understanding of coming-out being a publicly visible portion of a fluid, evolving, and changeable identity. Plummer (1996) on the other hand, points to the political potential each coming-out narrative has: it is coming-out itself that creates room for a new identity, or a new community, and consequently, a new space to claim one's rights. It

[1] Methodologically, the research was twofold. In the quantitative part of the research we conducted face-to-face surveys using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained 97 questions. The filling out of the questionnaire ranged from 35 to 70 minutes. The snowball method was applied and the non-random sample consisted of 443 respondents; 292 of these were men and 151 were women (the population of Slovenia is 2 million). The majority of the respondents were between 21 and 40 years old, whereas the age of the respondents spans a continuum from 17 to 60 years. 91% of the respondents were out to their closest friends, 67% came out to their mothers and 46% to their fathers. The second, the qualitative part of the research, consisted of 7 focus groups. There were 36 participants interviewed—19 men and 17 women. The average age of the participants was 27. See more on this research in Švab and Kuhar (2005).

was exactly coming-out narratives that created gay and lesbian identity politics, just as the personal stories of raped, beaten, and disregarded women created a base for the feminist movement.

Each such personal narrative establishes a new form of living by reshaping the relation between the "narrator," the one who comes out, and the one(s) he/she comes out to. In analyzing the new relation that emerges between an out gay child and his/her parents, scholars have suggested—in accordance with the trajectory models of homosexual identity development—that parents progress through several stages. In the process they reconstruct their perceptions of their child's identity and their expectations about the child's future. Summarizing a variety of research into parental reactions to their children's coming out, Savin-Williams and Dubé (1998) outline six typical stages through which the new relation between the child and the parents is established. Shock is suggested to be the initial parental reaction to the disclosure, which may forever impair the parent-child relationship. Denial and isolation are characteristic of the second stage; it is the time when parents try to "gather" themselves by denying the new information or by rejecting discussion about it. This is then followed by anger, often accompanied by physical or verbal violence. Bargaining is the fourth stage, during which parents try to work out a "deal"; they either make some promises, if the child is ready to change "back to normal," or they try to initiate this change by seeking psychiatric or similar help. The next development stage—depression—corresponds with the time when the anger and guilt are turned inward. The positive outcome of this staged development is reached by acceptance, the last stage. Parents complete their "mourning" and accept the fact that they are the parents of a gay child (Savin-Williams and Dubé 1998, 7–8).

Narratives about coming-out to parents told by our respondents can easily be placed within the suggested stage model. In fact one of the criticisms of the stage model suggests that "individuals may have been conscripted into stages rather than the stages being produced to correspond to reality" (La Placa 2000, 22). Therefore one should not generalize the parental reactions as if each parent went through all the stages, neither should the reactions be understood to emerge in these exact turns. A more fluid interpretation of the reactions should be employed. Nevertheless, according to our research findings, there are two moments that can be said to describe the majority of the narratives about coming-out to parents and can be manifested (or not) in a variety of ways: the first (negative, not supporting, or indifferent) reactions, followed by the consolidation phase, when the disturbance, caused by coming-out, is resolved

through cloaking the child's homosexuality in secret. In this manner a *transparent closet*—i.e. silence about homosexuality—, is established. This is where the stage model approach ends for the majority of our respondents and no real (unconditional) acceptance is ever established. This is to suggest, as we shall see, that *coming out* of the closet in the family ends with *coming into* a transparent closet.

The First Reactions

67% of our gay and lesbian respondents, who came out to their mother, described her first reaction as negative or indifferent. Similarly, 66% of those who came out to their father depicted his reaction as negative or indifferent. However, the majority of them believed that in the long run their coming-out did not affect or change their relationship with their parents dramatically; 12% of respondents reported their relationship with the mother to have become alienated after coming-out, while 11% of them claimed that their relationship with the father worsened after coming-out.

The narratives about coming-out to parents are diverse and in many ways depend on our respondents' previous relations with family members. The research shows, for example, that gays and lesbians have most reservations about coming-out to their fathers: While 67% of them came out to their mothers, only 46% came out to their fathers, and only 40% came out to both parents.

We assume that qualms about the disclosure of homosexual identity to the father can be attributed to weak, in some cases even non-existent communication between the child and the alienated father. It seems that the patriarchal order of family, if only at the symbolic level, is still at work to a certain degree and can manifest itself in the form of fear of the father as an authority. However, it should be stressed here that a growing shift away from the patriarchal family model can be observed in Slovenia (Švab 2001), characterised by the erosion of the father's authority. Therefore, it is possible to expect that the fear of the father would also be reduced in connection with coming-out. To a certain degree these changes could already be traced in the responses from the younger participants in the research; they do not only come out at an earlier age, but they, as a rule, also come out to both parents.

There were no statistically significant differences between the genders with respect to coming-out or not coming-out to fathers. The focus group participants who did not come out to their fathers most frequently explained that they did not do so because they did not have a good enough

relationship with their fathers. However, this is not to suggest that such non-existent or not good enough relationships with fathers can be found only in (or are typical of) the families of our respondents.

> The fact is that it would be horrible if I told him. I didn't explain it to my father because I have no relationship with him, and because I never talked to him about myself. In fact, he doesn't know a thing about me (Tara, 30).[2]

Based on the narratives from the focus group participants, there are several salient issues or questions parents are confronted with after their child's coming-out. "Why is my child homosexual?" is the most common initial question parents ask. According to our respondents, parents often blame themselves and attach responsibility for their child's homosexuality to themselves. This often leads them to attempts to "correct the mistake." In this context homosexuality is understood as changeable and correctable, for which professional psychiatric, psychological or medical help is needed.

> She [my mother] told me to go and cure myself. Funny, at that time one would do just about anything, only to erase all this. At that very moment, the illusion, the image about a child, which parents hold from his birth or even earlier, is dashed (Rok, 30).

The initial impulses of parents trying to change the child's sexual orientation can also give rise to the interpretation of homosexuality as being "just a phase," or as a transitory identity, being flippant and experimental, and therefore unacceptable. According to Sedgwick (1993) these types of reactions indicate the problematic character of the concept of homosexual identity and the intensity with which society resists it. On the other hand, the understanding of homosexuality as a "phase," or an identity, which cannot be taken seriously, shows how authority over the definition of that identity is removed from the subject, i.e. the gay or the lesbian person. These assertions are often interwoven with different forms of psychological violence, including emotional blackmail, ridicule or the breaking off of communication.

> My mum reacted like all other mums. Perhaps she was even worse, because she is cunning and manipulative enough to gamble with certain emotions. She staged a nervous breakdown which I later witnessed three more times. Exactly like before. It was so bad that at first I thought, gosh, I hope she's not going to do something to herself. And then you promise many things, that you'll change, that you'll think about it, that you'll do

[2] All the names mentioned here are invented. The number next to the name denotes the age of the focus group respondent.

> I don't know what. . . . But eventually I told her that if she didn't want to see the truth, she shouldn't ask (Martin, 25).

However, not all respondents interpreted the first reactions of their parents as psychological violence. Some claimed that these reactions were a sign of powerlessness and distress and that parents—just like they themselves before that—needed time to get to terms with this new information.

Another salient set of issues parents had to deal with were their unconsciously extant heteronormative scenarios: coming-out threatens the "normalcy and stability" of the family, which is based on the binary sexual matrix and related heterosexual rituals, such as marriage, the birth of grandchildren and similar. These implicit heteronormative expectations of parents (and people around them, who reinforce these expectations) are dashed when the child comes out.

> My father talked about grandchildren twenty-four seven. . . . Once I explained it to them [my parents]. . . . I said: "I won't have children just because you want me to have them. If I have them, I'll have them because of me, because it will suit me. But to live with a woman, because you want me to and to make the neighbours happy—I tell you this: you will still be alive for ten, twenty, maybe thirty years, while my whole life would be screwed forever." . . . Once I told them this, they started to change their minds (Gabrijel, 40).

The heteronormative expectations are so resistant that parents often find it hard to imagine "alternative ways." Several (male) respondents reported their parents, driven in desperation, wondering about how gay sex is practised and physically possible. While 61% of respondents said that their parents never discussed sexuality with them in their teenage years or they only briefly addressed the topic, the question of sexuality immediately arose after their coming-out. Some respondents were explicitly asked how they practised sex and whether they were HIV positive.

> Father asked me once how we do it with my boyfriend. I started to sweat. Then I explained it and he said: aha, aha. But then he—as usual—added: 'Are you sure you don't want to try it with a woman?' Recently he even suggested me to breed one child and he would take care of the child and provide financial means (Oskar, 24).

Parents often had to struggle with their apprehensions about the reactions of the social environment, too. They wondered how society would accept their child's homosexuality and how the child would fit into that society as a homosexual. These anxieties were also associated with par-

ents' own fears and uncertainties about how society would accept them as the parents of a homosexual child.

> Her reaction was hysterical. . . . What I resented most was that she was struggling with the question of what the neighbours might say. I thought: "What do you care what they say. Rather deal with your relationship with me, not with neighbours" (Barbara, 26).

Parents seemed to be pushed into the closet from where their child just came out. Since coming-out is always relational, the sexual identity of an individual who comes out no longer affects just him or her, but also the people to whom he/she came out, and their relationship. As a result, a child's coming-out also compels parents to confront the same homophobic society. However, according to our research findings, most parents were able to cope with heteronormative expectations only partially. 57% of the respondents reported that they knew, or presumed, that their parents did not talk about their homosexuality with any of their closest friends or relatives or anyone else.

> After all these years I noticed that my mother never came out to anyone. She didn't tell a single friend about me. I see that she even has problems saying that word (Ksenja, 30).

The tension which emerges after coming-out in the family is most often dealt with by conditional acceptance: parents consolidate, but demand that homosexuality remains a family secret. The new information is noted, but homosexuality is swept under the carpet. Thus there is a lack of understanding that coming-out is not only about the acceptance of a new piece of information, but rather "a constant struggle against those who, on the one hand, accept the disclosure and then, on the other, refuse to accept its implications" (Davies 1992, 80). In this way the transparent closet is established.

The Transparent Closet

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) argues that coming out can be understood as a contagion which thrusts those to whom one has come out into the closet dictated by the conservative society already confronted by the individual who came out. This, however, suggests that the "contagion" is simply transmitted from one person to another, while our research results show that the person who comes out is not necessarily "de-contaminated," especially not in the case of coming-out to parents. When parents are confined to the closet, established with the coming-out of

their child, they often expect that their child will remain in the same closet in order to ease the discomfort of the fact that they are now the parents of a homosexual child. The transparent closet thus refers to the situation, mostly in the family context, when coming-out to parents results in an annoying outcome of partial outing; parents know that their child is homosexual, but they are not willing to acknowledge it. The child steps out of the closet, but parental reactions and expectations push him/her back into the closet, which is now a transparent one as parents have noted the "new identity," but refuse to accept it. The non-transparent sides of the closet are now transparent ("we know that you're gay"), but the individual is still compelled to remain in the closet by the parents ("but we don't want to discuss it"). Thus discussions of the subject within the family are avoided, and the individual who has come out is expected to suppress any visible signs of his/her unacceptable identity. Any attempts to do the opposite are confronted with violent reactions. Stepping out of the closet therefore does not result in the expected outcomes, suggested by many development stage models. As indicated also by our respondents, homosexual identity cannot always be expressed (and lived) unrestrictedly in the family context:

> My girlfriend is now part of the family. We reached this point without any debates. In silence. But it took us five or six years for the issues to be settled. However, it is still not the way I want it. We don't talk about my [lesbian] partnership at home. We do talk about my brother's partnership (Barbara, 26).[3]

> Mom does say to me to invite colleagues and friends. But when I bring someone who is close to me, my boyfriend, she gets blocked. I can see how she can hardly breathe. . . . In our house my being gay is "pro forma" but nothing more than that. We don't talk about it. It is better if I don't mention it (Igor, 27).

Entering into a transparent closet is often coupled with psychological or physical violence against the homosexual child, be it emotional blackmail, ridicule, breaking off of communication, beating, throwing the child out of the house and similar. Such violence remains hushed and unnoticed by society at large, since coming-out and sexual identity are understood to be private matters. The state often remains silent and

[3] Another example of the transparent closet can be found in the division of domestic work. As Švab (2005) argues, maintaining relations with the family (as a form of domestic work) is an explicitly unilateral task in same-sex partnerships. In heterosexual families, this is typically a woman's task, while homosexual partnerships and families—due to the "requirements" of the transparent closet—are often not integrated in the wider network of the relatives of both partners. Therefore, each partner maintains relations only with his/her side of the family network. See more on this in Švab (2005).

uninterested, as in the case of other forms of domestic violence; it seems as if the parents had the ultimate right to change the child's sexual identity. Here the binary opposition between private and public spheres functions as a control over sexuality. The private sphere is, as Nancy Duncan (1996) points out, the space of the patriarchal and heterosexist exertion of power and regulatory practices. Homophobia, she claims, may be identified with the fear of going home, since the home is the space of heterosexist violence.

Conclusion: Living Beyond the Transparent Closet?

The transparent closet should not be understood as a fixed and unchangeable stage. Rather it should be seen as an experience of gays and lesbians, impeding their full (not-limited) expression of their sexual identity. It ranges from discomfort in the family when the topic of homosexuality is brought up, and the re-naming of the same-sex partners as just "friends" or "colleagues" rather than boyfriends or girlfriends and similar, to the more severe manifestations of the transparent closet such as physical or verbal violence.

According to our research findings, the average age of lesbians and gays in Slovenia at which they come out to their parents is 20 years. At that age they usually do not have sufficient economic resources for an independent life. Additionally, younger generations in Slovenia tend to stay at the parents' home longer than previous generations. They prolong their youth through an economic dependence or semi-dependence on parents, coinciding with social independence. This is caused by housing problems (shortage of affordable apartments), unemployment, prolonged studies, but also, as Rener (1996) suggests, by the fact that living at home is cheaper and that young generations, unlike their precursors, more often manage to establish good relations with their parents. While in the past the main motive that led young people to leave home and start independent life was the inter-generational conflict, young generations leave home later in life, because they are not faced with the patriarchal authority in the family. Rener (1996, 141) refers to this as "inter-generational harmony," which has replaced the inter-generational conflict. However, parents' protective attitudes towards their children may be

seriously challenged by the disclosure of homosexuality. Therefore, gays and lesbians may be split between prolonged youth and the material and emotional safety that it brings on the one hand, and the condemnation of their homosexuality by parents on the other. The latter may be

a strong motive to start an independent life. However, some can find a certain degree of comfort in "living apart together" arrangements: they create an illusion of a heterosexual identity at the parents' home (living together), while they live their homosexual life on-line in a virtual space, or in urban centres where they study or work during the week (living apart).

Although various different manifestations of the transparent closet seem to exist, at least according to our research findings, one form of the transparent closet is an experience of the majority of gays and lesbians who came out to their parents. However the narratives of the youngest respondents from our research show that different levels of acceptance of homosexual identity within the family context are employed more and more often. This usually includes an extra effort on the side of gays and lesbians themselves. While the predominant experience of the gays and lesbians who came out to their parents might be the entrance into the transparent closet, there is a new trend emerging: an increasing number of gays and lesbians and their same-sex partners manage to organize their lives outside the closet even within the family contexts. However, that does not mean that the "second coming out," the coming out of the transparent closet, is irreversible. The transparent closet persistently threatens to be re-established, if a new everyday life situation in which the family might find itself, happens to demand that.

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Disrupting the (Hetero)normative: Coming-out in the Workplace in Lithuania

Jolanta Reingarde and Arnas Zdanevičius

Introduction

The question surrounding discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation at the workplace is a new theme in Lithuanian social and political discourse on equal opportunities in working life.[1] It is mostly discussed as a gendered or, sometimes, ageist issue, while a more elaborated intersectional approach towards the discrimination of homosexual people is clearly lacking. There is a lack of information on what the issues actually are and contextualized research into the experiences of silence and coming out, and how these experiences impact identity and relationship with others at work. One of the reasons for this is that sexual minorities at work have not been noticed. As Martin (1992) puts it, just as men work with men and come to believe that they work in a gender-neutral world rather than in one where men dominate, heterosexuals also, by working with other heterosexuals, come to believe that they work in a sexually neutral world, rather than in one in which heterosexuals dominate. Because sexual minorities are socially invisible, sexual orientation is not perceived to be relevant, as if gay people have a sexual orientation, but straight people do not.

According to the results of the European Value Study Surveys,[2] Lithuania which is one of the most homophobic societies in Europe, provides a unique context to grasp the severity of the heterosexism and how it shapes the identity of sexual minorities in the workplace. Since these results present only a very general picture, we draw our analysis of homophobia in Lithuania from the results of a survey on the public attitudes towards homosexuality in Lithuania in 2006.[3] According to the find-

[1] The authors are very grateful to the informants who kindly agreed to give interviews. Special thanks to our colleagues Artūras Tereškinas, Skirmantė Česienė and student Vaiva Vinciūnaitė for their work in conducting interviews, transcription, analysis and their contributions and ideas throughout the course of the research project.

[2] See <www.europeanvalues.nl>.

[3] Representative sample, N = 1005—The survey was based on a multi-level random sample and direct interviewing in 20 cities and 63 villages, representing the attitudes of the Lithuanian population (aged 16–74).

ings of this survey, on the one hand 70% of respondents "would never personally approve of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation," but on the other hand, 61% of them "would not like to belong to any organization which has homosexuals amongst its members."[4]

In the article homophobia refers not only to the fear of homosexuals and the fear of heterosexual people (especially men) to be called homosexuals (see Herek 2004), but also to a process of socialization, and the structure and stratification of heteronormative society where anything that is non-heterosexual is not desired and subjected to discrimination. We use the term "sexual minorities" and "minority sexual identity" in order to emphasize the contexts and especially power relationships in working environments in which lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender/transsexual people (LGBT) find themselves as subordinated, marginalized, stigmatized and excluded.[5] However, we are aware of the fact that those generalized concepts such as "minorities," "subcultures," "marginal groups" and even "queers" are very much associated with categorising individuals and thus is subject to manipulation in the public sphere as it was in the case of "deviants" and related concept such as "deviance" which some critical sociology now seems to reject as theoretical mistaken (see Sumner 1996; Zdanevičius 2001). In the Lithuanian public discourse "sexual minorities" is used in order to underline the normative aspects of homosexuality (being inferior to heterosexuality), but in the academic literature this concept also has a sociological sense according to which a minority is a group which tends to be more vulnerable to social exclusion as in the cases of ethnic, religious and other minorities. Terms like "homosexuals" or "LGBT people" are also used as synonyms because in the case of bisexual and transgender people it is their homosexual desire and homosexual acts which are subjected to heteronormativity. However, in our view it is more favourable to use the more inclusive abbreviated term of "LGBT" which includes transgender and transsexual people, too.

[4] The survey—which was conducted by sociologists of the Vytautas Magnus University and the UAB Vilmorus company in the framework of the ATVIRI IR SAUGUS DARBE (Open and save at work) project, funded by the European Community Initiative EQUAL and the Lithuanian Government—indicated very controversial results which can be explained by the fact that "normative" homophobia (the normative attitudes towards homosexuality) is changing but "empirical" homophobia (which is related to value orientations of individuals) is still prevalent among the Lithuanian population. More details on the project can be found at <www.atviri.lt>.

[5] In Lithuanian public discourse the term "sexual minorities" is often misused as it may include not only LGBT people, but also other groups such as prostitutes, paedophiles, exhibitionists—sexual groups that have not received a "legal status" of belonging to sexual minorities recognised by the state.

This study is based on thirty-eight in-depth interviews with LGBT people in Lithuania, carried out within the framework of the project "Open and Safe at Work," supported by the European Union and the Lithuanian Government (EQUAL Initiative). The analysis below aims to explore how people of "non-traditional sexual orientation" construct their sexual identity at work and what their personal experiences of survival are in heteronormative working environments. Furthermore, we analyze how non-heterosexual identities are reflected in their choices of whether to *come out* (i.e. openly revealing their lesbian or gay identifications) or to *stay in the closet* (i.e. not to come out and hiding their sexual identities). The major complication in carrying out research into sexual minorities in organizations is related to the question of how to gather data when silence surrounds them.

LGBT people and their problems are very much under-researched in Lithuania, because silence prevails and it is very difficult to get people to talk about the subject. We have striven to include the experiences of both people who are openly gay and those who keep the fact secret, as well as homosexuals of different genders, age groups (21–55) and from different geographical locations (Vilnius, Kaunas, Druskininkai and Šiauliai). The informants were selected by applying the "snowball method." Some of our informants agreed to be interviewed themselves after reading our advertisements on the Internet. The general profile of participants can be summarized as follows: twenty-five gay men, ten lesbian women, two bisexual men and one transgender person. Eight gay men and four lesbians work in career-oriented "masculine professions" (as ICT expert, engineers, self-employed, security guards, high level managers), twenty-five (19 men and 6 women) participants work in women-dominated professions (such as health care, education, services) and one transgender person was unemployed for one year. In only seven cases are the informants totally open about their sexuality at work, in ten cases—they are open to only "selected" individuals, in the remaining twenty-one cases their identity is kept hidden.

Theoretical Perspectives

The silencing of minority sexual identity is the major factor in the lives of LGBT people. The splitting or separation between self-identity ("who am I") and social identity (how am I perceived by the others), especially maintained through silence, is particularly pertinent to the study of sexual identity. The focus of much discussion about the ontology of sexual identity is the dialectic of the essentialist versus constructionist debate. As

Seidman (1997) and Butler (1990) put it, the essentialist view does not adequately deal with the power/knowledge regime of *compulsive heterosexuality*, nor does it explain how compulsive heterosexuality is created in organizations. The significant development in this area was Foucault's radical challenge to our understanding of sexuality ([1976] 1999), and his notion that homosexuality should be viewed as a category of knowledge rather than a discovered or discrete identity. It was this view that led onto post-structuralist approaches, conceptualizing individual sexual identity as multiple, fragmented and fluid, constructed and reconstructed through different discoursive processes in organizations.

Foucault ([1976] 1999) has also suggested that silenced sexual identity is an agent of power in its own right. This is an important starting point for discussion. The hegemonic heterosexual discourse precludes open discussions of the experiences of sexual minorities at work, implying that knowledge of this taboo is present in the discourse even if it is not talked about: "the make up of discourse has to be pieced together, with things both said and unsaid, with required and forbidden speech" (Foucault [1976] 1999, 133). Things that remain unsaid are equally important and can therefore be illustrative of power being articulated, or as a means of resistance.

Another important aspect is that the dominant discourse of heterosexuality puts the dominated discourse of homosexuality under pressure to be silenced, suppressed and eliminated as well as credited a certain limited legitimacy and protection. The minority is tolerated and accepted rather than put on an equal footing. It is impossible not to recognize the unequal power relationship between the homosexual minority and the heterosexual majority. The critical approach to organizational discourse asserts that it is the hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity, which determines and constitutes the subject's sexual identity, with the subject being trapped in discoursive structures. One of the manifestations of that is the lack of congruence between the subjectivity (private notions of the self that may be left publicly undisclosed) and the public subject position available for the individual to take up at work.

In the analysis presented here we also argue that heteronormative discourse can be used as a mechanism of power and control to limit the ability of LGBT people to talk and construct their own identities at work; on the other hand, agency is not extinguished entirely, and the discourse can be used to build a power, which can then work against heteronormativity in an act of resistance.

Results

Silenced Sexualities

During the research process some themes recurred and became prominent. One of these was that of silenced sexualities at work. Many of the people we spoke to were still "in the closet," and being "out" only to a few "right people" to talk to at work. The interview material shows that leading a double life can have a tremendously negative impact on individuals, in terms of their self-esteem, but most importantly being in the closet causes a lot of human suffering:

> [T]his is a constant lie, an eternal one. . . . Sometimes I even get confused in my palavers: where I was, what I have been doing or what I have not. I am a very lively person by nature, but when I get to my working place I immediately become something of a dead person. I cannot discuss anything, I cannot tell my stories to anybody, and I feel as if I'm somehow vanishing from the inside. This heteronormativity destroys me from the inside, you understand? I have to destroy myself from the inside in order to please them. So how can one live in that way? And our lives are too short, do you understand? (Rima, lesbian, 36).

> The worst is this self-discrimination, when you think about all those norms that you do not accept and then start to apply to yourself, and start to live according to them without being aware of them. This is awful, and all those things [norms] . . . that means that even though you do not agree, you follow them anyway because you want to safeguard the ones that are close to you: your parents, your children and so on. On the other hand, not being able to take a clear position [to come out] makes you feel abnormal. You cannot admit it but somehow you still start to agree that we are evil somehow, that this is abnormal etc. You don't want it, and you don't say I am like that—that does not mean that I hate men or that I harass all women. . . . When you don't question anything, don't tell [the truth] in their eyes, then it will happen that these norms will stay [immovable] (Migle, lesbian, 33).

> In general, it is very hard to conceal your [sexual] orientation, especially when you reconcile it with yourself and accept it as a concurrent part of your identity. I feel in the same way perhaps as a dissident during the Soviet era who used to live a double life—a public one, more or less complying with the requirements of the regime, and the private—the underground one that is ruled by your own conviction. You always knew that when the truth about your real identity comes out you can always be repressed. Frequently, you cannot even participate in public life, nor be active in certain social movements. I left one organization just because I heard jokes about homosexual people. I realized that I cannot strive for the same aims, nor have something in common with those people because they don't accept people like me (Dalia, lesbian, 40).

What is prevalent among the researched sexual minorities is the tendencies to suppress the talk of coming out at work and to say that they do not want to "flaunt" (demonstrate) their sexuality at work. As it was

expressed by one of our informants "one's sexuality is a private issue, thus of no interest to other people at work." In view of interviewed LGBT people, being open about sexual identity often means the demonstration of something that is not publicly accepted. Splitting public and private life and hiding homosexual identity becomes a dominant survival strategy.

> Something that I like at work is that we don't talk about our families, children, husbands or wives. This is a good atmosphere. In my view, you don't need to talk about that at work. It is good for me, because I am very different from the others. I think it is most difficult for those who are really visible, I mean, gays who are obviously gay. As much as I discussed that with them, they told me that they don't need to come out, everybody knows about that anyway. Heterosexuals do not tell about themselves [that they are hetero], why should homosexuals talk about this at work? Many of them [homosexuals] adjust to their working places and they look like everybody else. You don't scream about what you are, and you live your life OK (Lina, lesbian, 30).

> It is without doubt that the most important thing that you are first of all a human being, who is doing some work, and that you are competent in your field and that you can be trusted. I think the competence positively affects anyone's professional career regardless of sexual orientation. I work in the field of information technology. My work is related to statistical analysis, creation of various tools, multi-dimensional layers etc. And somewhere at the end of the list there is the small fact that I am gay, that I like guys. There is no doubt if I was a gay Andrius, it would be harder than now, when I am simply Andrius, who among other things, is gay. . . . The head of our department knew about me being gay for sure, and this was not an obstacle, because it was simply more important how I was working, and not that a gay is doing that job (Andrius, gay, 23).

Mykolas, a young businessman, owner of a small company, stayed in the closet for many years and thinks that talking about discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation is something like a search for idiosyncrasy that breaks common rules.

> [I]f you want some idiosyncrasy, to be exceptional that breaks common rules then you start to scream that you are being discriminated. Simply, sometimes maybe you yourself break those rules. I don't get any remarks because I never give any grounds for that. I don't act, I don't need to act with manners, words, eye-winking. I would not tolerate it myself, if, say, I had those gays [with those effeminate manners] working for me. . . . In my opinion, [homophobia] is very often provoked by these people themselves. Very often, these people act with inadequate manners, they are trying to be very visible in the way that "I don't care and everybody should get out of my way," then this sort of public [sexuality] is not acceptable for me. And often it happens like in the [Lithuanian] proverb—they beat themselves and then they scream because of it (Mykolas, gay, 35).

As Fairclough (1995) pointed out, power can control and puts limits on alternative discourses. Having gay people around is acceptable as long as they do not draw attention to their minority sexuality. This can be illustrated by the very familiar public message in Lithuania which could be generally stated as follows: LGBT people have a right to exist as long as they suppress their own identity.[6] Homophobic attitudes in Lithuania even among some LGBT people became some sort of political correctness especially at work. If we consider that displays of heterosexual sexuality are constantly evident, repetitive and naturalized in the work environment, being homophobic and negative towards homosexuality is one of the coping strategies in the highly homophobic work environments in the country, eventually leading to self-marginalization enacted through the suppression of homosexual identity and silence. This contradiction can lead some to feel that it is the homosexual's sexuality that is of no interest to other people at work, rather than sexuality in general. In these cases, silence can be seen as the denial by the informants of the importance of sexuality at work. Eventually, suppression and silencing of discourse renders them invisible and makes it harder for them to develop confidence and power through shared identity (Kirsch 2000).

Another major reason not to disclose sexual orientation at work is a belief that they will be discriminated against. Language used by the colleagues at work or fear of being excluded were indicated to be influential factors towards individuals' decisions to remain silent.

> You know, this openness—if only it was so simple that you could come out of the closet: open doors and get out. First, it will not happen, this coming out. I would guarantee that at least sixty or seventy percent of my co-workers suspect me. And yet I am not sure. And that's why I don't want to come out (Edigijus, gay, 24).

Although there were no scientific self-reported studies conducted in Lithuania, the pilot surveys of mainly homosexual males that were carried out in Lithuania indicate that the majority of homosexuals in Lithuania hide their sexual orientation at home and at work.[7] Even if the figures are not accurate, they show that people with homosexual experiences are vulnerable of being discriminated at work. The sexual inequalities experienced by lesbians and gays at work can be constructed as ripple effects of a wider legalized heterosexism. Despite European anti-

[6] Recently a member of the right-wing party at the Lithuanian Parliament publicly announced that "Homosexuals are neither our friends nor our enemies as long as they stay in their clubs and bars, but if they come out of the closet they will become our enemies."

[7] See for example <http://www.gay.lt> (5 December 2006).

discriminatory legislation, incorporated into Lithuanian national law before joining the European Union in 2004, the absence of any mention of sexual orientation in the Lithuanian Constitution in respect to discrimination in general continues to be one of the main dimensions of status inequality.

The issue of coping strategies at heteronormative work environments is quite well elaborated by several researchers as well as explored in the empirical material of our research project. Griffin (in Croteau 1996) distinguished four main ways in which lesbians and gay men manage their identity at the workplace, which are described as follows:

Passing: the way that sexual minorities maintain the silence through deliberate action on their part to act as heterosexuals, sometimes inventing opposite sex partners (it is a very popular scenario among the informants). This ranges from not giving details about one's private life, referring to friends in a gender neutral way or even making up a heterosexual lifestyle.

Covering: not disclosing information (impacted by the homophobic attitudes of colleagues at work, low commitment to organization, etc.).

Being implicitly out: using explicit language and artifacts to indicate sexual orientation.

Affirming identity: encouraging others to view him or her as gay (this in most cases applies to "selected" colleagues, not to all).

The passing and covering strategies are the most prevalent among our informants:

> Can you imagine, we meet on Mondays, everybody is telling their stories: I raised children, I brought my children to McDonald's with my wife, etc. But what can I do? What can I tell them? But this happens, you understand? Everybody talks like nobody cares about your personality. But it only seems like that . . . they are waiting for my story—and what can I tell them about myself? . . . and in this situation I feel very uncomfortable. I cannot tell that I was with my girlfriend. Then you have to become like an actress. But this is too hard, . . . and it sucks. It means that from the beginning you have to become some dead person. . . . I imagine myself that I will change my profession and imagine myself working in a big company and I am already worried about the people there (Rima, lesbian,36).

> The lack of openness causes discomfort. You cannot even tell jokes about your lifestyle. Even if you are in company [at work] you cannot look around. You have to pretend that you are looking at girls. You have to pretend about your family constantly. It is a rule that you have to pretend at work. When you meet with your mates from college, you have to manipulate somehow, because we are not interested in telling the truth. Not in Lithuania. Sometimes, it seems that even if I leave for a foreign country, the same insecurity will stay with me. . . . Sometimes you get accustomed so much and you get used to think, talk, and be silent in that way. [It seems that] nobody should discuss this

with you. You should avoid that. It becomes your habit when you are at work or when you meet your friends (Egidijus, gay, 24).

A relevant finding of the research is that in certain occupations, mostly male-dominated and career-oriented professions, passing and covering are identity management strategies that are followed at work and outside of work. The story of employer Mykolas shows that he develops one identity, a profession-related identity, at work (where there is no space for sexuality), and another one in "off-duty life," where his homosexual identity is kept secret. When asked about his sexual identity at work, Mykolas was quite strict:

I: I am basically interested in how you feel at work as a gay person?
M: I would not like to talk about such a topic. The more you are connected to people the more you are afraid of it. When you are employed by someone, you don't take the responsibility for the other. But when you are an employer you care about your clients, the common image, about everything. When the clients have to sign contracts, would they care to give work to a faggot? Even this is not so related to work, but why would they need that? Why should I create some unpleasant situations for having business with somebody who is not like everybody else? I separate my personal life from my work. This [being gay] is my private life and it should not be confused with my work. I am "normal" in public life. I am neither fighting with myself nor with society in general (Mykolas, gay, 35).

The commitment to both identities (profession-related and private) and their contradictory manifestations have been observed in several life-stories of the research. Moreover, the male dominated and career oriented work places have also been observed to be highly heteronormative, in which the professional identity acts to suppress the homosexual identities. In the extreme cases, heteronormativity is manifested through the internalized homophobia towards feminine gays, mannerisms, overt demonstration of homosexuality, etc.

The strategies of being implicitly out or affirming identity in most cases apply to only carefully selected individuals at work.

When you communicate with people at work you choose people. You are close to or distant from certain people. Those colleagues that are close know about my orientation and they laugh at me. We talk about it and everything is cool. There are ten co-workers in my company and I can say for sure that half of them know about me. One joke, another joke. After some time, things should be very clear. So I tell jokes about it in order not to offend them. When somebody asks me about that I look into this person's eyes and try to tell as much as he or she can stand (Linas, gay, 22).

> I work in several organizations: one of them is very gay-friendly and it is because there are more homosexuals there. Also, in my view, it is because they accept me as I am. . . . Certainly, you choose whom to tell and what to tell them, but in general I work in the environment which is full of educated people, and it is less complicated. In addition, you feel how open people are to you, and then you decide how open you can be to them. When you communicate with persons you make a decision: to tell or not to tell. . . . In reality, not everybody needs to know all the details, and not everybody cares about it. For me, [sexual orientation] is not a very important thing, because this is my private life and I think, not everybody should know about this (Tomas, gay, 22).

Another interesting finding of our research is that the covering or not disclosing one's sexual orientation is not always in one's control. The naming of someone as lesbian or gay, "the divine power of naming" (Butler 1997), does not have to happen with the subject's knowledge. Many informants feel that their colleagues know about their sexual orientation, or feel being "outed," even though they have never made any effort, sometimes on the contrary, carefully tried to protect themselves from disclosure.

> I was working at McDonald's in 1996 and somehow they found out about me and it started this shhhh. . . . Once, a girl came to me and asked me if I wanted to have a cup of coffee with her after work. OK, I said, let's go. We went for coffee and she started [interrogating me]—how, when, with whom, how many times? And I say, please tell me why you are asking me all this. She wanted to know about it from her feminine curiosity. And I said "yes, I am lesbian" And our friendship ended after that. We talked and I found out that everybody knew about me. . . . And I started to feel that communication in our team was happening but I did not exist for them any more. We were at a party, but it went on like I was not there. And you feel this silent, passive—alienation (Rima, lesbian, 36).

In summary, there are a number of ways in which the issues of silenced sexualities at work are central to the experience and identities of sexual minorities. Silencing can be interpreted as a means of self-protection as well as suffering. Therefore, it could be argued that social interactions at work and denied subjectivity are dependent on organizational contexts and situational factors.

The silenced sexualities also show deeper incoherencies in our cultural discourses. These can be disentangled with reference to the distinctions between private/public and private/secret, respectively, which are superimposed upon the hierarchy between homosexuality and heterosexuality. According to Goffman (1963) sexual activities and fantasies tend to unfold in the private domain, while sexual identities and orientations are part and parcel of our public persona, and will be routinely deciphered

from appearances, artifacts and interactions. Here, sexual inequality means that it is only LGBT people who are lambasted for flaunting their sexuality when their sexual orientations surface in public places.

Coming Out

Work places and public spaces are "two of those social contexts where the closet preserves its oppressive power" (Kuhar 2006, 167). James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2005, 452) talk about coming out at work as a performative act: "Being gay or lesbian is not a truth that is discovered, it is a performance, which is enacted." Because of the constant presumption of heterosexuality, coming out is something one has to do in everyday life situations. There are a number of reasons why people decide to come out. Humphrey (1999, 138) suggests three main ones. First, there is an issue of honesty and integrity at the personal level; second, there are significant benefits in building open relationships at the professional level. Finally, some people think that it is important to educate various audiences about lesbian and gay existence and to empower lesbian and gay people in the process.

Those who are completely or partially open at work, think about coming out as being significant at the personal as well as the professional levels. The third, political aspect, mentioned by Humphrey, was not overtly articulated by interviewees. However, it is very important to contextualize the actual freedom of individual choice, and to appreciate that from the perspective of LGBT people. For instance, the only unemployed informant that was interviewed during our research was a 47 years old transgendered person of Russian descent who recently started to come out in public giving interviews to different TV channels and newspapers had a clear purpose: to become more visible and to use her sexual identity in order to attract employers and to find a job. Medėja has completed higher education but is now looking for a job as a beautician and wants to become famous using the media because this is the only way to persuade employers to hire her: "I have no choice but to sell my sexuality and I hope that some employers will understand that I will be able to attract more clients," she said at the end of the interview after the recorder was turned off, and added "Use my real name, don't be afraid to use it in public. I want everybody to know about my situation." As this case demonstrates, it could be argued that coming out is more of a survival strategy than an optional luxury.

One of the reactive strategies to coming out was observed to be the silence by the rest. Loreta told the story about how she had brought her

girlfriend to the company's informal party and kept telling everybody about her partnership during the whole night. The lack of interest in her private life made her feel disappointed and excluded.

> In other jobs I never concealed my orientation and in principle I did not care too much. But in my current employment I tried to come out, I tried to be more open, but nobody understood me. Our organization holds big celebrations at Christmas every year. The invitation that everybody received said that you are invited with your "other half" [partner]. So I thought that we [my girlfriend and I] could go. Of course, I was nervous, my hands were trembling and if I remember well I had four glasses of champagne in order to have more courage to introduce my girlfriend to everybody. I introduced her as my partner. . . . It was very scary and I was looking at their reactions. And they reacted differently: some of them had big eyes, some of them had curious looks, and some made me feel some delight and easiness. We were sitting and chatting: Oh, this is your partner, how nice!—Some people thought I was joking. We really had a nice time together. . . . That evening I was really happy and I thought that now I will be happier, will live in joy and peace. But after some time I realized that nobody really understood me. Everybody thought that this was not my girlfriend, just a friend. I think they could not understand that somebody would dare to do that—to bring their [same-sex] partner to the party (Loreta, lesbian, 27).

By this reactive silence, the colleagues, whether consciously or not, used silence as a tool of hostility. As Butler (1997) states, injurious language can take the form of silence as well. James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2003) in their study on the absent presence of sexual minorities at work state that "work colleagues create social reality for gay people in the workplace, through the absence of what might be said, and what is left unsaid." It could also be said to be constitutive of social identity and the way in which they are seen by their workmates (Hardy, Palmer, and Philips 2000). By ignoring alternative sexualities, the organization makes it more difficult for sexual minorities to construct an "out" social identity. In this case, silence can be seen as a manifestation of the refusal by the majority to acknowledge the alternative sexualities.

Although concentrating more on discoursive practices in terms of talk and social action, we do not suggest that context is not relevant, in fact it surfaced that this is very important. Many studies have unveiled the significant relations between the situational constraints embedded in organizations and occupations, on the one hand, and the coming out decisions made by individual employees, on the other (see Lehtonen and Mustola 2004; Lehtonen 2002; Heikkinen 2002; Sears and Williams 1997). As could be seen from the interview with Gruodis, low commitment to work is one of the consequences of the silence and absent presence and therefore it could be used as an argument when talking to employers

about equal opportunities and the principle of non-discrimination at work.

> If this work would last eternally or if I knew that I would work there for the rest of my life, maybe it would be different. I don't know how it would be. But I know that I will leave soon, and I always live with this idea that I will quit this job. This feeling of temporality, I think, made me avoid committing myself to being too open, and to have friends (Gruodis, gay, 36).

It is also noticed that in smaller organizations, where there is more interpersonal contact it is harder for people in those organizations to recognize their minority identities or to protect themselves in case of discrimination. On the contrary, as is indicated in Loreta's story, large international companies might be perceived to be more LGBT friendly:

> Sometimes I think, if someone [from work] would not like my sexual orientation, and if someone would try to fire me from the company, there are easy possibilities to act against that. It is possible to write letters to foreign partners of the company and I think they would not tolerate such discrimination. . . . In a Lithuanian company things would be different. The previous companies I worked with were small. Everybody knew about everybody. Everything was decided almost at the coffee table etc. [In small companies], I think, there would be no chance to make claims or complaints. There is nobody to protect you (Loreta, lesbian, 27).

James Ward and Diana Winstanley (2003) in their research of individuals at the police and the fire service in UK have also noticed that the close personal relationship also means that the costs are higher for coming out because of potential negative reactions. In bigger organizations with less interpersonal interaction it is easier to be in the closet, and the risks associated with coming out are reduced. The interviews from our study also show commitment and loyalty to organization as well as work attitudes may on their own determine the coming out as well. Gender makeup also matters: the more feminine environments are perceived as being more gay-friendly than career-oriented male organizations.

> Colleagues who know about me accept [my sexual orientation] quite well. My boss who is a woman has no problem with that and accepts it normally. She even knows my boyfriend. I don't think hairdressers should have problems with that. Everybody understands that a hairdresser is somehow allowed to do that [to be gay]. . . . There are many gay people working in the beauty industry. In other companies with all kinds of managers, it is more difficult. I think the managers are sitting [in the closet] with their mouths shut and live double lives (Raigardas, gay, 26).

In terms of homosexual women there does not appear to be the marked difference between male- and female-dominated areas of work. On the other hand, lesbian women interviewed during our research feel more vulnerable and exposed to acts of discrimination not only on the grounds of sexual orientation but gender as well. Dalia's viewpoint indicates her solidarity with all women despite of the differences between heterosexual and homosexual women:

> Lesbians in our society are in even more closed communities. In general, women are more vulnerable, they cannot feel safe and they have to secure the jobs that they have. They want to live and to love. Apparently they simply understand that to be public [about your sexuality] is to be something like a kamikaze. Our society will not change its attitudes, and there is no point in sacrificing your life. There is also another thing—lesbians are women anyway, and women value personal life and privacy more (Dalia, lesbian, 40).

Gender relations are one of the most significant, if not the most significant structuring factor when it comes to the conditions in which homosexuals work. Furthermore, as could be seen from the cases of lesbian women intersectional and multiple-discrimination could be subject for further research. Most people whom we interviewed and who are in one or another way open at work carefully assess the prevailing organizational climate before disclosing their sexual orientation. Thus, in future studies of sexualities at work, it is really important not just to focus on the actors, but also to describe the working environments.

Conclusion

In this study we examined the construction of minority sexual identity in organizations through the discourse on silent and silenced sexualities. Distinguishing between self- and social identity is an important conceptual distinction to make. The silence that enables this splitting to take place can be evident in a number of ways. Foucault ([1976] 1999) has identified silence as a discoursive practice, which contributes to the identity construction of sexual minorities in organizations, as well as being a feature of power relationships between the homosexual minority and the heterosexual majority (Butler 1997). The "absent presence" (Ward and Winstanley 2003) of homosexuals at work emphasizes the importance of all aspects of discourse in exploring sexual identity, because the absence of talk on minority sexual identity is as meaningful as the presence of talk on majority identity. Facing the everyday reality, in which the majority of homosexuals are in the closet, we believe that understanding of the

discourse can be potentially increased by focusing on the silence that exists in and around it.

The coming out process is predicated upon cultural discourses, organizational contexts and practices, which deprive lesbian and gay people from human dignity and integrity. Jill Humphrey (1999, 137) talks about the archetypes of the depraved and diseased homosexuality, which are a part of a collective heritage, so that even when they do not surface so dramatically, they are lurking in the shadows of subconsciousness. Therefore a cloud of vulnerability overhangs all homosexuals—even those who have been out and proud in the workplace. The perpetual angst, in turn generates a form of constant self-surveillance of sexuality and personal dignity. In line with other research findings (Kuhar 2006; Lehtonen 2002; Lehtonen and Mustola 2004) that are focused on the discrimination of LGBT people in the workplace, it seems that in Lithuania heteronormativity at work affects personal lives of gay people tremendously and creates a lot of human suffering. As the closet remains a social structure of oppression, coming out as a rational survival strategy for Lithuanian sexual minorities especially in the very masculine and homophobic working environments might be questioned. Perchance, using Seidman's (2004) words, living *beyond the closet* still lies ahead for many LGBT people in Lithuania.

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Mapping the Scenes

The Changing Space of the Gay and Lesbian Community in the Czech Republic

Kateřina Nedbálková

Introduction

In the Czech Republic homosexuality is no longer a taboo, it does not provoke clear indignation or condemnation, and sociological research on the subject which, however, is still somewhat limited, shows that Czech society is increasingly more tolerant towards lesbians and gays (Janošová 2000). The Czech gay and lesbian community increasingly comprises of generations that do not remember and often do not even have mediated knowledge of the period between the 70s and late 80s when homosexuals were persecuted by the secret police and when no gay and lesbian establishments or organizations could legally exist.[1]

Despite these developments a number of gays and lesbians feel that in certain situations they do not have the same rights as the heterosexual majority, or indeed they feel discriminated against (Procházka, Janík, and Hromada 2003). Gays and lesbians are still subjected to stereotyping and stigmatizing labels and representations on the part of outsiders, on the one hand, and creators of distinctive cultural practices or (sub)cultures, on the other.

The space of the gay and lesbian community is in this paper represented by three types of venues, which used to and still play a key role in it, namely public toilets, a gay and lesbian disco and a student civic association.

As a conceptual background I apply the term community conceived as something that provides values, ideals and standards of conduct. It includes social networks with different subgroups, encourages commitment to an exclusive identity and provides a sense of relative security (Stein 1997). In this sense community might also be perceived as an imaginary home that in some cases works as a substitute for the lack of a biological family. Weston (1991) and others referred to such communities as the "families we choose," since its members provide emotional and

[1] The first openly gay or lesbian institutions appeared only after the fall of communism (1989) with the creation and development of open society.

material support as well as a sense of belonging which are all typical functions of a family.

Ethnography in Gay and Lesbian Community

The article uses data gained mainly in ethnographic research. This research employed the technique of semi-structured interviews, participant observation and analysis of personal documents (such as diaries and letters). Observation took place in the years 1996–1999 and 2001–2004, and in the years of 1997 and 2003, and was documented in the form of field notes. In 1997 I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with 11 gay men and 4 lesbian women whom I tried to select to be representative of three types of venues. In the case of the first, public toilets, a valuable informant was a cleaning lady working in one of these toilets (Marta, a retired woman aged approximately 70) who made it possible for me to look through and gain data from her diaries that she has kept more or less regularly about her work at this place for 10 years.[2]

Although my empirical data was collected in Brno I consider it significant for the Czech gay and lesbian community in general as these venues create the dominant organizational structures of particular gay and lesbian communities.[3] Additionally, the student association STUD Brno has been the most influential gay and lesbian organization in the entire Czech Republic and it is involved in a large scope of internal activities (such as organising informal discussions, operating a helpline, offering library services) as well as external events (such as film festivals, political lobbying, and public campaigns).

Public Toilets—Hidden Under the Ground

Public toilets constituted an important part of the gay community before 1989, when officially there were no gay and lesbian establishments, and when lesbians and gays were listed in the records of the Secret Police with the aim of blackmailing them. On the other hand, even today these places have kept their function of being a place where anonymous sexual intercourse might take place. The following quotes show police harassment of gays before 1989, and also an attempt to blackmail them.

[2] These diaries do not tell us so much about the practices themselves as about the meanings assigned to them and thus about how the older generation views a particular segment of the gay minority. However, the diaries still uncover some interesting points.

[3] Brno is the second largest city in the Czech Republic (with 400,000 inhabitants).
In the case of the public toilet using the past tense might be more accurate since this institution even though still existing was more representative of the times before 1989.

> A guy called me out of the pub where I was having a beer with my friends. We were loud, I know, and we talked about all kinds of things. Outside he punched me in the head, said he was a policemen and that he was going to tell my parents and at my job that I am gay. I said he can do whatever he wants and then he left (Zdeněk, 44).[4]

> Once the police came to Richard's [at that time an illegal gay disco.][5] Everybody tried to hide somewhere and I happened to jump under a bed with a younger man whom I didn't know much. We were found and it turned out that the boy was under 18. The police was trying to suggest that we had had sex which would put me into big trouble [the age of consent was 18 at that time]. The guy though behaved very cool and said that he didn't know me at all (Mirek, 48).

Public toilets together with other places such as saunas, swimming pool showers, parks and railway stations provided gay men with some of the few possibilities of contacting and meeting people of the same orientation. Lesbian women on the other hand did not have specific venues. They got to know each other more commonly in the environment of the heterosexual majority. Two female respondents stated that women often entered the community following the experience of treatment in a psychiatric asylum where they either directly encountered other similarly oriented women or doctors mediated information about get-together parties at Richard's which were taking place already at that time. A stay at a psychiatric asylum was often a temporary solution to their unhappy situation at a time when homosexuality was dealt with mostly clinically by psychiatrists and sexologists. Previous research also pointed to the tendency that lesbian women were likely to be placed into psychiatric treatment, while gay men were more likely to face criminal penalization (Zaviršek 1997; Nagorna 2004).

Public toilets can provide space for anonymous sex without further commitment. The toilets comprise two parts: the urinals and the cubicles. Sexual encounters mainly take place by the urinals as these cannot be seen from the employees' workroom, as opposed to the area of the cubicles, which are directly in front of this workroom.

> A man in work clothes, a daily client, went into cubicle no. 7 and he was immediately followed by a roughly 35-year-old man, well-dressed in a light-coloured overcoat. As I saw it I immediately called out that two of them had gone into the same cubicle and the one in the overcoat quickly left. . . . "F" comes often with a boy of about 15–16,[6] good-

[4] A name and the age of the respondent follow each quotation.

[5] A separate section of the paper is devoted to this venue.

[6] This is a label that Marta uses to describe homosexuals. It is the abbreviated form of the word fag. It is interesting that inside the homosexual subculture "f" is also often used as an equivalent of the word homosexual.

> looking and well-dressed. He always wants cubicle no. 7 and spends at least half an hour in there. This afternoon both of them came. The boy went into cubicle no. 7, I was paying attention and I saw the "professor" standing at cubicle no. 9, I opened the door leading to the cubicles and thus I made it impossible for him to enter no. 7. In short, a noted customer from Jakub's[7] thinks that he will have "H" sex [homosexual sex] in the cubicles as it used to happen at Jakub's. But here it can be kept under control (Marta's diary).[8]

Although controlling behaviour at the public toilets is not part of her job, Marta's diaries suggest that her personal beliefs compel her to do so. There was a controversy when employees displayed signs stating that it is forbidden to remain on the premises longer than absolutely necessary. Men seeking sex are disapproved of by female employees and are often referred to a different space, such as the most well-known brothel in Brno which—although mainly frequented by heterosexual men—Marta defines as a place in the same category, i.e. a place for male sexual practices. Thus the expression of male sexual desire is channelled not only into the right objects (in this case, women) but is also directed at a specific place intended for this purpose (a brothel).

In the fight for space and above all for defining what is normal and moral Marta often finds allies: "The homeless hated homosexuals and tried to harm them whenever possible." Marta narrates how homeless people poured water on so-called fags, splashing a bucket of water through the opening at the bottom of a cubicle in which two men were present at the same time. In this light, public toilets can be seen as an example of a gendered and controlled organization and at the same time as a place where modern power manifests itself through unrelenting surveillance and discipline.

Gay men come here because they may find someone to have sex with, which mainly involves mutual masturbation or oral sex, or they can observe someone else engaged in these activities. Especially older men seem to seek the role of observer perhaps because they do not have too many opportunities to make actual contacts: "a number of times I saw older men give money to youths to watch them masturbate" (Marta). It is not only likely that one will find a sexual partner but it is also likely that one will find someone new, "a new dick, always more exciting" (Jiří, 36).

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7 Marta's previous workplace, also a public toilet.

8 Marta's original motivation for writing diaries was to prove to her employer how demanding and often dangerous her job is. She later continued the writing of diaries at my request and she tried to reconstruct her work chronologically. She inscribed the notebook which I gave her for her notes: DON'T TAKE AWAY! I'm writing for sociology, not for my own pleasure.

As it turned out from Marta's notes as well as from the interviews, men usually arrive at the public toilets separately, their meetings not being prearranged: "Someone may come, won't find an accomplice, rushes off 10 seconds later, but still has to pay the one crown" (Marta). Others, in contrast, stay at the toilets until someone arrives and so they can make an approach. Some men stay there for a number of hours a day and some come four times in the morning and four times in the afternoon:

> At 3 p.m. "F" Zdeněk came in and at 4:20 p.m. I went to clean the floor (it had rained in the afternoon) and I asked him what he had been doing there for the past hour and 20 minutes, . . . he didn't reply and stayed. During that hour only one man came in, leaving immediately. Men can hang around here but I worry about the things that they could break around the urinals. Zdeněk finally left at 5:15 p.m. after 2 hours and 15 minutes (Marta's diary).

The fact that employees keep finding condoms when cleaning shows the deliberation and the intent to have such a meeting: their presumption is that a sexual encounter may well occur with someone, but they don't know exactly with whom. This function of public toilets might be taken over by new alternative venues and services such as gay saunas and on-line dating.

Public toilets represent a kind of subcultural scene within the gay community, often associated with something hidden, underground or secretive. The specific characteristics of these places result partly from the fact that they are not gay venues officially and this is why participants must constantly solve the problem of their relationships with outsiders who can come to these places at any time as well as outsiders who are employed at these places.[9]

This "underground microcosm" is characterised by specific measures, rules and expectations, I had the opportunity to uncover only partially. The fact that gay men have been meeting in these places, even after "official" gay and lesbian venues and organizations have been in existence for some 17 years indicates that this scene can satisfy certain wishes and needs which did not disappear with the development of other gay places. Public toilets involve activities of which the participants are made ashamed by employees and others, including some gay people. This stigmatizing aspect within the gay community harks back to the totalitarian

[9] Outsider in this case means a person who enters this place without any knowledge of the (homo)sexual practices taking place. It does not necessarily have to be someone coming in to actually use the toilet as it can be also a plumber coming to fix the facility, a homeless person coming to beg for money or all kinds of cheating sellers coming in to offer their goods, as Marta describes them in her diary.

past when homosexuality was a reason for shame and secrecy, when homosexual activities were exiled to underground exclusion, thus typically reducing homosexuality to the performance of sexual encounters.

Richard's Gay Disco—Towards Commercialization

Richard's disco is a prime venue for the gay and lesbian community, and was the only gay disco in Brno until 1999. It is situated in the renovated cellar of a family house in a villa suburb. We can see this place as the starting point of gay and lesbian community formation as we know it today:

> How did it begin? Once I was waiting for friends in a pub and they were not coming so I was listening to what the guys were talking about at the table. One was saying that he rebuilt the cellar of a family house to turn it into a small club where he invited friends and they listened to music and danced and sex was also involved. I liked the idea, and I thought: I also have a house and so I started doing some things. In 1982 on my 19th birthday I invited friends there. I bought some wine and made sandwiches. Everybody liked it very much and they said "Richard, do it again!" We always made arrangements then when there was an occasion, such as someone's birthday or so. . . . It was not so difficult to make arrangements: we said it would be every first Saturday of the month. Then every other Saturday of the month. . . . Mostly it was our people:[10] My friends who brought their friends, and many people travelled from other cities. . . . How did the group form? Later there were already about 50 people and they got to know each other in a variety of ways. For example, at the station or in the toilets, well, in such public places, more often because no clubs existed at the time. . . . Many people who came at the beginning are now somewhat sentimental and they say that it used to be different before. It had a different atmosphere because it had the mark of something forbidden. Now it is an entirely commercial matter. . . . In 1990 I got a licence, arranged a loan and started my business. For example, before that I could not sell alcohol at all because if the police found out they could accuse me of something called sponging.[11] I had to make an arrangement, as if I was selling the alcohol at cost price and the consumers knew that they should give me 10 crowns extra. . . . I was a bit afraid as there were already a lot of people coming here and among them were certainly some secret policemen. Also because at that time the age of consent was 18. Now it is fifteen (Richard, owner of the disco).[12]

Even finding this place requires at least a minimum of local knowledge. There are no neon or other signs on the building, the door is

[10] A term "our" homosexuals is often used for other homosexuals in the Czech Republic.

[11] Before 1989 this term referred to a person who was either unemployed or a person making his/her living outside of the state system of employment. Both of these statuses were illegal.

[12] In 1990 the same conditions were set for legal responsibility for heterosexual as well as homosexual behaviour when the age of homosexual consent was lowered from 18 to 15.

locked, and in front of the gate there is a security guard to silence the visitors who are coming and going and thus minimize the number of complaints from neighbours. First you have to ring the doorbell, after which the door is opened electronically and you find yourself in the first room with a bar. Here you are met by an attendant who takes your coat and your entrance fee. The attendant usually knows the guests. If not, the contact with the attendant provides an opportunity of small talk to assess the newcomer at least to some degree. Entirely new visitors are told of the fact that entry is by invitation only. In this way the group creates a defence mechanism against "outsiders," which is, among other things, demonstrated exactly in the unwillingness to reveal places at which they meet (Humphreys [1970] 1997). This specific ritual of entry reflects on the closure of the gay community which often has very good reasons for such defence practices: "It happened to me a couple of times that I was here, some guys came and sprayed tear gas all around the place and then quickly went away" (Paul, 30).

The whole establishment works as a family business as the owner and founder Richard works at the same time as a waiter, accountant, caterer and cleaner. Richard's mother, who lives in the house together with him, cooks for the visitors:

> This way I save a lot of personnel cost because mum cooks and I try to do everything else myself, however, I still have to pay the cloakroom attendant, the barman, the DJ and the guard. But if I also had to pay an accountant and a waiter, and someone to do the shopping then it would be worse. . . . In the last year or year and a half the income was significantly reduced (Richard, owner of the disco).

The most important position among the staff is probably that of the barman who, if he is good, can attract a circle of regular visitors willing to follow him even if he changes his job (Achilles [1976] 1998). A barman often acts as a mediator in the communication between visitors, most of whom address him by name. Seats at the bar are most frequently taken by visitors who come alone. A typical course of such an evening is that some lonely men are sitting at the bar and one of them starts talking to the barman whom he usually knows from previous visits. The conversation is often so loud and the topic so universal that it is indirectly aimed also at the others at the bar. In this way everyone who is interested can participate in the talk. Barmen are exclusively gay men, and those who gather around them are almost exclusively male guests.[13] Many accounts show that individuals feel relaxed and that they can shed their masks

[13] I tackle the presence and absence of lesbians at these places later in the article.

here. A number of gay men are not entirely comfortable with playing the heterosexual masculine role, constructed for a person of the male sex by heteronormative society, as the following account suggests:

> You can behave much more naturally there (at the gay disco). I feel much more relaxed there. At other places one has to hold on to a certain concept. That means that I cannot just sit and watch a guy or simply start a conversation with him—and then here I am a priori certain that he is no tough hetero who will immediately hit me. This relaxes me . . . , I don't have to play a tough bloke. I don't have to pretend to be some tough bodied companion, I simply don't have to because this is not expected of me here (Michal, 21).

It is clear from mutual greetings, head nods towards people who enter, brief conversations at different tables on the way to the bar or the dance floor, that visitors know each other at least at some level. Individuals can be expected to be less anonymous in such a place as there are not so many like this, and visitors can thus quickly become regular customers.

> There is a very small circle of people who are willing to visit our establishments. They are basically the same who move among Philadelphia, Háčko and the well-known disco at Richard's (Marek, owner of a gay bar).[14]

> Here everybody knows everything about everybody, from their religious belief to the length of their penis (Ondřej, 25).

The familiarity experienced in gay and lesbian bars and discos can be undesirable and embarrassing when encountered in a different setting:

> A friend recently complained that he was walking through town with his mother and run into a group of people including a boy whom he knew from the bar. And that boy looks very twisted, it is plain that he is a fag. And he greeted this friend of mine in a very loud way. Naturally, his mum had no idea, so he grabbed her hand and pulled her away. It was all very embarrassing (Milan, 40).

At the disco we meet both open and closeted homosexuals. Literature often distinguishes between these two types. The former are assumed to be open about their homosexuality not only within the gay community but also in other aspects of their lives. The latter, on the other hand, are rather secretive about their sexuality outside the community (in their families and at their workplaces). I suggest that rather than using these two categories as mutually exclusive labels, we should see them

[14] Philadelphia and Háčko are names of gay bars in Brno.

as (self)labelling strategies that are activated or de-activated to suit the different environments, audiences and purposes of the individuals involved.

One of the visitors of the disco described its specific character as "a hormonal loading point." The atmosphere is created partly by the practical furnishing and equipment, partly by the very loud continuous music, and above all by male porn videos shown in every room:

> Some complain about it [porn video] very much but I think that the majority demands it. The way it happened was that I was on holiday at the seaside and I visited some gay bars where they had video, and if you don't speak the language and don't know the people then you are going to get a bit bored, and thus there was at least something to watch. So I started it at our place as well. I think that people watch it quite a lot as they notice, for example, that I have a new tape, or they tell me that the film has just finished and I should change it. . . . They often ask me why don't I run a sleazy hotel in the house. . . . I thought about that, but it would be too complicated in practice. So I always refer them to a hotel further down. But such fun costs quite a lot. They'd rather have a place where they could go just for an hour or so. It is mostly enough for these things. . . . They go to the park as well. In the summer time something like 2 to 3 couples an evening. Or some do it right here in the toilet. . . . How do I know? It always gets back to me somehow that he was in the park with that one and the other one picked that guy up or some like to boast about themselves (Richard, owner of the disco).

For these reasons in the King's disco (the second gay disco opened in Brno) there is a dark room where anonymous sexual activity is engaged in. The dark room is underground, and the top of the stairs leading there has a sign to stop women from going down. The first few years of gay discos created the impression that this is a space for the community of gay men:

> The girls that I know do not come here often, they don't like the porn and the loud music which makes it impossible for them to talk. The ones who do come are mostly "heteras" [heterosexual women] or prostitutes relaxing after work (Iva, 36).

The lesbian community concentrated more in private spaces and constituted of individual informal communities of women linked by personal relationships. This began to change when women started to frequent a second gay disco, King's, opened in 1999. This supports the notion that women were not against going to a gay disco per se but did not find the other place suitable. Between 2000 and 2005 several new discos and bars opened in Brno, some of them only for few months, others lasting for years. Some of these places gained great popularity among lesbian women.

Student Organization—Activism and Its Limits

The gay and lesbian organization STUD Brno was founded in 1996 as an independent, non-governmental organization which, according to its web presentation, above all unites young people of homosexual and bisexual orientation but also heterosexual supporters. Its main aim is to strive for the full legal and actual equality of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender minorities in society.[15] STUD Brno started as a student association at the Faculty of Arts at the Masaryk University in Brno.[16] In the first years its activities involved the organizations of discussion meetings which gradually moved from the Faculty of Arts to the private spaces of the association's activists. The weekly meetings were at first rather closed in their character, similar to the initial running of gay clubs. Although these meetings were promoted by leaflets at universities, one rather learnt about them from friends. At first it was not easy for an outsider to decide to participate:

> I remember how I was standing in front of that door and was thinking whether to ring the doorbell or not. I did not know what to expect, who would be there, what kind of people. Nothing. Then other girls told me that they had similar thoughts and they only rang the bell at the third time (Jitka, 23).

At the beginning, these discussion meetings were mainly the domain of gay men:

> There was always a girl who came and saw that there were no other girls so she did not come again. The next time another girl came who was also there alone. These girls did not know about each other (Jarek, 40).

However, in 2002 one of STUD's lesbian volunteers initiated a separate lesbian discussion group which has functioned regularly since then. It has gradually gathered a core of organizational activists and numerous participants. From a silent companion of the gay community, lesbian women turned into a specific autonomous group that reflects the special characteristics of its own situation and is moreover willing and able to transform its otherness into specific programmes, activities and articulations of demands within the gay and lesbian community. It is notable that in the same year the male discussion group ceased to exist due to lack of interest:

[15] See <www.stud.cz> (5 December 2006).

[16] Hence the name STUD which unfortunately also has an explicit sexual connotation in English.

> I think that this is also to a large degree due to the Internet. It is simply no longer so necessary to meet in person because there are other ways of staying in touch with people who have similar problems, face similar things. It is interesting though that the girls go and they go in a large number. It depends very much on the people. Among the boys there was no one who would be in charge and who would have a vision (Michal, 26).

In 2000 discussion meetings ceased to be the main activity of STUD Brno although they continued to be presented outwardly as its most important activity:

> People no longer feel such a need to talk about how to tell their parents, how they go through this experience, how bad they feel, as homosexuality is no longer such a burden (Martin, 26).

This shift was also reflected in the discussions themselves in which life experiences and views of various groups clashed:

> I don't know what you are talking about. Community, what do you mean? It makes me want to throw up when I think of how everybody gossips about other people (Simona, 18).

This account represents a fairly frequent notion of local gay and lesbian community. It still presupposes social ties and networks but rather the negative aspects of them are emphasized. One of the activists of STUD Brno described its change as a shift from a membership organization to a service organization:

> A membership organization like the Scouts has a large number of members and the majority of activities that are done are aimed inward. Something targeted outward is done only as a supplement (Martin, 26).

The membership phase describes the period when the major activity of STUD Brno was to organize informal discussion evenings attended by a stable circle of people who knew each other. They then created other forms of meetings for themselves, however their activities did not have the ambition to target a broader circle of participants, nor were they aimed outside of the gay and lesbian community. The service organization on the other hand is more focussed on providing services targeted at a wider imaginary community of gays and lesbians who are not necessarily members of any association. From 2001 STUD Brno has been more oriented to create specific programmes for differentiated target groups within the gay and lesbian community. The project for teenage gays is an example:

> For teenage boys there was absolutely nothing in our country. When they came to STUD everybody else was older, they had no one to talk to. Yet there are many of such boys who find out when they are, I don't know, in their teens and then where should they turn to? They will probably not talk about it at school. And often they can't tell their parents either (Petr, 28).

Differentiation of particular subgroups and activities clearly points to the multiplicity of gay and lesbian identities and reflects the non-sustainability of the simplifying notion of a single universal identity. Even in this civic environment of the gay and lesbian community there is a clear tendency to get out of the closet and isolation, attempting to mediate plurality of gay life and culture to the majority society. This happens through such activities as gay and lesbian film festivals which take place once a year in Brno and in Prague, or informative meetings at secondary schools in the form of discussions with students.

Unity has been maintained mainly for political purposes, such as lobbying for the Act on Registered Partnership which was one of the few activities that united activists from the gay as well as the lesbian communities. Everyone was aware that united power had a greater chance of success than individual efforts. At the same time even in this case there was a clear difference in priorities and strategies in the individual segments of the community. This is most marked in the case of measures on relationships with children, being one of the priorities of lesbian women, while gay men were concerned that including this issue into the negotiation strategies might jeopardize the passing of the Act.

Conclusion: Community That No One Endorses

The three spaces I have dealt with demonstrate the diachronic change of the subculture which is getting rid of its underground, secretive character as well as of an existence reduced to sexual encounters as represented by public toilets. This shift could also be understood as a change from homosexual identity towards gay and lesbian identities. The adjective "homosexual" rather reflects medical categorization, deviance and stigma that should be handled by particular specialized institutions and discoursive practices.

The concept of gay and lesbian identities in this context does not mean a proud membership in some social collectivity or movement. It rather refers to an individual coming out that encompasses a close circle of friends and family. If gay and lesbian community is characterized as a set of social outlets with different subgroups and networks, some of them institutionalized or politicized, then such community surely exists in the

Czech Republic. The sense of belonging to this community is, however, different for different individuals. Many of them don't endorse the community at all, even though they participate in it. It is not surprising then that the community is most widely endorsed by individuals who are active members of gay and lesbian non-governmental organizations.

The bar and club scene, where gay men and lesbian women meet to more or less passively consume fun, does not consider itself to be a community. This is on the one hand shedding the mechanism of exclusion and isolation which is, on the other hand, linked to the destruction of a notion of a homogeneous and unified gay (sub)culture. The gay and lesbian community is a diversified community: in the words of respondents it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of different "cliques," meaning circles of friends that meet each other mostly in their leisure time for fun, discussion of issues and problems they deal with, and for help—without an ambition to demand and exercise their opposition to the mainstream heteronormative environment.[17] While before 1989 a broader sense of belonging might have been caused by the image of the common enemy of the Communist regime, now when participation in the community has no legal barrier, the term community repels people reminding them of mandatory organizing, warrants and member fees.

Community described in this article represents a varied space and time that includes various groups of participants, creates specific types of identification with a certain group which is increasingly a group within a diverse and changing multicultural society.

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[17] Similar points are also made by Nagorna in the context of Ukraine and Gruszcýnska in the context of Poland (Nagorna 2004; Gruszcyńska 2004).

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Values Reflected in Style in a Lesbian Community in Budapest

Rita Béres-Deák

"We create a sense of identity by dressing or behaving after a particular fashion or style" (Finkelstein 1991, 1). A recent survey in Hungary found that 71% of respondents wanted to express something with their appearance, which was either their own personality or (for 26%) belonging to a certain (real or imaginary) community (Kende 2002, 73).[1] The identity expressed by style includes the acceptance or rejection of certain values and attitudes, especially in minority groups where members consider it extremely important to protect their shared value system. This paper introduces the style and values of such a community.

My study is based on research in a lesbian community formed around Labrisz Evenings. These monthly meetings started in the fall of 1997, on the initiative of a small activist group who were publishing a lesbian newsletter at the time under the title "Labrisz". Labrisz Evenings were the first organized lesbian meetings in the country that attracted a high number of people (up to 50–60 on each occasion) from all over the country, from both activist and non-activist backgrounds. The first Hungarian lesbian organization, Labrisz, also grew out of this community. Labrisz Evenings are open to every woman, and are advertised in the Labrisz Newsletter, via the Meleg Háttér gay and lesbian telephone helpline, in the gay magazine *Mások* and on various gay and lesbian Internet sites. Due to their openness, some people come more and some less regularly. Therefore, we cannot speak of a close community; however, there is a sense of belonging, especially in the more regular visitors.

As the lesbian scene became more varied towards the turn of the millennium, the regular visitors of Labrisz Evenings started to come from a relatively similar background. They are mostly young, middle-class intellectuals, which might be due to the fact that the organizers and so the topics they choose represent this layer (e.g. lesbian rights over the world, esoteric knowledge, "what would you include in a women's cultural centre?"). As the meetings take place in Budapest, it is understandable that fewer participants come from the countryside. Whereas in the first years

[1] A non-representative survey including 135 people.

there were no other women-only forums for lesbians to find friends and partners, later several parties were organized regularly and the first women's bar opened, not to speak of the numerous internet forums and home pages. Therefore, Labrisz Evenings became less a place to find relationships than an opportunity for discussion, and this also restricts the range of people visiting them.

I conducted anthropological research in this community from 1999 to 2002. Apart from participant observation and informal conversations, I conducted semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews with twenty-three women, and with ten of them I also conducted a second interview. The choice to make a second interview depended on several factors; I made a second interview when the first one was too short or did not touch upon some important issues, or when significant changes had taken place in the life of the interviewee since the first one (e.g. Gerda finished university and started working). The interviews lasted from half an hour to two and a half hours, most of them being around an hour and a half. The women I interviewed (whom I prefer to call "collaborators" rather than "informants" in order to reflect a less hierarchical relationship) shall be referred to by pseudonyms chosen by themselves.

The women I have interviewed all have (or had at the time of the interview) some ties to the Labrisz community. Only one of them, Anna, was over fifty, and two, Dia and Martin, under twenty; the rest of them were in their twenties (12) or thirties (8).[2] Eleven of them had college or university degrees, eight had secondary education, and the youngest, Martin, was still at high school.[3] Six were university students, some of them on a post-graduate level or studying to get their second degree. Only three of my interviewees lived permanently outside Budapest, but two of them (Anna and Turquoise Flannel) close enough to Budapest to come here regularly.[4] However, nine other women had left their native town or village (Gerda between the first and second interviews) to live in Budapest; most of them did so partly or wholly in order to participate in gay and/or lesbian life. Thirteen of my interviewees were members of a lesbian and/or gay and lesbian mixed organization at the time of the interviews, eleven of these (also) of Labrisz Association itself. This selection, though certainly not representative of the Hungarian lesbian scene, was quite representative of Labrisz Evenings at the time. Although the research

[2] As often several years elapsed between the two interviews with the same person, I shall not indicate exact ages.

[3] One woman's educational background is unknown.

[4] I have translated the "telling" names into English, but not the others.

was finished four years ago, I use the present tense in writing about it for simplicity's sake.

The focus of my research was the connection between lesbian style and identity. However, it soon became obvious that style also represents various community values. This paper, therefore, is the "side-product" of a larger research on style. Style is, according to the *Garland Encyclopedia of Lesbian Histories and Cultures*, a "mode of self-representation in which individuals embrace gestures, symbols, hairstyle and clothing to convey a particular sense of self. Individuals use elements of style to claim membership in lesbian communities. Collectively, lesbian style is a form of self-expression and resistance" (Stein 2000, 739).

The idea of style as self-expression is rather common in the lesbian community, and several of my collaborators feel that this is actually the only community where their "true self" can be shown. "What I enjoy among lesbians is that I don't have to make up any stories, I'm just Kinga and that's it" (Kinga), "[with heterosexuals] it's not such a deep friendship, you don't tell them this part of your life. Which is quite a big part, because—and you always have to pretend" (Kriszta). More commonly, however, the requirements of the community sometimes conflict with one's individual needs or views. The emphasis on sameness silences voices that would point out inner contradictions or exercise self-criticism, often accusing them of "giv[ing] ammunition to the enemy" (Bersani 1995, 53). Krieger (1983) describes the individual's attitude to the community as an inner conflict between the desire for being accepted as unique and the wish to be similar to others and stresses that in spite of all its benefits, community membership often constitutes a threat to personal boundaries and individuality. Some of my collaborators expressed such feelings, for different reasons. Nardis, a singer, feels excluded due to her feminine style:

> What makes me a hot woman say for a guy, will not make me a hot woman for a certain kind of woman. . . . I'm not interesting, I'm not sexy, I'm not dunno what, I'm a woman who shows what she has and because of this I'm automatically not to be categorized into the hell-of-an-intellectual part of the movement.
> I still feel that the gay community is not a home for me. I can't feel completely relaxed in it. I really enjoy frequenting parts of it, and I do get something from the gay community, but I wouldn't like to belong there (Nardis).

Nardis has another reason to feel excluded: she is one of the two self-confessed bisexuals I interviewed. Lesbian and gay communities often feel rather antagonistic to bisexuals. At best they assume that so-called bisexuals are either curious heterosexuals or homosexuals who do not

dare to come out as such (Takács 2002, 198). Others think that bisexuals cannot live without a partner of both sexes at the same time. Zoe, an attractive *femme*,[5] gave a classic example of the confused ideas concerning bisexuality in the community. She stated that "deep down everyone is bisexual." I told her I was relieved to hear this, as I had encountered a lot of prejudice against bisexuals. Zoe's passionate answer was: "Yes, because I wouldn't date a bisexual woman. Because they're promiscuous, they'll cheat on you and leave you for a guy."

Another common criticism is that bisexuals do not experience so much discrimination. Nardis herself admits "if there's real danger, I can always chicken out, back into my socially accepted category." This in spite of the fact that she is openly out and would even walk the streets hand in hand with her girlfriend, a thing many "proud" lesbians dare not do. Stereotypes about bisexuals are deeply rooted, and although the community claims to welcome bisexuals, the idea that they are "not one of us" is present, often unconsciously. Ilona, a member of Labrisz Association and self-professed feminist, faced this in her own life.

> And then it was an incredibly great experience that my sister was a lesbian. And I was proper happy about this. And time was passing, and it turned out that she was bisexual. And then I was very disappointed. So it [biphobia] is in me, too. But I think it's already something that you know you've said the wrong thing (Ilona).

The rejection of bisexuality may also originate from the second wave of feminism,[6] which had a strong impact on the style and attitude of the Labrisz community, even from a distance of over twenty years. The radical feminist movement of the 1970s considered lesbianism as essential to the challenge of patriarchy. "If you cannot find it in yourself to love another woman, and that includes physical love, how can you say you truly care about women's liberation?" (Brown 1975, 70). At the time for many women feminism was the first step towards lesbianism. In the Labrisz community this usually happens in the opposite direction: several of my collaborators became interested in feminism after coming out. In fact,

[5] The classification of lesbians into *butch* (masculine) and *femme* (feminine) is not widespread in this community, but some individuals and couples are involved in role-playing. Although the interpretation of these roles is slightly different from their "classic" American content (e.g. most of my collaborators agreed that it does not coincide with sexual roles) and might vary among individuals, I shall use these terms, as my collaborators tend to use the English words themselves.

[6] "Women who practice bisexuality today are simply leading highly privileged lives that do not challenge male power and that, in fact, undermine the feminist struggle" (Ulmschneider 1975, 88).

the founders of Labrisz Association were at the time mostly either active in the women's movement or interested in feminist theory and gender studies. This is reflected in the profile of the organization as well as its programs. Feminist issues have been in the focus of several Labrisz Evenings dealing with feminism itself, violence against women or politics. This brings up the question whether the values of this community come from "below" or are imposed by the organizers of the evenings. Talking about values, Judit, a core member of Labrisz who often moderates Labrisz Evenings, puts it the following way: "what are the community values which I have found important that we should transmit through Labrisz Evenings." Barbara, a university student and feminist, explains:

> Well, I think it's simple kinda consciousness-raising, which doesn't do any harm to anyone, I think. And those who reject it very much either have bad experiences, [or] it must be based on false ideas, because there are quite a few people who give quite a bad image of feminism (Barbara).

In short, the assumption is that all lesbians are feminists, but some do not yet know. This idea might be reinforced by the fact that even women who do not claim to be feminists dress in a style approved by those with feminist principles: the majority of the people in this community prefer trousers to skirts and dresses, have short hair and avoid elements of style expected from "feminine" women in Hungary such as make-up, plastic nails or high heels. In some cases, the reason is clearly feminist: "I think there's this feminist politics in underwear, so like if you're a feminist, you don't wear this butt-cutting stuff, what do you call it, thongs or what the heck," says Judit. In her case, association with lesbian feminists during her stay in the USA changed her style enormously: "then I thought that I can't be a lesbian like this, and I let go of part of my femininity with this, so I kind of thought that you should be much more butch." Zsófi's androgynous style is influenced by her studies in gender and queer theory: "we could suppress a little this man/woman dimension into the background and express one's personality in another way." Often, however, behind "feminist" style one finds reasons that are not political.

Firstly, the image people have of "feminist attire" might be a stereotype. Many people think that feminists have always preferred trousers to skirts, but Wilson (1985, 240) points out that it is not so: in the 1960s, feminist style adopted the then fashionable long skirt-long hair combination. The symbolic meaning of wearing trousers is also ambiguous. While often celebrated as a symbol of emancipation, several authors disagree with this view, saying that as skirts have not entered men's (mainstream) fashion, women's trousers suggest progress on male terms, keeping the

masculine as the norm (Wilson 1985, 165). Short women's hair is also associated with emancipation: the flapper of the 1920s or the Second Wave of the Women's Movement. Popular imagination is again faulty here: the flapper's emancipation is questionable, as by abandoning confining underclothes she also became a more available sexual object for men (Wilson 1985, 106); 1960s feminists, on the other hand, wore long hair and long skirts, and therefore feminist style seems to follow the "naturalist" wave in the mainstream rather than be completely independent from it (Wilson 1985, 240). At the time of my study, in the Labrisz community there was strong pressure on people towards wearing trousers and cutting their hair (I myself heard the comment "once we'll cut your hair while you're asleep" several times). Only towards the end of this period did things start to change: "several girls have turned up who do not distort themselves" and "can accept themselves having nice long hair and being feminine," observed Zoe, who had previously been almost the only long-haired person in the community. The pressure is still strong, however: Judit, who has recently started growing her hair, sees it as symbolically breaking out from the role the subculture used to force on her.

Secondly, wearing trousers rather than skirts might represent a general tendency in society. Emma recalls the 1980s: "when I came to Hungary as an outside observer when I lived abroad, what I saw was that Hungarian girls wear skirts." She points out that within the Labrisz community, it is the older generation (in their 30s and above) who can be seen in skirts: "I'm not saying that everyone who's older, but that in that generation skirts might be more widespread." When asked about lesbian style, several of my collaborators mentioned elements like piercings or boots, adding that this might also signal of belonging to other subcultures.

The style women adopt in the Labrisz community might also be a consequence of the characteristics of lesbian space. It is again Emma who points out the background of casual style:

> So the lesbians who are there, let's say, at the Labrisz [Evenings] or at the party or wherever, are mostly students. So they don't have to dress up nicely for the workplace. And if she only goes to party at Eklektika [a bar which organized women-only parties at the time], of course she won't dress up prettily. So where we meet in a lesbian environment, it very much focuses on partying and relaxing (Emma).

Emma's theory is reinforced by several women who said that they go to work in elegant clothes, but they change into "more lesbian" attire as soon as they leave their workplace. Formality is seen as constraining; the only exception is Vera, a businesswoman in her thirties, who admits that she likes to look elegant. Both she and the others are aware that she

differs from the majority of the community in this: talking about certain clothes, Emma sometimes commented that "they're already this Vera-style." For most women in the community, a division between work and free time is expressed by formal versus casual clothing. This contradicts Kalocsai's theory that politically conscious lesbians regard Labrisz Evenings as part of the public sphere, and suggests that it is rather associated with the private sphere, and can be regarded as public only to the extent that all spheres of a lesbian's life are politicized (Kalocsai 1999, 103).

Casual style also transmits the illusion of abolishing hierarchies which is part of the mythology of this community (as well as other feminist/lesbian ones) (Wilson 1985, 243). Some elements of lesbian style, such as suspender trousers or boots, are associated with the working-class, so the woman wearing them rebels against gender and class boundaries. My collaborators like to stress that Labrisz Evenings bring together women from different layers of society; we shall return to this emphasis on diversity later.

Lastly, many people do not see the avoidance of traditional femininity as a choice. "I couldn't imagine myself as feminine. Say Dia, who has perhaps a bit of an inclination towards it. She can do it, I can't," says Martin, a teenage butch, who tellingly chose a male pseudonym. Other women, who do not identify themselves as butch, also claim that, for example, wearing a skirt is alien from their nature: "it wasn't me, you see what I mean, you look into the mirror and see the skirt on you and it's not you" (Dia). "[In a skirt] I look like a very clumsy drag queen," says Stella, who gives an interesting argument to "prove" that masculine lesbians do not choose their style:

> The twist in the thing is that the majority of lesbian women say that they prefer feminine women. And preferably heterosexual and feminine women. So it is downright disadvantageous for a lesbian to look masculine and dress in a macho way. She worsens her chances, almost. But she can't help it (Stella).

Whereas masculinity is often seen as innate, femininity is considered a choice, and there is a rather negative attitude towards "traditionally feminine" women. "Then you kind of blend and don't come out as a lesbian, and it's easy to be a lesbian like this. And you see, then how much are you one at all?" Judit describes the attitude she has met in the USA. Stella goes even further and considers feminine women somewhat non-lesbian: "if somebody can stay feminine . . . because she can wear feminine clothes and stuff, what makes her a lesbian and how does she know she's a lesbian?" She herself experienced implicit pressure to dress in

a more masculine way. She and her girlfriend, living in isolation in a small village, for some time wore "more feminine" clothes like skirts or scarves, but then met some women from the city who followed this "more masculine, extravagant style" and then "this seemed more authentic what they were doing, and we managed to quickly get out [of femininity]." As a consequence of this pressure, femmes are in a difficult position and they tend to remain "moderately feminine." Zoe and Nardis both express disdain towards make-up or high heels, and Judit, who—as we have seen—gave up her more feminine style because of her (American) community's expectation, is having a hard time coming out as a femme. True, she has grown her hair and at the time of our second interview was considering buying lacy underwear, but an outsider would not categorize her as a feminine woman; when she told her straight friend that she was attracted to butches, the friend's answer was: "but they are not so much different from you."

One reason for the rejection of femininity might be that feminine clothes are usually associated with heterosexuality or the pseudo-lesbianism of "lesbian shows" in striptease bars. Red Shawl, a feminist and Marlene Dietrich-fan, says about thongs: "for me that's very heterosexual stuff, like it was invented for the sake of blokes." It is a general assumption that women who follow the heterosexual norms in clothes are not really lesbian. When some such women turned up at a lesbian party, the community immediately dubbed them "tank-top girls" and their reaction was uniformly negative. Anna, my oldest collaborator and a feminist for over a decade, says: "I can't imagine that they're lesbians. I repeat, I can imagine that for the sake of men they lay together, the two of them start so that men would take pleasure in it, but I can't imagine, their whole appearance." Judit, relating the discussion about these women, concludes: "what came down from it is that these girls are not feminists, not even really lesbians, who are they?" Even Zoe, herself a *femme*, thinks that these women are "rather bisexual." Barbara thinks these women are "very close to those girls who at a busy trendy night club get on the stage, two of them, also in these tank tops, and they start kissing and smooching, but in fact the whole thing has nothing to do with their sexual belonging. Rather the opposite."

Barbara also criticizes the sexual openness and promiscuity of these women: "during the evening I can see them pushing with each other in various configurations. I can't even follow who's with whom." Sexuality in general is downplayed in the community, and it is assumed to have a secondary role in lesbian relationships. Anna is shocked at pictures of half-naked women at an Internet lesbian website, and she finds them

a proof of "how much they don't have any information about gayness and all; that is, they show the same stereotype, that gayness is about sex. And that this is what lesbian women need, too." Conscious activists try to break down the stereotype that homosexuality is only about sex. With this, however, they deny tendencies that do exist in the community. After Zoe went to a Labrisz Evening in a miniskirt, she decided never to do it again, because "it was worse than going to some men's bar in a skirt . . . and then I said that it had been a very stupid idea." Nardis has similar experiences at lesbian parties. Macho, a transvestite butch, had a traditionally feminine woman tattooed on her breast. It seems that several lesbians have adopted the "male gaze," this way turning *femmes* and feminine women into sex objects, which might have added to the general negative attitude towards them.

As opposed to "femininity," masculine style is highly valued in the community, although very few of my collaborators identify as *butch*. Several people mentioned that they would like to wear less feminine clothes, and butches are respected, not the least because they are considered to be the most "out" in public spaces, and thus they experience more homophobia than others: "I think they have courage" (Stella), "what one gets from the straight world if one's so butch is really tough" (Judit). At the same time, some of my collaborators still feel uncomfortable about butches, either because they consider butch/femme relationships hierarchical (Anna) or because they associate butchness with masculine characteristics and aggressiveness: "I'd probably think she'll give me a few clips round the ear at home" (Red Shawl). Others dislike the fact that for the broader society the butch has become the stereotypical lesbian. "The relation of any stigmatized group to the figure that functions as its symbol and stereotype is necessarily ambiguous" (Newton 1984, 560), and this is especially true for a group that has been almost completely invisible until recently. When Labrisz Association had to be represented at a public event, someone suggested that the representative should not be bald so as not to reinforce the stereotypes.

Baldness is seen as a symbol not only of butchness but also of being out: people in this community assume that a bald woman is immediately "read" both by gay and straight observers as a lesbian "it's like shouting everywhere that I'm queer" (Anna). Therefore, shaving their hair—although almost everyone says she would like to do it—remains a distant plan for most: Hella, a hairdresser in her 30s, thinks she might do it at a time when she does not have to go to work or meet many people. Worries about losing one's job because of baldness may be well-founded: Gerda, a secondary school teacher, was given a choice either to grow her hair

at least two centimetres or leave the job. She chose the latter, because "I'm not the type who would look into the mirror afterwards for years thinking 'uh-huh, this wasn't my doing.'" This explains why, although bald women are admired in the community, not many people dare to take this radical step.

When Anna—after long consideration—shaved her head, she bought a wig which resembles her previous haircut to put on when she does not feel like exposing her baldness. Thus, unlike Gerda, she has left herself a way back into the closet. "And it's the same as with symbols, that I can always decide when to wear what." Symbols expressing one's lesbianism (pink triangles, labrys axes, the rainbow flag or the double female astrological sign) are popular in the community: several women—including Anna and Kinga—collect them, and after a visit abroad, Red Shawl distributed a large number of gay buttons at a Labrisz Evening. However, these symbols are usually only worn at gay and lesbian events, if at all. Turquoise Flannel, who lives in a village, carries her gay buttons around in her pocket for reassurance, but never puts them on. Kinga usually hides her labrys under her clothes and only takes it out at the Labrisz Evening, even though experience shows that this symbol is not well-known to outsiders. She also keeps her rainbow-coloured objects in her home, just like Nardis, who never wears her pride T-shirt in the street. Zoe realized her own limits in wearing an earring in the shape of the double female sign, when in the street she accidentally met her mother, who does not know she is a lesbian.

> And I tore it [the earring] from my ear in a panic and so it broke. And then I thought I wouldn't buy another one, because the point would be exactly that I shouldn't have to tear it from my ear, but once I have made up my mind to put it there, then I shouldn't have to take it out. Or if I can't wear it all the time, why should I wear it (Zoe)?

The few people—such as Judit or Anna—who openly wear lesbian symbols are admired, but the majority of people prefer not to look identifiably lesbian in the street. Judith Schuyf's study categorizes the followers of this style "ordinary people" because they want to show that homosexuals are not basically different from heterosexuals (Schuyf 1992, 60–61). This is similar to Eszter's motivation: "I'm a human being whose every moment and every word is determined by the fact that I see certain things differently, but they should also see that I'm simply and naturally a human being, we have a lot in common." Dia thinks that "people don't really have anything to do with it [her lesbianism], except if they're like that, too." For others, however, the reason for not wearing conspicuously lesbian symbols is fear of being "read" as lesbians: "[i]t might be para-

noia, but I assume everyone, a lot of people would know what they mean, and they would then say, oh my god, she's queer, they'd know immediately" (Kriszta). They prefer ambiguous symbols like the pinkie ring: "I used to have one, and I dared to wear it exactly because it was fashionable then" (Vera). Although being out is valued in the community and closeted people even get harsh criticism, most people limit coming out to their immediate environment.

Pinkie rings and GLBT symbols all come from the West. The perception of the "West" among GLBT people in Hungary is that of an ideal place where the life of homosexuals is much better. Judit Takács quotes a study from 1983 in which over 60% of the gay respondents had considered leaving the country (Takács 2002, 180). Although the institutions of gay/lesbian life in Hungary have developed a lot since, the attitude is not lost. When I asked Emma where those lesbians were that she mentioned as looking "extremely" butch, she answered: "they moved to Germany." Judit thinks that what we can call "lesbian style" in Hungary is in fact "impressions of Western lesbian magazines." People usually think that Western lesbians express their identity much more with their appearance but also have a "more uniform" look. The latter is often criticized, though: after a meeting where there were two foreign lesbians, Gerda rather negatively commented: "have you observed, they both had this typical lesbian-image, leather trousers and all." The Hungarian community is seen as more diverse.

When the leading figures of Labrisz are asked about community values, they always emphasize diversity: "[w]ith a lot of people there the only thing that connects us is lesbianism, but it has the interesting consequence that otherwise I would never meet such people, because I move in a different environment" (Zsófi). We have seen, however, that diversity is only tolerated within certain limits, and does not apply for certain groups like "tank-top girls," towards whom even politically correct women have strong prejudices. Also, people respected in the community are not rejected for things other women would be. "Some people don't get scorned off whatever they wear, and some people will always get scorned off, no matter how they try," Emma observes. Red Shawl's following story is a perfect illustration for how leaders of the community may be forgiven for wearing "the wrong" style.

> When she [Judit] returned to the community, I didn't even recognize her, because—partly she'd lost so much weight that I didn't recognize her face even, and she had real short hair and she was in this light dress, but what floored me was her shoes. Because she'd put on a, well, I had such plastic sandals when I was a kid. A plastic thing with bars, a sandal with bars all over. And pink! Pink! And then I was staring like who's this

> woman at all, and how on earth can she put on such sandals? And then it turned out that it was Judit, and I quickly revised my views: if she puts them on, everything is all right (Red Shawl).

Conclusion

We can conclude that community values and their manifestations in style are often contradictory. Although coming out is seen as a value, not many people put it into practice on the level of dressing. Despite the strong emphasis on acceptance and diversity, people differing too much from the norm experience strong community pressure to become less extravagant. Consequently, only highly respected members or people less attached to the community dare to deviate from the norm. "If I'd been a stranger and I'd come in, I'd have said that there were thirty identical women," Emma recalls a Labrisz Evening. Newcomers either adapt or seek another community.

What could be the future for such a community? As the research finished four years ago, we are in the rare position to answer this question. In the past four years the number of virtual and real lesbian spaces in Budapest has grown, and this has brought a variation into the lesbian scene. Lesbians have become more visible and generally more tolerated in Hungarian society, and this might have played a part in several of my collaborators becoming more out. More access to Western models, not the least due to a cable television showing "The L word," has lead to a wider acceptance of feminine style. At the same time, the number of women frequenting Labrisz Evenings has fallen dramatically to 10–15 or even fewer a night. The old regulars have mostly disappeared, including many Labrisz Association members. One reason might be that until recently the evenings took place at a new site, where there was no possibility for socializing outside the discussion, and this has downplayed the community-building function of the evenings. At the same time, the ideologically based group norms could also have played a part: a couple who are against lesbian parenting decided not to come again after they got severely scorned because of their views. Is it still possible to speak about the Labrisz community in the present tense? A challenging question, but this should be the topic of a new research.

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Living 'la vida' Internet: Some Notes on the Cyberization of Polish LGBT Community

Anna Gruszczyńska

In this text, I am going to explore various forms and meanings of the process of cyberization of Polish LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community. I will also want to analyze how cyberspace functions interchangeably as private and as public space, depending on the context. Throughout the paper, I will be commenting on the process of *being* and *becoming* lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, that is increasingly and intrinsically linked with cyberspace; looking at the Internet as a space for negotiating issues of (sexual) citizenship. In the first section, I will provide background historical information on the Polish LGBT movement, as I believe this is crucial for the understanding of the meanings of the Internet for the community at the moment. In the second section, I will concentrate on the intersections of cyberspace and the coming-out process, passing on later to the analysis of blogs. In the section that follows I will analyze briefly the presence of LGBT issues on on-line discussion boards, situating the analysis around a salient event for Polish gay and lesbian movement, that is, the Poznan March of Equality. Finally, I will talk about the meaning of the Internet for Polish LGBT organizations.

This paper grows out of two sources—on the one hand, an increasing body of literature on the relationship between various manifestations of cyberculture and queer culture/activism, on the other hand, my own experience of coming out and into the LGBT community and activism via the Internet. My own positionality—a Polish immigrant living currently in the UK—is forcing me to rethink the meaning of the cyberspace, as a home, a welcoming place of what Anne-Marie Fortier calls "ontological security" of being among kindred spirits, that is often central to the experience of both immigrants and queers (Fortier 2002, 190). As Kunstman adds in her work on the efforts of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel to establish an on-line queer community; in the case of queer immigrants, the ethnic and the sexual connectivity are interwoven, underlying yet more the concepts of sexual citizenship (Kunstman 2004). As McLelland further notes, the Internet technology provides a unique

opportunity for relationship building between individuals who are otherwise deterritorialized, diasporic and transnational (McLelland 2002, 389).

Background Information

Before analyzing queer lives in virtual space, I am going to provide some background information that is crucial to the understanding of the processes I am describing and discussing in the paper. As far as legal issues are concerned, homosexuality is legal in Poland, having been removed from penal code already in 1932. Age of consent is 15 years old, both for heterosexual and homosexual intercourse. It is not possible for same-sex couples to marry or register their relationship. When it comes to anti-discriminatory laws, Article 32 of the constitution provides only a vague clause that reads "no one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever" (Konstytucja Rzeczpospolitej Polskiej 1997). At the moment, the Polish Labor Code is the only legal act in Poland that mentions sexual orientation (Pogodzinska 2005). The prejudice of the society, both on a private and public level is still quite high. According to the most recent survey on discrimination based on the grounds of sexual orientation available),[1] about 13% of gays and lesbian experience physical violence, about one third—psychological violence. 70% hide their sexual orientation at the job and in public sphere. About one third claim that if offered the possibility, they would consider moving abroad (Raport 2004). 86% don't want their children to come in touch with gays or lesbians. 40% believe, that homosexual acts between consenting adults should be illegal, about the same number would prefer not to have any contact with gays and lesbians at all. Finally, only 4% believe that homosexuality is normal, and a further 55% claim that it is a deviation from the norm that should be tolerated but not accepted (Wenzel 2005).

Various of authors locate the beginning of the presence of homosexual issues in public discourse in Poland at the beginning of 1980s, pointing to the article of Barbara Pietkiewicz published in 1981 in the weekly *Poli-*

[1] The report was based on 632 questionnaires, of which 359 were filled in by men, 216 by women and 7 by transsexual persons, while in 50 cases the respondents did not provide information on their gender. Over 90% of respondents were between the age of 18 and 40, which could be due to the fact that most respondents were contacted in gay clubs or discos. As for sexual orientation of the respondents, 48.7% were homosexual men, 8.1% bisexual men, 22.5% lesbians, 11.7% bisexual women, 0.3% FTM transsexuals, 0.8% MTF transsexuals, and 7.9% respondents failed to provide data about their sexual orientation.

tyka (Politics), where the author described the attitudes of Poles towards homosexuality and provided a glimpse of the Warsaw gay scene (Wiech 2005, 237; Kurpios 2004). In Poland, like in most of the other countries of the Central-Eastern European region, gay and lesbian life until 1989 took place in small circles of friends (Flam 2001, 14). When discussing the possible beginning of the emergence of the gay and lesbian movement, Kurpios mentions Akcja Hiacynt (Action Hyacinth) as a crucial event for the mobilization. On the 15th of November 1985, at the order of the minister of internal affairs Czeslaw Kiszczak, Polish state security officers initiated an action of gathering files with information on homosexual men. The data were gathered between 1985 and 1987, in total 11,000 men were registered as homosexuals in the "pink archives" (Kurpios 2004).

The creation of officially recognized and legal gay and lesbian movements in Poland was only possible after 1989, when after the fall of the communist regime non-governmental organizations could freely register and gays and lesbians had a chance to emerge as new social actors (Flam 2001, 12; Zuk 2001, 45). The first gay and lesbian organization in Poland, Stowarzyszenie Grup Lambda (The Association of Lambda Groups) was registered in 1990 (Adamska 1998, 26). Branches of the association were created also in Krakow, Gdansk and Wroclaw, where the activists provided a safe meeting space, organized movie nights, parties, conferences and meetings, and published leaflets on safer sex (Adamska 1998, 111). Most of the local branches of the Association of Lambda Groups ended their activity in 1997, while some of the activists connected with the Warsaw branch created Lambda Warszawa in 1997, which was the only gay and lesbian organization between 1997 and 2001. The organization concentrated for the most part on community-based activities, that is on providing counselling and legal activities, support groups and organizing cultural events.[2]

The victory of Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (The Alliance of the Democratic Left) in parliamentary elections in 2001 seemed to announce a breakthrough point for gay and lesbian activism in Poland. During the electoral campaign, this left-wing party promised to introduce a same-sex partnership bill and anti-discrimination protection for sexual minorities. Nevertheless, the bill that would legalize same-sex partnership never materialized and in the end, the hopes connected with the Alliance of the Democratic Left were dashed (Gawlicz and Starnawski 2004, 190). In September 2001, a group of activists in Warsaw under the leadership of Robert Biedron, a member of the Alliance of the Democratic Left, creat-

[2] See <www.lambda.org.pl/warszawa> (5 December 2006).

ed the national organization Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (Campaign Against Homophobia), the first one in Poland that would focus on gay and lesbian visibility. It was also in 2001, that queer studies began functioning as an academic discipline,[3] at least informally within the circle of committed researchers, who created Kolo Naukowe Gender Studies "Nic Tak Samo" (Academic Association of Gender Studies "Nothing Is the Same") and organized the first conference devoted to queer studies in Karpacz (Basiuk, Ferens, and Sikora 2002, 12).[4]

The first successful LGBT Pride Parade in Poland occurred in May 2001 in Warsaw. The Parade was organized by Polish branch of the ILGCN (International Lesbian and Gay Culture Association). The organizers, in their official statement, called upon the Polish president to respect minority rights in Poland and reminded him that these rights are being constantly violated (Gorska 2006). Parades in 2002 and 2003 in Warsaw gathered increasing numbers of participants from all over the country, 2000 and 3500 respectively (Gorska 2006).

The social campaign organized by the Campaign Against Homophobia, called "Niech nas zobacza" (Let them see us) in the spring of 2003 was a breakthrough in terms of public visibility of gays and lesbians in Poland. The first project of this kind in Poland, "Let Them See Us" was a social advertising campaign which consisted in an exhibition of 30 photographs of ordinary looking same-sex couples (15 lesbians and 15 gay men), holding hands. The exhibition opened in four galleries (Krakow, Warsaw, Gdansk and Sosnowiec) around the country and was followed by a nation-wide billboard campaign. Each image was stamped with the words "Let them see us!" in red. The aim of the campaign was to provide positive images of gays and lesbians and also introduce the issue of sexual minority rights into public discourse (Basiuk 2004, 123). Since the campaign was financed partly by the office of the Plenipotentiary of Equal Status of Men and Women, then responsible also for protection of sexual minorities against discrimination, discussion ensued in the Polish parliament as to whether Polish taxpayer's money should be wasted on "promotion of deviations and deprivations" (Leszkowicz 2004, 20).

[3] Gay and lesbian studies are not officially recognized by the Academy of Polish Sciences. However, within the sociology or psychology departments it is at least theoretically possible to undertake research on gay and lesbian issues (Informal conversation with Jacek Kochanowski, whose Ph.D. was devoted to issues of gay identity in Poland, April 2006).

[4] As the founders of the association claim, it was impossible to register an organization at the University of Wroclaw whose name would contain words "lesbian," "gay," "queer" or "homosexual." Despite its name, the organisation deals with queer studies. See <www.nts.uni.wroc.pl> (5 December 2006).

"Let Them See Us" was a crucial moment for the presence of gays and lesbians in the public sphere. As Graff claims, "a mere few years ago gays and lesbians were still basically invisible to the heterosexual majority, at least not as an interest group with specific demands" (Graff 2006). Warkocki argues that "Let Them See Us" was a spark that started a fire, pointing out the connection between the campaign and the events in Krakow during the March of Tolerance, the first march to stir public controversy:

> There certainly exists a relationship between "Let Them See Us" and the Krakow events. Before this billboard action there were gay and lesbian parades in Polish cities, in Warsaw, to be more exact. However, it was only after this symbolic spark that introduced homosexual subjectivities into public discourse that it turned out how Poles react to any kind otherness (Warkocki 2004, 105).

The March of Tolerance was the only public event planned during the four-day festival of gay and lesbian art and culture Kultura dla Tolerancji (Culture for Tolerance), organized by a group of students from the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Kubica 2006). During the weeks preceding the planned date of the march, 7th of May, the event met with the heated opposition from the local government, city council, university authorities, local right-wing and Catholic organizations. About 1500 persons participated in the March of Tolerance. Before they were able to reach the final destination of the March, the participants were stopped by an illegal demonstration comprised of local politicians of Liga Polskich Rodzin (The League of Polish Families), members of the ultra right-wing organization Mlodziez Wszechpolska (All-Polish Youth), skinheads, football hooligans from Cracovia and Wisla (Vistula) clubs. They threw eggs and stones at the marchers, shouting "Gas the gays," "We will not give the Wawel castle away," "Deviants and perverts" (Kubica 2006).

Public resistance to the increasing visibility of gay and lesbians was growing in tandem with the emergence of nationalist and xenophobic feelings connected to Poland's entrance into the European Union in 2004, as well as the rise of right-wing political forces. Over a month after the march in Krakow, Lech Kaczynski, the mayor of Warsaw, cancelled the Warsaw Pride in June 2004 mentioning security reasons, and the possibility of danger to public health and morality, as reasons for the cancellation. One thousand demonstrators held a rally in protest against the ban.[5]

In November 2004, as a reaction to the attack on the March of Tolerance in Krakow and the ban of Warsaw Pride, the first March of Equality

[5] See <www.paradarownosci.pl> (5 December 2006).

was held in Poznan, as part of Days of Equality. The March took place despite the protests of right-wing parties and Church authorities claiming that the march would be "promoting homosexuality which is a serious disease" (Kowalczyk 2005, 42). On the day of the March the participants managed only to cross the street, before they were attacked by a group of right-wing protesters who threw eggs and lemons, and shouted "Gay trash, get your hands away from the children," "Lesbians and faggots are ideal citizens of the European Union," "Healthy Poles are not like that." The police turned the participants back to the starting point and informed that their safety could not be guaranteed should the march be continued (Kowalczyk 2005, 41).

In May 2005, the Mayor of Warsaw, Lech Kaczynski, banned the Warsaw Pride for the second time, claiming that the parade would interfere with the unveiling of a statue to General Stefan Rowecki who was a leader of the Polish underground during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw in the Second World War (Baczkowski 2005). The organizers tried using every legal resource possible to undo the decision of the Mayor, which violated the freedom of assembly guaranteed by the Polish constitution, albeit unsuccessfully. On the 12th of June about 3,000 demonstrators defied the ban, thus recurring to civil disobedience. The presence of then vice-Prime Minister Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka as well as European MPs from the Green Party, Claudia Roth and Volker Beck, made it possible for the participants to march through the streets of Warsaw, under police protection from right-wing March opponents, who were throwing eggs and bottles and tried to block the streets (Baczkowski 2005). As Graff remarks, in the fall of 2005 the issue of freedom of assembly for representatives of sexual minorities and organizations supporting sexual minorities became one of the key themes of the presidential elections, where the candidate's attitude towards sexual minorities served as a litmus test for his views on modern democracy, Poland's westernisation, freedom of speech and "traditional values" (Graff 2006).

Lech Kaczynski, now president of Poland, representative of the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc (Law and Justice) began his presidential campaign by producing a widely-publicized leaflet entitled "Catholic Poland in Christian Europe," which elaborated on his desire to build a Catholic Poland, based on strong moral principles. The leaflet listed two previous bans of Warsaw Pride (in 2004 and 2005) among his successes in the fight against "demoralization." Kazimierz Ujazdowski, representative of Law and Justice, when appointed as the minister of culture, openly called for "no tolerance for homosexuals and deviants," adding "Let's not mistake the brutal propaganda of homosexual attitudes with calls for

tolerance. For them our rule will indeed mean a dark night" (quoted in Kowalczyk 2006). Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, appointed by Law and Justice as the Prime Minister, in one of the first interviews after winning the elections advocated introducing a bill that would prohibit homosexual teachers from teaching in public schools.[6] The ban of the Poznan March came only a month after the elections, becoming a symbol of the new political regime.

The Poznan March of Equality was one of the events planned for the second series of the Days of Equality in Poznan. Four days before the planned date of the march, that is, on the 15th of November, the Poznan Mayor refused to issue a permit for the march, arguing that the march would cause "significant danger to public morality and property" (Graff 2006). A day before the planned date of the march, after all legal attempts to undo the Mayor's decision had failed, the Poznan March organizers took the decision to go through with the demonstration, since the ban violated the freedom of assembly guaranteed by the Polish constitution. The police brutally broke up the peaceful demonstration and arrested 68 participants (out of about 500). The events in Poznan sparked a huge wave of protests against the attack about democratic principles in Poland and a discussion on the freedom of assembly and sexual minorities' rights.

Coming Out in Cyberspace

Owing to the history of oppression, marginalization and exclusion that LGBT individuals have faced because of their sexual orientation, the social vacuum of anonymity provided by the Internet has contributed towards a tremendous rise in its popularity amongst sexual minorities, and the situation in Poland is no exception (Garry 1999). Woodland calls cyberspace a "distinctive kind of 'third place'" for many gay and lesbian people: "These on-line 'queer spaces' . . . are 'third places' in combining the connected sociality of public space with the anonymity of the closet" (Woodland 2000, 418). As such, they are relatively "safe" spaces to encounter and experiment with a queer identity—an experimentation that might carry over into real life. As Kunstman notes:

> [T]he . . . feeling of security is mediated by the very nature of interactions on-line, which are based on complicated games of anonymity and intimacy, privacy and disclosure. In the case of closeted gays and lesbians, for example, cyberspace can provide an

[6] Legally, the introduction of such bill would be against the Polish constitution and the Polish Labour Code.

opportunity to meet the like-minded and perform one's sexuality (albeit virtually), while remaining anonymous (Kunstman 2004).

Polish gay and lesbian Internet started around 1996, with the creation of the first gay portal, called "Innastrona" (Different page). The first lesbian portal appeared around 1997, and was called "Inny Krakow" (Different Krakow). Both titles are connected with a Polish phrase "different love" which rather euphemistically encodes homosexuality. In 1998, the first lesbian mailing list, POLLES, was created on a free American server. The virtual friendships that formed through the list soon transformed into meetings, picnics, relationships and affairs, with the list being crucial for women from small towns and villages who had had no access to LGBT services previously (Gorska 2006). As Podgorska claims, the Internet has given Polish gays and lesbians a sense of community and the possibility of contact with the outside world. It is a way of locating gay- and lesbian-friendly services such as clubs, helplines, travel offices, sympathetic lawyers, psychologists and gynaecologists, and up-to-date information on events relevant to the LGBT community (Podgorska 2004).

As LGBT services and organizations in Poland are established only in a few bigger cities (Warsaw, Krakow, Poznan and Wroclaw) and readily accessible information about lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender persons, free of value judgements and homophobic attitudes is practically absent from mainstream publications and the educational system, the Internet is very often the point of departure for many individuals' coming out process. Since gays and lesbians do not seem to be worthy of being awarded full citizenship status, remaining in cyberspace seems to be a forced strategy of survival in the face of rampant public homophobia, and so countless private queer lives can be lived fully only in their virtual, on-line version (Weseli 2006). The quintessential rite of passage, memorialised in so much of gay and lesbian literature, used to be entering a gay and lesbian bar, in order to find connections to the hidden world, unveiled in cigarette smoke and the thrill of the forbidden. Now the connection can be established at the click of the mouse, which does not mean that the moment of mirroring one's own experience has become any less dramatic. The experience of Baszka, a 52-year old lesbian, quoted by Podgorska in an article on the situation of lesbians in Poland, is one of countless examples of searching for identity through the Internet: "At last, three years ago [I] dared to type that word 'homosexuality,' into Google. Two million pages. Then [I] typed: lesbian. One million pages. Oh my God, [I] thought, this world exists after all" (quoted in Podgorska 2004).

Since mainstream culture is reluctant to include queer content, like any person becoming part of a culture, gays or lesbians have to learn the ways of being, knowing, and acting socio-discoursively within the community:

> Scratch the surface of most coming-out narratives and you find a story of literacy, about someone reading between the lines of the culture's texts in search of some scraps that may speak to her or his desires. Recent generations talk of scanning the web for coming-of-age while coming-out stories or trying on different personas in a chat room before physically occupying any queer space in public. This unique dynamic works somewhat like a large-scale social science experiment: Let's find out what happens when a social group is so effectively silenced and isolated that each prospective member must to some extent initiate her- or himself into the group (Linne 2003, 669).

Among the proliferation of LGBT-themed websites, one can find the latest news, personal ads, mailing lists for teenagers, future "rainbow parents." Above all, the Internet facilitates personal contacts; in particular for gays and lesbians from small villages or towns, the Internet is the only place where they can feel safe. They cannot talk to their own friends or family, but when chatting, they can meet other queers and lesbians from all around the world.

Cultural Empowerment

Alexander, analysing the content of gay and lesbian themed websites notes that the Internet provides a wealth of opportunities for exploring how a variety of queers construct, represent, and articulate their own understanding of sexuality, sexual orientation, and sexual politics (Alexander 2004). In this section I want to concentrate on a particular example of self-representation on the Web, that is, blogs,[7] which constitute a new form of personal media (Kim 2005, 101–102). Landa comments that it should come as no surprise that many homosexuals choose to express their desires more openly through their cyber identities, and that there should be such a high proportion of lesbian and gay blogs, since many on-line diaries: "perhaps bespeak an obscure, unspoken attempt at coming out; at achieving a self-revelation which would allow them to make their private and public selves coincide and hence put an end to the ten-

[7] The term "blog" is a contraction of "Web log." A blog is a website where entries are made in journal style and displayed in a reverse chronological order. Blogs often provide commentary or news on a particular subject, such as food, politics, or local news; some function as more personal on-line diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, web pages, and other media related to its topic (Scott 2006).

sion inevitably deriving from concealing important aspects of one's personality" (Landa 2005, 106).

Blogs are another possibility for expression for those belonging to marginalized groups, whose voice is not always compatible with the politics of mainstream culture. They offer one of the few opportunities to write about one's own experiences without the constant stress related to coming out and the possibility of rejection by one's family and peers. Thanks to the possibility of publishing commentaries, as well as relative control over the commentaries, the authors of on-line diaries receive support from other Internet users and in this way can compare and confront their experiences from other persons belonging to minority groups, thus aiding them in the formation of their (queer) identity (Radwan 2005, 23). Blogs can often help to find one's own voice, even though it may not fit any of the pre-established social categories, as seen in the following two examples from the countless LGBT-themed blogs:

> We, a regular 2+2 family, two adults, two kids, daily problems, bills to pay, some pets such as hamsters, dreams, plans for the future, dilemmas what to cook for lunch and where to find some additional money for entertainment. . . . You could even say we are a very nondescript, usual Polish family, if it hadn't been for one single detail—our home is extremely feminized, there's no male element, because all of us are women.[8]

> I was born a long time ago with XX chromosomes, or at least this is what everybody around thought of me. For the past ten years I have been in a body that has been subjected to a number of necessary changes. All of this would have been impossible, if it hadn't been for my own determination and medical progress. Today I am a normal guy, maybe not exactly very happy about what I can see daily in the mirror, but for you, my dear readers, I am unrecognisable today in the street, you'd never know about my past if I hadn't started to write down this blog.[9]

Furthermore, it is not only the writer that benefits from creating the blog, it is also the readers. Blogs breaching upon the subject of gay and lesbian relationships and families can provide a safe setting for awareness-raising experience. Radwan comments that the use of blog is particularly valuable in the case of transsexual persons,[10] who write about their experiences from the pre-op period, the operation itself, post-op life and about their intents of trying to find a place in a world that operates strictly on the binary gender system (Radwan 2005, 24). It is quite un-

[8] See <http://les-rodzina.blog.pl/archiwum/?rok=2005&miesiac=7> (5 December 2006)

[9] See <http://www.transseks-km.blog.pl/> (5 December 2006).

[10] Examples of such blogs are: <http://transseks-km.blog.pl>, <https://transseks-nadia.blog.pl>, <http://transatlantyk.blog.pl>, <https://ono.blog.pl>.

likely to find those stories in the media or in schoolbooks, except maybe in their sensationalized versions.

When The Discourse Awakens

Moving away from the solely personal aspect of queer cyberspace, it can also function as a space for plurality of opinions, providing thus a chance for awakening the discourse on the taboo issue that has largely been silenced: the social exclusion of gays and lesbians. As Gawlicz and Starnawski claim, as a result of "awakening the discourse," one can observe a marked shift in terminology, an attempt to move the discussion on homosexuality from the realm of biology, medicine, psychology and re-frame it in terms of human rights and social pluralism (Gawlicz and Starnawski 2004, 180). Interestingly, cyberspace has provided an opportunity for free expression not only for gays and lesbians but also a safe haven for homophobes and thus one can talk of witnessing two parallel and interrelated processes, not only the awakening of gay and lesbian-friendly attitudes but also the awakening of homophobia.

In this section, I am going to provide an analysis of comments posted on an on-line forum as a reaction to articles on the Poznan March of Equality in November 2005 appearing between 16 and 25 November 2005, that is, from the moment that the decision about the cancellation of the March of Equality by the city authorities was made public till about a week after the march, when the discussion was slowly winding down. During those days, the pace of the discussion was really hectic, while articles on the March appeared daily on the front page of the newspaper. I chose this particular method because discussion forums, especially those on the sites of the biggest Polish national dailies, seem to enjoy enormous popularity, furthermore, a virtual discussion forum can also serve as a "laboratory" of attitudes and beliefs, as Internet users have become more and more diversified as a group in terms of their social status, religious or political beliefs. As Gawlicz and Starnawski report on their research of discussion forums during the debate on same-sex partnerships in Poland in the summer of 2002, within a couple of hours from posting an article related to gay and lesbian issues, one can expect a torrent of a couple of hundred e-mails (Gawlicz and Starnawski 2004, 179).

As Graff claims, in the fall of 2005 the phrase "gay parade" and the question "should it, or should it not, have been banned?" became one of the key themes of the presidential elections. The question was not framed as a joke, after all, a candidate's attitude towards sexual minorities served

as a litmus test for his views on modern democracy, Poland's westernisation, freedom of speech and "traditional values" (Graff 2006). The nation is a homogeneous creation, and so Kowalczyk in her analysis of the events surrounding the March of Equality in Poznan notes how public gay and lesbian events disturb and dismantle the carefully sustained fiction of homogeneous Polishness, untainted by abject Otherness, be it homosexuality, disability, difference in religion or skin colour (Kowalczyk 2005, 41). In fact, conservative rhetoric skillfully links "instinctive" dislike of sexual "deviance" with heart-felt Polish patriotism, a sense of belonging, as evident in a quote from the Internet forum I analysed:

> As a citizen of Poland I demand respect for my majoritarian beliefs and the protection of my children against demoralization. . . . [T]hose who are ashamed of living in a country which is as backward as Poland—the gates of the EU are open for them. Maybe unemployment in Poland will be smaller when the Europeans leave for where it is nice, tolerant and free (viola33, 28 November 2005).

According to Marody and Mandes, in Poland, religion was (and still is) the main source of collective rituals through which the national identity was formed and is sustained in Polish society (Marody and Mandes 2005, 17). The importance of religion in the construction of national identity has been salient during the EU accession process. Thiele claims the conservative right perceive Poland's entry into the EU as an opportunity to reintroduce Catholic-Christian values to the mostly secular societies of Western Europe, where Poland profiles itself as the new religious-conservative power in the Union (Thiele 2003). Graff also notes that some of the prominence of homophobic attitudes in Poland can be seen as a reflection of national pride and the notion of Poland as an island of "normalcy" in the sea of Western European degeneracy. Another argument is connected with the claim that homosexuals already have more power than heterosexuals, while gays are conspiring to dominate EU politics, to destroy religion and the traditional family (Graff 2006). There are a number of posts on the forum, which support the above claims:

> I am of the opinion that the existence of similar "homoparades," faggot marriages etc. in the countries of the old EU is not an argument that should lead to allowing something like that in [Poland]. We are a beautiful country, with a Catholic tradition and we should not waste that. I can just say one thing to the arse holes from the EU: "if you can't fight us, join us. Maybe it's time your society and laws got normal again?" I am a regular citizen, for whom the authorities and the police provided safety. . . . EU has nothing to say in here, fortunately we live in a Catholic country that is capable of having its own opinion and will not adjust in every issue to the ideas of EU (drhuckenbush, 20 November 2005).

> I have a right to be a Catholic and not to like pederasts. I have a right to consider them to be deviants and not to employ them in my company (filo_de_putino, 27 November 2005).

Another salient issue concerning links between (homo)sexuality and national identity is that of citizenship. According to Patricia Wood "citizenship can be described as both a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic) and a bundle of rights and duties (civil, political and social) that define an individual's membership in the polity" (Isin and Wood 1999, 4). Citizenship is at the same time an exclusionary and inclusionary concept, never expanded to all members of any polity (Isin and Wood 1999, 20) As Richardson argues, claims to citizenship status are closely associated with the institutionalization of heterosexual as well as male privilege (Richardson 1998, 88). She adds further, that even though lesbians and gay men may eventually be afforded certain rights, "lesbians and gay men are granted the right to be tolerated as long as they stay within the boundaries of that tolerance, whose borders are maintained through a heterosexist public/private divide" (Richardson 1998, 89). Within the prevailing Polish nationalist discourse, gays and lesbians, if acknowledged at all, can only be citizens if they remain invisible as "good" citizens and do not claim "special privileges":

> For sure, it is not about discrimination of disabled persons or discrimination on the basis of political or religious beliefs. The thing is that the aim of the march was to demonstrate sexual difference, sexual deviance, which are not and cannot be accepted by the majority, the healthy part of Polish society (kaisy7, 20 November 2005).

When it comes to citizenship, within its heteronormative understanding, rights and duties connect and the promotion of the common good is located within the private sphere of the nuclear family. Rights are dependent upon evidence of common good, and follow from responsible behaviour (Goldberg-Hiller 2000, 43). Within this logic, homosexual citizens, presumably hedonistic and childless, are accused of aggravating the low demographic rates and contributing towards the danger of "true" Poles being replaced by racial "others":

> You are the reason there are fewer and fewer Poles born that will lead to financial trouble because there will be nobody to work and so new workers will have to be brought in. The cheapest ones and unfortunately they won't be our neighbours from the East but Turks, Arabs and other animals from Africa (vitmik, 25 November 2005).

The anxieties regarding visibility of homosexuals can be viewed as responses to processes of social and cultural change (Epstein 1994, 43):

> There is a saying—give them a finger, they'll want a hand . . . in a year they will demand a Love parade. We will join the West but in terms of vulgarity and sexual anomalies. Does the fact that we live in a democratic country force us to follow the example of other countries? Can't we live in our own way? What do I care about the ideas other countries might have? All the time we are following the West, and not living like a free country with their own ideas (viola33, 1 December 2005).

> What kind of Poznan do we want? We want a city, which is quiet and righteous, where order and the decisions of city authorities are respected. Where the extremists are not imposing their point of view on the majority of city inhabitants and do not insult people under the guise of fighting for tolerance. If "Europeanness" means fights, drugs, prostitution and intolerance for values respected by most of the inhabitants then I don't want such a Europe (XL, 26 November 2005).

Epstein notes the prevailing link made between homophobia and anticommunism, where homosexuals and communists pose serious threats to the prevailing social and sexual order (Epstein 1994). This link is also made in numerous claims about the existence of a powerful "homosexual lobby" apparently supported by the West:

> Those "homosexuals" are just a guise for commies who do not have other salient issues once they suffered such a defeat, so they found for themselves "fight for gay rights." . . . Under the guise of "freedom, equality, tolerance," they want to transport to Poland "new, secular traditions" which rule in the Euro-Soviet Union. . . . Everything adds up to some new totalitarianism. . . . In Sweden or France there is such a phobia of homophobia that they can even lock you up if you say that homosexuality is not normal. In my opinion, treating disease as something natural . . . is dangerous and can lead to the failure of our civilization and in twenty years we'll have situation like in France now (bocian, 22 November 2005).

> I want to live in a normal city where I won't be afraid to walk in the centre and that suddenly a weird pederast will jump up in front of me and attack me with his dick. I don't want to be bothered in the name of equality and vaguely understood tolerance by hordes of homo-terrorists (wielgus, 23 November 2006).

While cyberspace seems to have provided a safe haven for homophobes, it also offers an opportunity of free expression for gay- and lesbian-friendly voices marginalized within mainstream discourse (Gawlicz and Starnawski 2004, 182):

> The situation with the Poznan March of Equality is really embarrassing, everybody in the West is laughing at Poland and protesting. Have the politicians lost their minds completely? How can you forbid a legal march? And why, instead of protecting gays, are the politicians fighting with them? It's absurd, a real nightmare. . . . Why does Poland always have to be so retarded (pyorunochron, 26 November 2005).

> I feel like crying when I am looking at what happened in Poznan. I was hoping that after the march was cancelled in Warsaw there won't be any more similar attacks on democracy in Poland.[11] I am ashamed, not to mention the intolerance. As you can see, the EU was not really meant for us, maybe we should just shake hands with Lukashenko. I am sad and ashamed for Poland (eastpaka 20 November 2005, 00:37).

Even though by analysing discussion forums one can find really homophobic utterances, which could suggest that the discussion forum are dominated by this type of argument, persons striving for the equality of homo- and heterosexuals were actually in majority. First of all, basically all homophobic messages were immediately answered and commented upon, in order to show that the homophobic postulates don't make any sense. For instance, when some persons argued that homosexuality is an individual caprice, caused by social conditioning, it was shown, that the aetiology of homosexuality has neither relevance to the discussion nor to the decisions taken by homosexual persons. One could also notice general resistance to the sexualized image of homosexual persons, at the same time, persons involved in the debate were trying to point out that the discussion refers to barriers gays and lesbians encounter in their daily life "far away from their beds." One could also observe examples of "just anger," that demonstrate outrage at putting persons belonging to sexual minorities into a symbolic and societal ghetto (Basiuk 2004, 150). An unexpected and positive outcome of the discussion in cyberspace was the emergence of collective subjectivity of gays and lesbians and the emergence of plausible political strategies. For instance, gays and lesbians were presented as persons whose votes might be important, thus not only waking up the emancipatory discourse but also empowering the participants to act together and for instance create a database of sympathetic psychologists or support the activities of existing LGBT organizations.[12]

[11] This comment refers to Warsaw Pride, which was cancelled in June 2005 by Lech Kaczynski, then mayor of Warsaw, now Poland's resident. Despite the cancellation, about 10,000 participated in an illegal march, together with representatives of German Green party and Poland's then vice-Prime Minister, Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka.

[12] The Internet forums enjoy a rather dubious legal status. While praising the freedom of speech, the big portals hosting Internet forums often preface each with a set of rules; for instance, the gazeta.pl forums includes a disclaimer it is not permitted to publish posts that are illegal, incite hate on the basis of race, religion or ethnicity or propagate violence. Homophobia, however, is nowhere specifically addressed, there are also no viable legal sanctions against persons uttering homophobic remarks, be it in virtual space or in "real" space. Furthermore, the category of hate crime does not exist in Polish law, and the media law does not address issues of homophobia, either.

Cyber-organizing

At the same time, the Internet has very often served as a springboard for LGBT initiatives and activism. This is where the organisations look for volunteers, provide information about their on-going activities and present their projects. The Internet also serves as a tool for networking, both at the national and the international level. It is also an extremely useful and often powerful tool for monitoring the media, and serves as a place for public discussions on LGBT issues, especially in the case of visibility campaigns.[13] The Internet is an invaluable tool for the day-to-day operation of LGBT organisations. First of all, because of difficulties with securing funding, most LGBT organizations do not have a physical office, and almost all activity is coordinated via mailing lists, with the participants being spread all over the country (and sometimes all over the world).[14] There is also quite a trivial, but not insignificant aspect to communication via the Internet—it is simply cheaper, and some of the groups established in mid-90. had to be dissolved only because their members could not bear the financial burden of long-distance and international calls, and so, for instance, Kowalska attributes the downfall of the Association of Lambda Groups to the lack of a communication infrastructure (Kowalska 2006).

Kowalska sees the emergence of the Internet as freeing local initiative and enabling local groups to communicate, and thanks to the absence of censorship and the luxury of anonymity to build a positive image of gays and lesbians. As Kowalska claims, the Internet enabled the community to consolidate and more importantly, to effectively lobby and also gain international cooperation (Kowalska 2006). Cyberspace allows not only the planning of successful projects, it is also a tool to conduct those projects, especially when politicians and journalists need to be addressed urgently. In the cases of homophobic utterances of politicians and public persons, a mass-mailing action can be started immediately, and the message can be spread through various portals and discussion lists (Piatek

[13] Notably, three Polish LGBT portals at the moment—<www.homiki.pl>, <www.innastrona.pl> and <www.lesbijka.org>—are acting as informal watch-dogs, monitoring the press and news for instances of homophobic utterances.

[14] A perfect example of this phenomenon is the Lesbian (LBT) Coallition (see <www.porozumienielesbijek.org>), which is an informal group comprising over a hundred women in Poland and abroad, who coordinate their actions via a yahoo group. One should also remark on the numerous mailing lists of umbrella organisations such as ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association) or IGLYO (International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organziation) that function transnationally and allow for very quick communication between partners in various countries, especially when the occasion necessitates an international mass-mailing campaign.

2004). Mass-mailing is also employed by international organisations offering their support to Polish LGBT initiatives, as was the case with the Krakow March for Tolerance or Warsaw Pride. Cyberspace is the only place to find up-to-date information, which in the case of LGBT projects is of crucial importance. In cases of more controversial projects, venues have been known to withdraw at the last moment, and officials have refused to grant permission to hold events. This was the case with Warsaw Pride in 2005 and the Poznan March of Equality in 2005, where the organizers communicated their battle to hold a legal demonstration, and when that failed, their appeal to civil disobedience through the website.

In my concluding remarks, I will comment briefly on what was my starting point for this paper, and, probably contrary to expectations, it did not occur to me to "Google" my key-term, cyberization (I did that only later). My primary point of reference was a conceptual piece by Sarajevian artist, Vanja Hamzić, entitled "Cyberization III" which presents dozens of gay-related URLs (mostly gay dating websites) in black, arranged horizontally on top of one another. Some of the letters in the URLs are in colour and if the viewer is patient enough, he or she can make out from these letters words such as *love*, *passion* and *happiness*, emotions hidden within the cyberworld. The piece was a great, yet disturbing comment on the process of cyberization of the LGBT community, producing lives that could only be fully experienced on-line. Thus, through my paper I have been trying to show multi-dimensional aspects of cyberspace, stressing its positive aspects, as well as pointing out to a constant interaction and negotiation between activities undertaken in cyberspace and in the so called "real world."

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"East" Berlin: Lesbian and Gay Narratives on Everyday Life, Social Acceptance, and Past and Present

Frédéric Jörgens

Seventeen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, it seems odd to speak of a sociological article concerning gay and lesbian everyday life in East Berlin.[1] For many in Berlin, speaking of the Eastern and Western parts of the city no longer makes sense. For others, being gay or lesbian rather than straight has become a *non-issue* here. However, East Berlin constitutes an interesting case to look at in considering continuity and change in everyday lives at several levels of identity construction. In the context of this book, Eastern Germany shares the historical heritage of the post-war Eastern Block. The Soviet past with its range of social and political experiences continues to carry some meaning when today we refer to Central and Eastern European countries. The East German case is different in many respects, most and foremost in that, as early as 1990, it was politically absorbed into the West and ceased to be a political unit altogether. This specificity has also affected the development of lesbian and gay culture and the conditions for lesbian and gay everyday life in a way that differs from those of other Central and Eastern European countries. Commentators have pointed to the East German gay and lesbian culture having been quickly absorbed by the West German 1990s culture, a period that coincided with an increasing acceptance of homosexuality in West German society, politics, media and law (Holy 2001, 61). After reunification, debates on homosexuality and society, and same-sex marriage in particular, have to a large extent been dominated by West German media and politicians. Lesbians and gays in the Eastern part of Berlin have lived these changes in reference to the national level, but have equally experienced the melting of East and West Berlin's les-

[1] For comments on the draft I am grateful to Johan Andersson and Kevin Inston. Special thanks to numerous friends in Berlin for their support. I am deeply indebted to those who kindly agreed to participate in my interviews. Most of the material used in this article is part of a larger sociological research project on the recognition of same-sex partnership in France, Germany, Italy and the UK, for which over 50 interviews have been conducted on lesbian and gay views on legal and social change concerning homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

bian and gay cultures which today are only rarely distinguished in those terms. However, in the East, a historically strong presence of lesbian and gay culture and meeting places has persisted in specific neighbourhoods such as in Prenzlauer Berg. In this sense, social change and a strong local lesbian and gay culture have marked the everyday lives of lesbian and gays in the Eastern part of Berlin in the past two decades.

In this chapter, no attempt will be made to reconstruct historical change in gay and lesbian culture in Berlin. Neither will the work of associations and political developments concerning LGBT themes be addressed in any satisfactory way. Instead, the everyday life of gays and lesbians is the central concern here. Lesbian and gay narratives will be based on a select number of interviews conducted in the Eastern part of Berlin. The respondents have all been approached in gay and lesbian bars in East Berlin between 2003 and 2006 and in one way or another, all identify with an "Eastern" life experience.[2] Their discourses are not to be seen as representative of the lesbian and gay bar scene of East Berlin, let alone of lesbians and gays more generally. Neither are the respondents' historical or social observations to be seen as factual information on events or trends. Instead, their narratives and experiences will be used to address specific themes related to questions of homosexual identity, acceptance and social change. First, the context of East Berlin, East Germany, and Berlin today will be addressed. In section two, the ways in which gay and lesbian identities are constructed and managed in everyday social settings will be explored. Finally, section three will return to the question of past and present in the respondents' narratives on history and change.

The Context: East Berlin, East Germany, Berlin

East and West Germany had parallel developments in matters of homosexuality that cannot easily be read as black and white. In the legal context, during the post-war period, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) had at least nominally been more progressive in decriminalizing homosexuality: the discriminatory §175 and §175a on homosexual acts were abolished through consecutive reforms in 1950, 1957, 1968 and

[2] Seven respondents were contacted in the East Berlin borough of Prenzlauer Berg, four women and three men aged between 20 and 71, at the bars Stiller Don, Schall und Rauch, and Amsterdam in 2003 and 2006. They were approached according to criteria ensuring age and gender diversity, and in the case of two interviews conducted in 2006 also according to their GDR-origin. Beyond these categories, they were approached on a random basis, i.e. they were people who happened to be there. The interviews were semi-structured, tape recorded, all conducted by the author, and lasted between 40 and 90 minutes.

1988.[3] In West Germany, in contrast, the highly repressive form of the paragraph introduced in the period of National Socialism had been left untouched until as late as 1969.[4] Thereafter, scrapping the remaining weaker form of §175, which stipulated an older age of consent for homosexual acts than for heterosexual ones, constituted a continuous aim of gay and lesbian movements and was achieved only after reunification, in 1994.[5]

Culturally, however, the lesbian and gay scene of East Germany mostly appeared less vibrant, to say the least. There was nothing there comparable to the bars and discotheques that became fundamental experiences in lesbian and gay lives in Hamburg, Cologne or West Berlin. According to commentators, the absence of a commercial homosexual subculture is what characterized its main difference from the West.[6] As one of the respondents, who worked as a protestant priest in the GDR, remembers:

> I think it has become very much alike. . . . There is a considerable difference, I think, to the gay life in those days in the GDR, which worked on a purely private basis and through friendships, without associations and advertisement. You simply met in private groups, or there was someone who knew someone else, and that was it. It was new to us that gay life, in whatever way, could be commercially based, or even exclusively work commercially (Thorsten, 71).[7]

Very few homosexual bars existed, such as the Schoppenstube in Prenzlauer Berg. Instead, private circles and homosexual associations tolerated within the structures of the Protestant church constituted a large part of the East German "homosexual scene" (Holy 2001, 60; Herrn 1999).

[3] The decision in 1950 to return to the Weimar Republic version of §175 implied a lower maximum penalty (6 months and 5 years respectively). In 1957, the possibility of non-prosecution was introduced if the homosexual act did not represent "a danger to the socialist society," which in practical terms ended the prosecution of homosexual acts between consenting adults. In 1968, the new penal code of the GDR mentions only a higher age of consent (18) for both male and female homosexual acts, namely 18 years. After a judgement of the Higher Court in 1987, the GDR parliament finally abolished this specific law concerning the age of consent for homosexual acts (Stümke 1989; and overview at <www.juraforum.de/jura/specials/special/id/15965/> (5 December 2006)).

[4] Until the legal reform of 1969, about 50,000 men were condemned on the basis of §175 in the Federal Republic of Germany. The 1935 law was confirmed by the West German Constitutional Court in 1957. Ibid.

[5] Ibid. In 1969 the age of consent for consenting homosexual acts was at 21, brought down to 18 in 1973.

[6] As the gay activist Rudolf Klimmer noted in 1968: "Despite this progressive legislation homosexual life in the GDR has not changed . . . few forms of visibility, no magazines and clubs" (Holy 2001, 58f). All translations by the author.

[7] All names are changed. Age at time of interview.

So did cruising areas. As Matthias Kittlitz, an East German gay activist, puts it: "As a gay man, you knew where you could go . . . to meet people" (Grau 2001, 73). Beyond looking for sex, cruising places arguably had larger social functions, in contrast to those in the West.[8] But for many, the existence of a colourful and very visible lesbian and gay culture on the other side of the wall equally constituted a particular reference point in forging gay identities within East Germany. As another gay activist says: "A GDR-citizen, in his walled-in situation, was simultaneously always living with a real Utopia . . . namely the one beyond the wall."[9]

Beyond the legally comparatively progressive stance there had also been a significant cultural development towards the integration of homosexual perspectives into GDR culture, at least during the 1980s. In the very last years before the fall of the Wall, this development was symbolized by the production of the GDR film *Coming Out*, which was a state sanctioned critical review of a young gay teacher's life in East Berlin.[10] Incidentally, the film "premiered on the very evening that the Wall was breached" (Kersten 1993, 227) and the East German debate on cultural inclusion of homosexuality was overtaken by the macro-events.

For young respondents, such as Daniel, a 25 year-old student, the social change and the open presence of gay culture was an event of the 1990s, with the opening of bars and clubs:

> D: I have only experienced Berlin in the 90s, after the Wende.[11] Well, I'm from the GDR, so I might perhaps have a different background. You notice it here in the neighbourhood in Prenzlauer Berg, you've got bars opening. Those are all developments that took place in the 90s. Before that it was somewhat in a sleazy corner.[12] Well, I don't personally know so, but I have talked about it with many people. I would say that [now] there is a lot on offer. . . . Maybe not in the outskirts of Berlin, but if it is part of the cityscape that there are couples holding hands in the streets, then after a while it doesn't bother anyone any more. I mean, somewhere in the province in Brandenburg[13] it would still be bad, but not here. Not here.
> FJ: Do you think that the 90s, or rather, that the Wende was the crunch [in this development]?
> D: Yes, for the East of course, yes. But I think the development was there also before, in the West, it developed in parallel ways, so to speak. In the East you just noticed it more suddenly then, perhaps (Daniel, 25).

[8] Jan Feddersen in group interview (Grau 2001, 80).

[9] Olaf Brühl in group interview (Grau 2001, 72).

[10] Heiner Carow, *Coming Out*, GDR, 1989.

[11] Collapse of the Communist system.

[12] *Schmuddel-Ecke* in the original.

[13] Eastern German region adjacent to Berlin.

For Daniel, the presence of gay bars since the 1990s has equally brought greater acceptance overall. And for him, this presence and the "coming out" of the "sleazy corner" is largely limited to the capital, and even to specific areas within it, particularly Prenzlauer Berg. This reference to a borough that before 1989 had equally been known for its artists', intellectuals' and gay and lesbian subcultures, stands for a local continuity despite the macro-change of the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the GDR.

On the one hand, the younger respondents repeatedly referred to "GDR times" as the dark ages concerning gay and lesbian life, as goes for anything that did not match with social norms. As one other younger respondent, Andreas, 28, states: "In GDR times, anything that didn't conform to the norm was suspicious to start with." On the other hand, East Berlin, and Prenzlauer Berg in particular, through its limited number of bars and its intellectual and artist circles was known as an active gay scene at least since the late 1970s and in the 1980s. Not all, but quite a lot of the present gay and lesbian life in East Berlin has remained in the same location as before 1989, showing patterns of both East-West integration and cultural resistance and "East" localism.

In general terms, our immediate social environment has an important function in people's lives. Often, families or long term friends, but also neighbours and local culture, have not necessarily changed in their attitude towards homosexuality. Alongside the radical social, political and legal overhaul of the *Wende*, this continuity forms an equally important reference for lesbians' and gays' public identities and life constructions. But there is no doubt that macro-change has been particularly relevant in the case of East Berlin, with the succession of a complete change of system, the imposition of West German national culture (media, politics, television, advertising etc., all portraying sexualities in a particular way) on the East, and the simultaneous transformation of the representation of homosexuality within that new national framework.

No Longer "East" or "West" Berlin: Gay Berlin?

In recent years, Germany has become a country with a relatively high acceptance of homosexuality; it is indeed amongst the most tolerant worldwide, together with a range of other European countries.[14] The coming

[14] In the Pew Global Attitudes Project 2003, Germany comes top of a list of 41 countries surveyed for the study, with 83% of respondents saying that "homosexuality should be accepted by society." It shares this result with the Czech Republic. See <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/185.pdf> (5 December 2006). Neither Scandinavian countries nor the Netherlands are included in this study. According to the 1999 findings of the World

out of national politicians and other prominent public personalities and the introduction of Registered Partnership for same-sex couples in 2000 created a decade of public debate in which a cultural East-West divide had no significance.[15] It is striking that indeed various surveys indicate no difference between West and East Germany overall in acceptance of homosexuality.[16] Instead, a city-country divide can be observed in both West and East Germany.[17]

Looking at East Berlin, many gays and lesbians see the East-West divide as irrelevant to their everyday lives, suggesting that a cultural heritage of the East and different traditions in how the homosexual subculture was organized no longer matter. One of the respondents, Andreas, who is 28 years old, judges this to be a matter of age, and finds East and West Berlin indistinguishable today, both generally and for gay and lesbian culture in particular:

> It has mixed very well and you find exactly the same bars in West Berlin as in East Berlin. Whatever you need or you are looking for. Visually there is no difference, and you don't notice from the people there whether you are in the East or in the West . . . I think what has opened up in the East has relatively quickly adapted to the West . . . I think it's a question of age. If you asked someone who is forty or fifty years old, he could probably point to a development and tell you that there are significant differences. But I can't detect any, and not in the least between East and West (Andreas, 28).

Values Survey 6.1% of Swedish, 6.2% of Dutch, 8.0% of Danish, 11.3% of East-German, 11.8% of West-German, 15.6% of French, 16.4% of Spanish, and 17.4% of Belgian respondents mentioned that they would not like to have homosexuals as neighbours. See <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> (5 December 2006).

[15] Gay public personalities became particularly debated after the controversial *Outing* of various politicians and TV presenters by the film-maker and gay activist Rosa von Praunheim in 1991 in the TV-show *Explosiv – der heiße Stuhl* (Explosive—the hot seat), RTL 10/12/1991.

[16] See *Datenreport 2004*, Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, Berlin, pp. 471ff. For 2002, the report finds that East and West Germans have an equal proportion of respondents judging homosexuality to be "bad" or "rather bad," namely 24%. Interestingly, the number is up from 17% in the East in 2000, up from 21% in the West, thus showing a negative trend for both. On other contentious topics, such as abortion, a difference between East and West is instead significant, arguably because of the more pro-abortion regime in the GDR: it is "bad" for 35% in the East compared to 53% in the West, with a declining gap since 2000. On East and West Germans' opinions on homosexuality see also Emnid survey 2001 (see e.g. *Tagesspiegel* 20/02/2001).

[17] Two regions with a high proportion of rural populations or absence of major cities, Rheinland-Pfalz and Sachsen-Anhalt, come last in the nation-wide survey Emnid 2001 (see e.g. *Tagesspiegel* 20/02/2001).

And more generally speaking he notes:

> In Berlin you can't distinguish between the boroughs anymore. That's no longer possible at all (Andreas, 28).

Andreas had grown up in Eastern Germany and had lived in Berlin and West Germany before settling in Berlin again. He underlines the East-West dichotomy as being meaningless in the everyday life of the capital, both for gays and lesbians and in general terms. On the one hand, according to his narrative, this is due to the "mixing" of the populations. On the other hand, it is the consequence of the East having "adapted" to the West, where he points to gay bars and the appearances of the people frequenting them. Where he states that he "can't detect any" differences, but where older people might be able to "point to" them, in his words the East-West divide is more a matter of archaeology than a socially relevant distinction.

Indeed, when I recruited respondents in gay and lesbian bars in East Berlin, it immediately turned out the crowds were very mixed, with people originally being from East or West Berlin or from yet elsewhere.[18] While it has become difficult to speak of East and West Berlin, and particularly so concerning lesbians and gays, who form a highly mobile section of the population and many of whom have come to Berlin from elsewhere, one can more easily point to Berlin's specificities on the whole. Berlin appears as a particularly tolerant city within Germany as far as homosexuality is concerned. In a quantitative survey, Berlin is reported to be the most accepting of German regions with regards to homosexuality.[19] The election of the openly gay mayor Klaus Wowereit had been a novelty in German politics in 2001, and has added to the gay-friendly image of the German capital. His enigmatic statement "Ich bin schwul und das ist auch gut so"[20] during his endorsement speech as a candidate for the City hall probably became one of the most famous slogans by a politician in the city since JFK's "Ich bin ein Berliner." Various lesbian and gay events, such as the gay parade *Christopher-Street-Day* or the street festival *Straßenfest* have become integrated into the city's popular culture, and local politicians of all hues are eager to show themselves on the occasion.

[18] For the interviews used in this article, in addition being contacted in East Berlin bars, their origin was a selection criterion. Not all live in East Berlin, but all were born in the East (six in the GDR, one in Poland) and all are familiar with the East Berlin gay and lesbian scene.

[19] 76.4% of respondents in Berlin say homosexuality is no longer viewed as a problem according to Emnid 2001.

[20] "I'm gay and that's a good thing."

Managing Identity

The acceptance of gay and lesbian lifestyles has a great influence on how lesbian and gay identities are lived. According to the respondents, most gays and lesbians in Berlin embrace open and public gay and lesbian identities and see society as on the whole open to homosexual lifestyles. Many don't think of problems or conflicts when addressing their homosexuality to friends, family, at work, or when showing affection to a partner in public. The narratives the respondents give on how they live their everyday lives partly reflect the general observations made above. Daniel for example, in speaking of being *out* to one's family, sees it as the only option, and argues that potential problems would generally be overcome:

> You just have to make them change their ideas about it . . . and tell them, OK, that doesn't work, and that's the way it is. Parental love won't suffer then, at least I don't think it will (Daniel, 25).

In his view, being openly gay or lesbian has become more frequent. His narrative fits in with an often encountered narrative of progress, arguing that homosexuality has become far more accepted today than in the past. Daniel notes both that many more are publicly gay today than before and that they "come out" at a younger age:

> FJ: Are there specific reasons why people, or some people you know have changed their views?
> D: Yes, because many more people have come out I think. That's my feeling. It has become a greater number, simply because they were encouraged by developments that have taken place. . . . You also notice it, I would maybe add here, in that people who come out are getting younger and younger (Daniel, 25).

Daniel thus sees the two developments as clearly interlinked. The fact that more people live their homosexuality openly constitutes for him a reason for greater acceptance throughout society, and in turn, the development towards a more accepting society has encouraged more to be "out." More visibility: more acceptance. More acceptance: more visibility. The construction of Daniel's answer provides a circular argument in explaining the reasons of *progress*, but it is one that few respondents would contradict.

Dependent on the sector of employment, the workplace traditionally represents a challenging setting for gay and lesbian identities. Whether a woman or a man wants to present her- or himself as lesbian or gay, or whether to keep it a secret, often depends on the risks that it potentially poses to their career. Here again, Andreas for example, who works in

public administration, encounters a high degree of acceptance; he tells of his straight colleagues coming along to the gay parade:

> A: Let's say that I went to the CSD with my colleagues last weekend.[21] They then usually come along.
> FJ: Also if they are not themselves gay you mean?
> A: Correct.
> FJ: So, no problem at all?
> A: Not at all. . . . In Berlin by now that really isn't a problem at all. Most gays are unhappy that they are the only gay one at their workplace or that they have only one other gay colleague or things like that, but that's it (Andreas, 28).

Case-to-Case Management

But this is not universally the case. For many others, unlike Andreas or Daniel, specific social settings require a case-to-case management of their identities.[22] Gay or lesbian identities can be lived publicly in one setting and not in another. The way they choose to live their identity in each setting is often based on an experienced or imagined risk. Acceptance is not experienced throughout; for many difficulties remain. As Katharina, who is 22, notes: "In large parts of society it is still not seen as normal when two women or two men are together. . . . It will last quite a while until it really gets through to all layers of society, I think." For Katharina, here, the intolerant sections of society will resist acceptance, at least for a while.

So what are these specific settings in which constraints on public identities are felt? For many respondents, these constraints not rarely translate into specific persons in their social environments, such as their parents, or more abstractly into specific groups of society that are being judged as being rather intolerant towards homosexuality. Hence, the observed general trend towards greater acceptance does not change the fact that for a number of respondents, managing homosexual identities remains the result of a subtle case-to-case judgement. In general terms, public identities can then be constructed according to experienced, expected or imagined risk. In some of the interviews, specific social settings such as the family, the workplace or specific cultural groups are singled out. In certain places, or among certain groups of people, some refrain from addressing their homosexuality. Daniel points to suburban areas in East Berlin (see above), and refers to adolescents, right-wingers and the elderly as potentially insulting gays in the street:

[21] *Christopher-Street-Day*, gay parade.

[22] On the management of stigma and identity, compare Goffman (1963, ch. 2).

> Maybe sometimes you get some nasty comment or something like that, like from adolescent teenagers, right-wingers or so, who don't have any experience with it yet, none with their own lives either, or perhaps from the elderly, who still have the old scheme of things in their heads (Daniel, 25).

Avoiding certain areas or certain groups of people may or may not be felt as a constraint, but often, the area or the group of people in the immediate vicinity has an impact on showing affection in public for instance, such as in Daniel's mention of "right-wingers." Abstract references to social groups can imply a careful approach to being *out* as much as personal experiences with specific persons. In relation to their parents for example, both Katharina and her friend Jenny, who is 20 years old were born in a small town in the GDR before moving to Berlin, have experienced negative comments about homosexuality and in reaction remain secretive about it. Imagined risks concerning groups of society can have a very concrete impact on personal everyday choices in managing identity. Jenny's narrative can serve as an example as to how the abstract and the personal interact, where she explains her attitude towards a Muslim friend:

> Well, I have had positive experiences, and I think that at the end of the day my Muslim friends wouldn't have a problem with it either. But I don't really insist, because there's always a bit the fear that, you know, that they would somehow distance themselves, I don't know. Because I don't know how they would. I even have the suspicion that one friend of mine, she's Muslim too, that she wouldn't be against it herself, but I don't really mention the subject, because she's never had a relationship, neither with a man, nor with a woman. No idea, but somehow I also think that, I just have the feeling, I don't know why, but it's a feeling I have. And she doesn't, I think she wouldn't be able to cope with it (Jenny, 20).

Jenny acts according to her cultural assumptions; she assumes that the girl would have difficulties to accept her homosexuality and refrains from addressing it, keeping her lesbian identity as a private matter towards her. Jenny's "fear" that "they would somehow distance themselves" thus illustrates this imagined risk. While she thinks that "at the end of the day . . . they wouldn't have a problem with it," her risk evaluation is clearly linked to her repeated reference to religion.[23]

Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell

Jenny equally tells of the generally private approach most gays and lesbian nurses have at her place of work, a Catholic hospital, as far as

[23] On homosexuality and Muslims in Germany, see Bochow and Marbach (2003).

superiors are concerned. She reports of some employees "hiding" their homosexuality "very much":

> Yes, I have to say I work in a Catholic hospital [laughs]. But among ourselves we know who is and who is not, and they have [and] I have so far not had any problems. And many know, and there are no problems with the younger ones. Most of them are [gay or lesbian] themselves, and I have to say that some of them hide it very much. Of course, in a Catholic hospital, I won't go to the nursing sister and say: Hello, I'm lesbian! Well, I don't do that. But I have had positive experiences in the hospital, no negative ones. But I wouldn't go on about it, honestly. Those who have to know, they know. But I don't wear a sign around my neck saying I'm lesbian (Jenny, 20).

This passage shows that in this specific setting, for Jenny, a private and careful approach to her lesbian identity has implied "not to have problems." "I don't wear a sign around my neck saying I'm lesbian" underlines the specific strategy employed here; Jenny has adapted to the collegial tradition within the hospital, to a norm of keeping the personal private, at least to a certain extent.[24]

In a comprehensive study on the social history of homosexuality, George Chauncey has analysed the construction of double lives by homosexual men in New York at the beginning of the twentieth century (Chauncey 1994). The combination of constraints and available space for homosexual life made the *double life* the most common element of gay identity: "The complexity of the city's social and spatial organization made it possible for gay men to construct the multiple public identities necessary for them to participate in the gay world without losing the privileges of the straight: assuming one identity at work, another in leisure; one identity before biological kin, another with gay friends" (Chauncey 1994, 133).

This necessity of multiple identities and double lives seems to be the exception in Berlin today. But the concept of a case-to-case management of public identity is not entirely absent in the interviews conducted here. This includes careful approaches to being publicly gay or lesbian with certain people, in certain institutions or in certain areas. Social identities still depend on social constraints and possibilities, and on values that the individual includes in her or his choices in constructing identity.

[24] The constraint imposed by the Catholic Church as an employer is all but fictional: the public registration of a same-sex partnership formally constitutes a reason for terminating the employment even in state-financed institutions if they are administered by the Catholic Church in Germany. This includes a vast number of schools, hospitals and charities. See High Court judgment BVerfGE 70, 138, <http://typo3.lsvd.de/194.0.html#778> (5 December 2006).

Choosing Public or Secret Identities

As has been argued, don't-ask-don't-tell identities often reflect social risks and the experience of intolerance as constraints. But at the same time, in constructing a public identity, the individual also embraces a certain ideology, choosing how she or he wants to live and be perceived, at work, by friends or in the family. At times, private or secret identities are accompanied by a discourse of choice. Secrecy and privacy can be embraced as positive elements of identity construction as much as openness and being public. However, in such cases both discourses are often combined, telling of intolerant social settings on the one hand, and of willingly choosing to keep homosexuality a secret or private matter on the other.

In the following section, a more detailed example shows the link between choice and constraint. It equally illustrates the socio-geographical difference between Berlin and a provincial town close to Berlin. In the interview with Petra, 42, and Renate, 38, who are sisters, the alternatives become apparent of an openly lesbian life on the one hand and a secret, hidden one on the other. Different elements are relevant to their choices. Both grew up in the GDR in a small village in Brandenburg, relatively close to Berlin. While both initially got married, two marriages from which they each have a child, Renate very soon falls in love with a woman. She causes a big scandal in her town and her family, and leaves her husband and child—she is socially if not formally denied the right to keep her son—to live in (then) East Berlin. There, she had several lesbian long term relationships. With her current girlfriend, she is planning to move to a village in the North-West of Germany to live in a countryside house.

Petra eventually divorced from her husband, kept the custody of her daughter and later had an amorous relationship with a younger woman who simultaneously had a boyfriend. Petra describes herself as bisexual. Only a very restricted number of people know about her lesbian relationship, and she encourages her daughter to keep it a secret even before her closest friends. Her public identity is primarily that of a divorced mother, an identity she judges to be the most suitable for herself and for her daughter in the small town where they live. She describes the town environment as generally "conservative" in an oppressive way.

> Oh well, I know those children. And I also know what kind of opinions there are, from the parents' reunions and also from what the children say. Well, then you can just about estimate how conservative some things turn out to be. And then I just tell myself, they don't need to know. Then it's better to keep the silence. Well, you don't have to [talk about it] (Petra, 42).

Petra's relationship is fundamentally based on secrecy. It is, however, a secrecy she embraces as her own choice after all. In the following passage, Petra and Renate's work environment serves as an example here concerning their identity construction. Both are working as a hospital nurse, and while Renate is openly lesbian to her colleagues, Petra keeps both her private life and her opinions to herself:

> P: Yes, that's how it is. I mean, at work it's like that as well, yes, they always keep away from such a topic, or if not then it's totally condemned as something bad. So what do you want to add to it then? Nothing any more. You got your own thoughts about it and that's it.
> R: I then always say something provocative.
> P: Well, I can't do that, because nobody should know about me, nor do they need to. . . . Also, I don't necessarily want to. . . .
> R: I would somehow.
> P: No. I have my opinion . . . about it and stick to it, and I don't say everything, because I think they won't understand anyhow, and they don't want to understand either, and they don't want to be confronted with it either, you know. Let's say, if they knew that I am now also [lesbian], they would say: Oh my God, we would have never expected that of you!
> R: So what?
> P: Whether they would still want to be around me at all, yes, whether they would still see this human being in me, how I really am, that of course is the question, because you then get a stamp put on. . . . Well, you do have to weigh these things. Whom you can talk to, or whom you can tell what, or what you cannot say. Not all of them want to know about it anyhow, and then you do it that way: OK, you don't have to talk about it (Petra, 42; Renate, 38).

Petra's choice in constructing her public identity at work is clearly linked to the constraints she sees herself confronted with. Due to the opinions she hears on homosexuality in her town, including her work place, she keeps her lesbian love story to herself. However, as we can see in this passage, while she suffers from the closed-mindedness of her social environment, she also draws some satisfaction from being able to conduct a more exciting undercover life than what she conveys to others. While she says that she "can't" she immediately adds "I don't necessarily want to." In stating that "you don't have to" tell them, she underlines the choice element in the managing of her secret love life. Furthermore, it is interesting to note how Petra here relates being *out* to a distortion of her *real self*: If her colleagues knew about it, she thinks she would risk that they would see her differently from "how I really am." According to this, in carrying a lesbian "stamp," her "real" identity would be lost rather than revealed. Her lesbian identity is essentially a hidden one, and the

secrecy of her love life a constituent part of it. At least towards her sister, it is her vindicated difference from the environment of her town that is more central to her identity than a potential public recognition within it.

In debating whether their respective teenage children should talk to friends about their mothers' lesbian relationships, the two sisters disagree heavily. Where Renate sees her sister as essentially unfree, Petra yet again underlines her freedom in successfully managing a double life in which she succeeds in avoiding conflicts with others both for her own and her daughter's sake:

> P: I do that anyway. I decide for myself. I do what is good for me. And I also live what is good for me. I don't need anyone else for that, to tell me: "that's bad" or something like that. You just have to try things out.
> R: But you contradict yourself!
> P: What?
> R: Because if you say you don't want to live a lesbian relationship openly in your small town, then you are not free. You don't live freely then, with your views.
> P: But I do it undercover. That doesn't matter.
> R: No.
> P: But for me it's still this kind of being free. Do you understand?
> R: No, not really, because you are deluding yourself. Either you are free and really live that way—well of course you always have some norms you should comply with, whether it's with the neighbours or whatever, you don't have to annoy everyone with your way of life, independent of which country you come from, I mean, everyone has different rituals and is loud or quiet or whatever. But I think that you are not really free, because you say, for example, that you . . .
> P: At home I'm free.
> R: . . . would have worries that people, what they say, [your daughter's] friend's parents, what they would say. . . . Either you are free and you say: either they like me, and see me as a person, or they should just stay away (Petra, 42; Renate, 38).

The different social contexts of Berlin and Petra's provincial town appear to imply sharp contrasts in value judgements. For Renate, freedom implies being openly lesbian, but Petra bluntly states that she is free "undercover," "still," "kind of" and free "at home." While in this passage, Petra is saying "I do what is good for me" and underlines her freedom in doing so, she subsequently refers to the city-province divide in pointing to constraints. Here, Petra nuances the element of choice she had in other passages pictured as strength, and secrecy is described as a norm she cannot just leave aside:

> Perhaps I haven't had that for that long that I would think like [Renate]. But I would say it's quite a good thing that everything has kind of become more open. But I cannot for example deal with it in the way [Renate] does, because I'm from a much smaller town,

> a very narrow-minded town, where everyone knows one another and, for God's sake, that's why we do all that in a more hidden way. Of course it's also more difficult to handle it. Yes, apart from that, a lot still needs to be done, I would say (Petra, 42).

Petra here argues that "a lot still needs to be done." Some would probably argue that the construction of a secret gay or lesbian identity is bound to be linked to discrimination and homophobia, if not a directly experienced one then a form of internalized homophobia. They would then tend to disqualify this sort of double life as either forced by ambivalent discrimination or as hypocritical in the absence of social constraints.

But it is this sort of judgement that exemplifies the value shift from a taboo of homosexuality to a norm of endorsing public lesbian and gay identities. This shift in turn influences the construction of identities, where the concept of homosexuality itself moves from sexual activity to public partnership, for instance. Hidden homosexual identities seem hard to justify in the context of Berlin, as exemplified in Renate's reaction to Petra's secrecy.

A New Norm of Being Publicly Lesbian or Gay?

With growing social acceptance and greater visibility in Berlin, the official support of gay and lesbian events by the City hall and local town halls, openly gay and lesbian public figures and legal recognition of same-sex partnership since 2000, living gay and lesbian identities publicly today constitutes the norm rather than a transgression. The following extract tells of Katharina's experience at work, where her careful "private" approach to her sexuality was seen as inappropriate. She was asked by her boss to explain her sexual orientation—a non-conflictual event that illustrates the trend from secrecy and privacy to the expectation of openly expressing your sexual orientation:

> K: I work only with men, in a technical sector, and therefore, at the beginning, I had many scruples. . . . At some stage, when you get to know each other and talks get into more personal things, because you spend eight or ten hours a day together after all, there were always some questions coming up. "So, do you have a boyfriend?"—"Err, nope, I don't." You know, that kind of thing. People don't necessarily get my sexual preferences from my looks. Especially guys don't, I would say. [laughs] . . . So I also had them see me with my girlfriend, my former girlfriend. It was kind of seen by my boss, as it were. And at the end it went the way that in front of various other colleagues, I was directly asked about it [by my boss]. And that was, well, it came across as quite funny, you know. I was breathless, because [laughs] I was not prepared for that, for such directness. But, well, I would never have thought that they are all so easy going,

> and it was totally OK. They just wanted to know, along those lines, because they couldn't really classify me. But it's quite funny.
> FJ: So what did you answer then?
> K: Yes, I simply said [laughs]: I like women. Men as well; I make exceptions sometimes. [laughs] And then it was OK, the thing was dealt with, because before that I had seen that questions were coming up behind my back, and they didn't really dare to ask me. But my boss was more resolute—definitely. . . . By now it came out that two of my colleagues also go for men as well, and it's all easy-going (Katharina, 22).

It seems like Katharina did not have a chance to stay private about her love life and is forced to talk about her sexual orientation. For her, this turn of events was a positive one, according to the "scruples" she initially had, and her subsequent description of her work place as one where "it's all easy-going." But rather than being choice-driven, it seems that Katharina adapts to the norm she is confronted with in her work environment. She is faced with the norm of public homosexual identity, which she is somewhat surprised to find in her field. In sum, in this metropolitan setting, it seems that secrecy, privacy, and taboo have given way to public sexual identities.[25]

Past and Present

Most respondents contacted in East Berlin describe gay and lesbian lives as easier today, with the growth of acceptance and the stronger cultural presence of homosexuality. The 1990s, the ten years after the fall of the Wall, are often seen as the period of dramatic change in this respect, as has already become apparent in some interview abstracts cited above. As we have seen, the notions of East and West hardly seem to affect gay and lesbian everyday life. The former Geo-political border of the city now seems meaningless in this respect. Nevertheless, the references that are being made to the past and to the GDR in particular, are interesting to look at. Accounts of the GDR are made, sometimes as side-remarks, in ways that can differ greatly, as in some of the following interview extracts. How is the past represented in the narratives of the respondents we have looked at so far? How is the social change described in relation to the Communist period? While the narratives that we will look at here do not constitute a significant sample for an analysis of the social memory of the GDR, in a rather light way they nevertheless appear as insightful on the construction of such views on the past concerning gay and lesbian life.

[25] On the decline of the *don't-ask-don't-tell* identity see e.g. Broqua and de Brusscher (2003, 26ff).

Often, discourses about the past reflect both changes in the respondents' personal lives and observed changes on the level of society more generally. Renate for instance says that things have become "freer" in the past five or ten years, while the past experience in the GDR is linked to her "coming out" and people's negative reactions in her home town at the time:

> In the past five years you can definitely say, well, as I live in Berlin now anyway, that everything [has become] somewhat freer. I kind of see the past ten year [as those] in which [accentuated:] a lot has happened. Well, as I'm from the East, and had my coming out in the East, I experienced all those things that still happen today everywhere across the country if you are not in a big city, that people avoid you, and people start to look away or speak to other people instead. . . . But within the last years a lot has improved. . . . Today I live openly and they all know it, and in that way it changed towards the better. . . . And I think that in the last years, a lot has [come] through the media . . . and it then becomes more socially accepted. Suddenly everyone must have tried it, and in that sense I think the media has played a major role. . . . It was never made a topic at all in the East (Renate, 38).

Such progress narratives are very common in the fieldwork that has been conducted within this study. Often, accounts link personal experiences with observations of developments in society on the whole. In Renate's biographical account, her coming out, her moving from a provincial East German town to the capital, the collapse of the Soviet regime, her experiences in the street and the perceived media representation of homosexuality together constitute a narrative of progress, liberation and acceptance.[26] That experience often results in the feeling of things having changed for the better, and that being lesbian or gay in Berlin today is "easy," "trendy," "cool" or a "not at all" a problem. In the GDR, it seems, the lack of a cultural presence such as in Western commercial or political gay and lesbian culture, or yet again in the mainstream media, is what Renate connotes negatively with the regime itself. It is on that cultural level that she insists "a lot has improved." Concerning her personal experience in her home town, she stresses that reactions would be the same today in other provincial towns "across the country,"[27] thereby explicitly limiting both the GDR factor and the time factor in evaluating her own experience. While Renate interlinks the different personal and societal discourses, she analyses past and present with some subtle dis-

[26] On the *coming out narrative* see e.g. Plummer (1995, 50–61).

[27] *Bundesweit* in the original, which necessarily includes the West. For an extensive qualitative study on provincial gay life in Western Germany, analysing reasons of difficult coming out processes, see Bochow (1998b).

tinctions and counter-hypotheses to different interpretations, providing a nuanced and not necessarily linear discourse on social change.

In some other accounts, a discourse of progress is even more pronounced, describing an unquestionable form of social progress and painting a darker picture of what the past had been like. Jenny for example outlines a trend towards greater acceptance of homosexuality in more sweeping and quite general, but forceful terms:

> The young ones, they find it absolutely cool to be gay or lesbian. And then they also want to be it themselves. . . . Well, because today, it's simply more in the spotlight, it's more present in the public debate, in the media. The mayor [of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit] as well for example. These are all things that fifteen years ago, nobody would have imagined. They would all be burnt at the stake, those who were gay. Plenty of things have changed, for sure. I would not have wanted to be public or to be outed ten or fifteen years ago. I'm glad it's now and not ten years ago. I think that would have been much more difficult for me (Jenny, 20).

The contrast between past and present, in Jenny's account, is one between a medieval set-up on the one hand, and a very open society today, in which homosexuality is "in the spotlight," on the other. In the metaphorical description of all gays being "burnt at the stake" fifteen years ago, and the observation that "the young ones . . . find it absolutely cool," we see that for her, there are worlds between the period before the 1990s and today. The GDR past, without being explicitly named, here belongs to some dark ages. In the last sentence, the view that it "would have been much more difficult for me" underlines this image of the past, but also links her general interpretation of society to her own imagined life at the time.

A Matter of Generations

Daniel gives a similar account as Jenny, in the sense that he sees the gay past in East Germany as extremely limited, but nuances his observations taking account of the lack of homosexuality in the public sphere and to the lack of a more pro-active gay culture:

> I would say that it's more difficult for East Berlin, or rather for people from East Berlin or East Germans. I mean liberalism was there much earlier in West Germany and West Berlin. That had been lived for years and there had also been other minorities. . . . [In the East] that just didn't exist, never, neither in the public sphere, nor [anywhere else]. Or at least I can't remember it. Well, maybe it existed somewhere, but not in a pro-active way, at least compared to what it was like in the West. That was unthinkable. There were some niches; I would not negate that, yes, in art or things like that, but not in everyday life. There you would have stayed ignorant for all your life. . . . It's a ques-

> tion of generations, so to say, until the next generation has grown up. Those who were born in the 90s will see it completely differently, I'm sure (Daniel, 25).

A generational effect, as in Daniel's terms, clearly matters in narrating gay and lesbian everyday life in the GDR. In Jenny's case, for example, an imagined account of the GDR is given, being only six years old at the time of the regime change. Daniel himself was eleven in 1989. As a matter of fact, for Thorsten, two generations older than Jenny, things are very different. Thorsten was born in the 1930s, and the GDR times stand for most of his life as a gay man. His narrative is one of happiness and absence of difficulty concerning his homosexuality. In describing his love life and personal life, no sharp break is included between pre-1989 and post-GDR, apart from the fact that he moved to Berlin after job-cuts. In the village community where he used to work, his gay life and partnership was tolerated and accepted, as he says:

> In [a Protestant convent in a rural setting] . . . I had been with a man for fourteen years. That was completely official. . . . It was a rural parish. . . . Either people didn't get it or it's just that nobody ever asked about it. Or it was just natural to them, what do I know. When I . . . got invited for dinner, I was told: "you are bringing [Robert] with you, aren't you?" And so it was a natural gesture. That way, you know. I never had any problems in that respect. . . . Well, there had never been any problems (Thorsten, 71).

Thorsten's experience may not be a typical one. The point here is not to persuade the readers of the quality of life during East German Communism. The negative connotations, which many people link to the GDR regime, are framed by a range of reasons that are not necessarily connected to matters of homosexuality. Jan Fedderson for example recalls his surprise when noting that various gays from East Germany "wanted to be away from the GDR for all kind of reasons, but not for gay reasons at all."[28] However, there is no scope for an analysis of the social reality in the GDR in general here. Thorsten's experience was particularly positive in contrast to Renate's. The fact that much depended on personal "friendships" surely was a difficulty for many who did not have those friends at hand. What matters here instead is that accounts of everyday life in the past are greatly linked to personal experiences in which specific phases of life can have extremely positive connotations. In contrasting accounts such as Renate's, Jenny's and Thorsten's, what can be observed is that the construction of a more generalised notion of the past and of social change into which personal experiences are built, is highly dependent

[28] Jan Feddersen in group interview (Grau 2001, 79).

on the generational and socio-geographical background. Memory in gay and lesbian history has particularities, as homosexual heritage is only to a very limited degree constructed across the generations, compared to other cultural communities. Individual life phases therefore become particularly important in gay and lesbian narratives about the past. Thorsten for instance refers to the feeling of nostalgia when remembering gay life in the GDR days with his friends, a feeling he himself points out as being "strange":

> I notice, it's very strange, a number of friends from [Sachsen-Anhalt] live here in Berlin, around this area, and we meet every now and then, here and there, what do I know, on the Straßenfest or we celebrate a birthday together, and then there is still this, there is this nostalgia coming up, or this kind of feeling: "Oh yes, wasn't it so good back then," or "better." Yes. Now, everything is possible, and everything is open, and everything, well, what do I know what kind of things you can do now, or, I don't know, things you should want to be able to do. Yes. And myself, well, I go to some bars, and here and there, but I mean to go to a disco at 71, you'd get odd looks now (Thorsten, 71).

The "nostalgia" towards the past is linked to a contradiction of the Western gay life: everything is "possible" and "open," but certain gay spaces, such as discotheques, are socially restricted to a certain, particularly younger, public. Thorsten's reference to "odd looks" implies such an implicit norm. (See e.g. Bochow 1998a, 223f; also Bochow 2005) But at the same time, he equally sees benefits in new forms of gay culture, such as those offered on the internet:

> FJ: And with your new partner, where did you meet?
> T: On the Internet. Gayromeo.[29] Every now and then you get to talk there. That can go on for some days or weeks, until a discussion ends. . . . Yes, that really is an improvement. Well, in the past, we didn't even have a telephone, I mean not everyone. That's true, that's obviously quite essential (Thorsten, 71).

Interestingly, for Thorsten, the Internet platform appears as a more open form of gay culture, being more inclusive than discotheques. It is described as being "really an improvement" and "quite essential." Thorsten's discourse on past and present, however, is not structured quite as much along the lines of "progress" as other discourses we have looked at. Instead, self-critical references to nostalgia and a differentiated view on advantages and disadvantages of various elements of change are what characterises his narrative. His account therefore appears as somewhat different to the view of the "East" expressed in the other nar-

[29] A Germany-based non-commercial gay Internet platform, <www.gayromeo.com>.

ratives as those of Daniel or Jenny. In the latter, the experience of social change and greater acceptance that occurred parallel with the change of regime and during the 1990s is not very different compared to those encountered in West Berlin or in other West European cities. Thereby, GDR memory melts with a more general picture of the past, in which things were "worse."

The narratives on past and present that we have looked at in this section are neither a reconstruction of what lesbian and gay life was like in the GDR, nor are they representative of views about the past among lesbians and gays in East Berlin. Instead, what we have seen, through a rather light and eclectic look at the accounts of social change in this small sample, is how narratives on the past reflect biographies, different life phases and personal experiences as much as general observations and transmitted knowledge about recent social history.

Conclusion

Today, rather than speaking of East and West, for the respondents here, Berlin is lived as an entity that is judged as being exceptional in its acceptance of homosexual lifestyles. Instead of East-West differences, the respondents focused on regional differences, on specific neighbourhoods, particularly in the periphery, or on a general city-country divide. In the construction of lesbian and gay identities, being open or public is often described as very unproblematic. Quite on the contrary, in certain settings, openness is the norm, and privacy on matters of sexual orientation can come across as odd or inappropriate, as in Katharina's case or in Renate's judgement of her sister's secrecy. However, a case-to-case management of public identities still applies for some—either in specific environments at work or in the family, or in geographically defined areas, such as in certain outskirts of the city, where they perceive constraints on how to act in public.

In the accounts of past and present, the picture given of lesbian and gay everyday life in the GDR is mostly interlinked with personal biographies. Progress during the 1990s is often juxtaposed with a prior dark period, the GDR times, in which there was little cultural space for lesbians and gays. However, as Thorsten's account shows, this general observation might be at odds with individual biographical narratives, depending on various factors such as generation, life phase and the direct social environment of the individual respondent. A "dark past" on the one hand and "nostalgia" on the other can thus in turn be constructed in the discourses on homosexuality in East Germany and East Berlin.

Hence, in examining lesbian and gay identities in East Berlin, a plurality of factors needs to be addressed, including generational and ideological ones. As some examples here have shown, the East-West dichotomy often constitutes an interesting element in discourses on social change, but it does not by itself play a determining role. Instead, lesbian and gay everyday life in the Eastern part of the city today reflects the high degree of visibility and acceptance in the city as a whole.

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Challenging Identities

Wrong Bodies and Real Selves: Transsexual People in the Hungarian Social and Health Care System

Bence Solymár and Judit Takács

This paper presents the main findings of the first descriptive sociological study of the situation of transsexual people in Hungary.[1] The research project was initiated by the Háttér Support Society for LGBT People in Hungary in 2003 and funded by the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs. The main goal of the research was to explore the official and medical possibilities for gender transition in Hungary by analysing how transsexual people as well as medical experts and other professionals perceived the functioning of "the system," i.e. the system of gender transition and related services.

Methodologically the project was based on a preliminary self-administered questionnaire survey (N = 39) publicised mainly on the internet,[2] followed by the collection of semi-structured interviews in the case of transsexual people (N = 17)[3] and structured interviews in the case of professionals (N = 10).[4] Our transsexual interviewees were mostly people who had filled in the questionnaire. Further interviewees were contacted through respondents. In seeking out professionals for interviews, we relied on the list of professionals posted on TransSexual Online. In addition, information obtained by questionnaires and interviews, we also used written accounts from transsexual people.

Considering the transsexual respondents, our target was to reach persons who have entered or intended to enter the health care system, and

[1] The full research results are available in the book *A lélek műtétei* (Surgery of the Soul) in Hungarian—with an English summary (Takács 2006).

[2] The questionnaire was published on the websites of TranSexual Online <http://tsonline.uw.hu/>, pride.hu, hatter.hu. Calls for transgender respondents were also published in the printed press (*Mások*, *Magyar Narancs*).

[3] Age range: 19–77.

[4] Eight of the professional interviewees take part or have taken part in the health care provision for transsexuals as psychiatrists (4), a clinical psychologist, a surgeon, a urologist and a geneticist. A sociologist and an ethologist were also interviewed: although their activities were not closely related to the health care services available for transgender people we hoped to get additional insight from their fields.

who have considered, started or completed gender transition in their lives. Thus instead of relying on a purely medical definition of transsexualism,[5] we have focussed on the self-definition of our respondents.

Transsexual People's Paths

Analysis of interviews conducted with transsexual people was inspired by a social constructionist—and especially the ethnomethodological—approach as well as Breakwell's social-psychological theory of identity processes, with special regard to threatened identities.

In modern Western societies people's genders are assigned according to socially approved, acquired rules based on externally visible physical/biological features. A child will get assigned one of the two genders according to its genitals. People's gender identity will in the majority of cases be defined by the group membership acquired at birth. The formation of the gender identity is a process in which a person self-assigns such group membership. In the case of transsexual persons the assigned and self-assigned genders do not coincide.

As practical experience confirms the validity of external (social) assignment of gender, people who grow up in conflict with their assigned genders are left with transitioning into the "opposite" of their birth gender. In this context of real dichotomies, a "real" transsexual will be a person who undoubtedly changes their physical sex by appropriate genital surgery. The ethnomethodological approach, however, reveals that although we live in a fundamentally two-gendered world, this is not the only possible world (Kessler and McKenna 1978, 40).

Inquiring into transsexuality, we need to pay special attention to the processes in which transsexual people build their identities. Uncertainties around gender identity may be linked with problems in socialisation, and may lead to difficulties in adult re-socialisation. A failure in the external gender assignment may result in early feelings of difference, strangeness, "abnormality." The individual in such a situation may be

[5] An internationally recognised definition of transsexualism is found in the International Classification of Diseases (a publication of the WHO): 1. The desire to live and be accepted as a member of the opposite sex, usually accompanied by the wish to make his or her body as congruent as possible with the preferred sex through surgery and hormone treatment. 2. The transsexual identity has been present persistently for at least two years. 3. The disorder is not a symptom of another mental disorder or a chromosomal abnormality. See <http://www.genderpsychology.org/transsexual/icd_10.html> (5 December 2006). Another "tool" for diagnosing transsexualism is found in the publication of the American DSM–IV, under "gender identity disorder." (DSM-IV. 302.85 referring to adolescents and adults. See <http://www.genderpsychology.org/transsexual/dsm_iv.html> (5 December 2006)).

threatened by the normative expectation of their social environment, which would signpost the path to a well-socialised lifestyle.

Identity threats may be experienced by anyone: in a sense, every identity is threatened, as an individual will in all their life face challenges that threaten their identity (Erős 2000, 81). The seriousness of the threats, however, can be largely varied. Breakwell examined factors threatening the principles of the basic processes of identity such as *distinctiveness*, *continuity* of identity, *self-esteem* and the *desire for autonomy* (Breakwell 1986, 23). Breakwell's theory of identity threats is applicable in a practical investigation into problems of identification around transsexuality. Prior to transition, transsexual individuals commonly experience the feeling that the continuity of their identity and their self-esteem are threatened. At the same time, their individuality, distinctiveness may reach such a degree, that they are unable to (re-)integrate into society.

Developing the Concept of Transsexuality

The word "transsexualism" was coined by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld,[6] but the term with its contemporary meaning—referring to a possibility of physical gender transition—first appeared in 1950 in the American surgeon, David O. Cauldwell's "Questions and Answers on the Sex Life and Sexual Problems of Trans-Sexuals": "Trans-sexuals are individuals who are physically of one sex and apparently psychologically of the opposite sex. Trans-sexuals include heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals and others." However, Cauldwell did not believe in treatment offering alterations to the body, which he referred to as "mutilative operations," being a sign of the lack of mental equilibrium (Cauldwell cited by Meyerowitz 2002, 44).

During the first half of the 20th century the work of Harry Benjamin—German endocrinologist who lived and practised in New York—greatly contributed to the growing medical–scientific awareness around transsexuals' specific problems. Benjamin was convinced that psychotherapy could not help transsexuals whose problems could be resolved only through medical intervention: in his view it was evident that if "the psyche cannot be brought into sufficient harmony with the soma, then and only then is it essential to consider the reverse procedure, that is, to

[6] Hirschfeld applied the umbrella term *transvestite* (referring to a much wider category than it does today) to people who we now call transgender or transsexual (Hirschfeld [1910] 1991). In the 1930s, the British sexual psychologist Havelock Ellis used the term Eonism (after the name of the 18th century French diplomat Chevalier D'Eon) to describe people who did not simply dress as the other gender, but felt that they belonged to that gender (Ellis 1936).

attempt fitting the soma into the realm of the psyche" (Benjamin cited by Meyerowitz 2002, 113).

As gender reassignment processes became more accessible in the second half of the 20th century, there was a change in the definition of transsexualism. People who sought to change their biological sex were considered "patients" rather than "psychopaths," and the definition of transsexualism started to include the personal need for practical transformation that had previously been dismissed as dreams or fantasies. In 1968 the American psychoanalyst Robert J. Stoller defined transsexualism as "the conviction in a biologically normal person of being a member of the opposite sex. This belief is these days accompanied by requests for surgical and endocrinological procedures that change anatomical appearance to that of the opposite sex" (Stoller 1968, 89–90).

In the 1960s Stoller began to use the expression (social) gender identity in the sense of psychological sex. The new terminology made it possible to separate *sexual identity* (linked to sexual practices and fantasies) on the one hand, and *gender role identity* on the other hand, reflecting the expectations of the society (manifesting themselves in masculine and feminine modes of behavior), and what individuals feel towards their gender identity, related to their being men or women (cf. Stoller 1968).

In 1990 the feminist theorist Judith Butler pointed out that the presumption of the internal coherence of identity, which is manifested in the opposition of asymmetrically divided female and male characteristics in the cultural matrix of gender norms, and in the "heterosexualization of desire," is illusionary, and more and more untenable: there is no necessary causal link between a person's sex, culturally constructed gender roles, their sexual desires, and sexual behaviour (Butler 1990, 23). Butler considers the querying of this virtual coherence to be the deconstruction of identity, which may lead to the formation of a new type of (identity) politics.

From the 1990s onwards, the social concept of transsexuality (to be distinguished from the medical concept of *transsexualism*) has been transformed mainly by the emergence of the transgender—or as Sandy Stone puts it *post-transsexual* (Stone 1991)—movements relying on post-modern *queer* theory that institutionalises scepticism towards categories previously thought to be absolute. This has allowed transsexual activists to form coalitions with other sexual- or gender-diverse people. The central element in these movements is the struggle for the freedom of expression, which may focus on several areas from the social constructionist interpretation of biological sex through more abstract questions of social justice to matters of human rights and anti-discrimination.

Wrong Bodies and Real Selves

While in social scientific theoretical discourses it has almost become a commonplace to analytically separate (biological) sex, gender and sexuality, that is, to acknowledge that one's sex does not necessarily define either one's gender or one's sexual identity, everyday life experiences are still dominated by expectations about identity coherence at least sex- and gender-wise.

On the basis of analysing the interviews conducted with self-defined transsexual people one of the most important characteristics of transsexuality seemed to be the lack of harmony between the individual's external, bodily appearance and inner self, self-image. This lack of harmony was expressed as having the "wrong body," which the individual sought to change.

> Basically, I am a woman in the wrong body. I think this is what is called transsexualism. And in short it is about this: one has a mind that does not match the body (9).[7]

> I turned to him [the GP—general practitioner] with the problem that I felt I was born in a completely wrong body, and that this needs [to be] changed, as someone had to leave this body, it is not enough for two (3).

> This is a condition that does need to be changed. This is [as if] . . . I had an extra hand that was a hindrance. Therefore I am simply asking competent people to change this. It is as simple as that (6).

The need to alter the body was connected with the interpretation of transsexuality as illness, congenital condition or condition to be remedied. Most transsexual respondents were aware that to change their bodies they need medical intervention and that in contemporary Hungary transsexuality was classified as an illness called transsexualism. At the same time, they were aware that this is not an "ordinary illness," and several did not think they were ill.

> I would not say that I am transsexual therefore I am ill. This is a condition that does need to be changed (6).

> I don't see myself as ill, I think this condition is more of a birth defect that current medical science can address in order (8).

The problematic construction of gender categories may have led our transsexual respondents to widen the spectrum of interpretation of their gender (for example: differentiate between bodily, genetic, psychological sex, gender and sexuality), and recognise the existence of degrees and diversities of being transsexual.

[7] In order to protect the complete anonymity of our respondents we assigned them each a number.

> It is important that people become aware of the loads of variations. Some don't mind what their genitals are like, they could be somewhere in-between, but definitely not female. Some are happy with female genitals. Some will need male genitals at all costs. Some can reconcile with their female genitals and would only go for surgery if that could have a very good result. In this respect there are millions of in-between states . . . There are countless individual shades between male and female (8).

Transitionality seemed to be a key concept in defining transsexuality. This can refer to birth sex—as a previous reference point for identification—, the transsexual condition and that these may be "over."

> I, too, was transsexual up to my surgery, that is, . . . well, opinions differ as to who considers what . . . I consider a person transsexual until they exclude this issue. Technically I am an infertile woman. . . . All in all, I think one is transsexual until they have dealt with this issue [the surgery] (2).

Another experience of transitionality was expressed by respondents when other possible categories of identification appeared in previous constructs of identity such as hermaphrodite, transvestite, homosexual.

> Well, the first thing was to think of transvestitism. . . . But . . . it became apparent that there is a great difference between transvestites and transsexuals; it wasn't only the question of going out being "full girl" at the weekend—that in fact is less preferable than weekdays when I am not in "full girl mode" . . . lots of people treat me like a girl . . . that means a lot more (1).

> After I had achieved some status of being a gay man, I started to realise that that was not it after all. There were complications. . . . I wasn't satisfied being attracted to men, and that everyone respected this, I also had to add that there is something wrong with me: I am not entirely a boy. And bit by bit I started to go around in women's clothes and all. There was a time when I thought I was a transvestite, but I think it was only a phase . . . in the end I managed to clarify it for myself what was really all about: that I am a girl, and I diagnosed myself as transsexual. After that, things had been going pretty smoothly, slowly but surely (12).

Transsexual identity processes appeared to be discontinuous: statements like "I used to be male/female, but I no longer am" or "I used to be transsexual but I no longer am" could be interpreted as attempts at the elimination of a past status that may have been characterised by a disturbing sense of distinctiveness logically resulting in the desire for integration. In these cases self-esteem could be gained by a toning down of distinctiveness, the negation of difference.

In the case of transsexual people their practical life managing strategies can reflect queries concerning the coherence of biological sex, gender roles and sexual practices. Among transsexual people we inter-

viewed there were two different types of resolution to this situation: the first group was most concerned with "putting right" their biological sex. For them shifting—from the inappropriate biological sex to the appropriate one, from the "wrong body" to the right one—within a mutually exclusive two-sex/gender paradigm was seen as desirable.

> I think I would be quite self-giving, as far as I can see it. I would try to give everything that a man and a family need, all a woman is expected to do: that she should keep the family together really . . . with her love and her understanding and sympathy. And there are the accidental things like housework and the like besides others (3).

For members of the other group fitting into the social gender system became problematic because they experienced inability and/or unwillingness to integrate into the existing sex/gender paradigm.

> I have to a certain extent managed to make my peace with the two halves of the world that there are women and men. And I have managed to shed light on the fact that if so and it is absolutely and inevitably necessary—as this is a whole terrorist system, even if you only go out into the street you face the question whether you are a man or a woman—where I put down the coin. . . . Because I am really so much between the two that if I don't say anything, people start wondering. And then you can have the so-called objective criteria and the like, but I don't even want to apply objective criteria. Applying my subjective criteria I am saying that I am not a woman. I have no choice, I am a boy. I have no other choice. And if I had another choice, I would be neither male nor female (10).

Thus while members of the first group were busy re-arranging their own (sex/gender) coordinates within a system they accepted without criticism, the others were actively criticising the system itself. (As it will be indicated later, in Hungarian medical practice the first group of transsexual people seems to be preferred.)

Homosexuality as a transitory—previous—identity category was part of some transsexuals' understanding of themselves. Some came to define themselves as homosexual because the term and concept of transsexual was unknown to them.[8]

> I first heard about transsexuality when I was sixteen or seventeen. Up to that point I had not known that such a thing existed and I thought that I was a lesbian and that was all there was to it (15).

[8] For our respondents the Internet was the primary source of information on transsexuality, the basis of further enquiries. The importance of the information accessed via the internet cannot be overestimated. State-of-the-art specialist literature or information is almost non-existent in Hungarian, and the field was unexplored in public discourse.

> This was an enormous taboo in the family. And I had not known anything, of course. I had not been clear about the basic concepts. . . . I consented to be something. First there was the homosexual, then there was the transvestite (*sighs*), but really the first shock when you realise who you are—[happens] when you go to a place like that. Go clubbing. . . . And that's where I realised the state of things. That's where I realised that a gay guy is really proud of his male body. Probably very masculine, trains and works out. So that's where I realised all these things. And that a lot of them have a thing about showing themselves. I mean the ones that have come out. And they are looking for guys like themselves—with similar masculine bodies. . . . Well, I immediately realised that this is—not (*laughs*)—that this is not what I am (3).

Homosexuality is a phenomenon more widely known than transsexuality, thus occasionally it may have served as a "cognitive introduction" when explaining oneself to others, for example, to parents. In such cases homosexuality might later become a negative point of reference. Despite the unfavourable public opinion of homosexuality, our respondents thought that homosexuals' situation was better than transsexuals'. Homosexuality was "better off" by being more widely known and more "institutionalised" than transsexuality. It was also noted that the "gay infrastructure" may sometimes be more open and inclusive for transsexuals than the "straight world." In some cases the advantage of being in a gay/lesbian environment was that it gave "shelter" from the ordeals of the "traditional hetero world" and at least temporarily provided manoeuvring ground for transsexuals in search of their identity.

> [My mother] still believed that I was a lesbian, and I tried to persuade her to come with me to see the doctor then he would tell her all about it. But she didn't want to come along, because she was stubborn; she did not care, it was my own business, she wasn't interested; so I started to tell her about this thing bit by bit. She still didn't understand. . . . My study group at uni know everything . . . and accept it. They accept this, although nobody knew about it previously. I thought it was strange that someone ages with me should not know about this. . . . They know about transvestites, lesbians, but not about this (15).

> Lesbians or gay men are better off in a way, as everyone understands what they are about. And I never stop explaining things to even the most well-informed of people. . . . People talk more and more about gay men and lesbians. They have also heard about transvestites, but they don't know the difference between people who just dress up when they feel like it and people who want to change their gender. But it would be great if they understood this (5).

> And today I say that I wish I was gay because I know lots of gay people and their life is extremely easy, lot easier in a way that they go between worlds. . . . It is extremely easy, as they know what they want. It is fascinating that it is me saying all this. I too know what I want, but it is . . . not possible. Biologically my body is unfit, and then

here we are, wondering why not–(*sighs*) because I would not be fit to do a lot of things afterwards either. And I will not transition for the sake of a guy. So I should do it for myself in the first place, but I am fine as I am for now (11).

However, we detected points of conflict between transsexuals, gay men and lesbians. Our interviews showed that in some cases gay men and lesbians did not respect or listen to the self-identification of transsexuals among them, the main factor of classification for them being the gender of the preferred sexual partner.

When there is a gay male company and a gay female company, that is almost nearly the same. Especially now I don't frequent gay female company because they say that whoever thinks I am a man is either stupid or blind. . . . So they classify me as butch and that I can bear for a while. . . . I clearly present a very strong stereotype, that lesbian females are very, very masculine. But this is not the case with me. By the time I explain this, that they should not see lesbian women through me because I am not one, because they are on the wrong track, the sun goes down (10).

In contrast, transsexuals, who have realigned themselves according to the heteronormative gender paradigm, drew on the "normality" they achieved in opposition to aspects of homosexuality they saw as socially transgressive.

I am an average, normal man, who rejects the notion of any sexual deviance. I don't frequent gay company. For example, at the festivals, a muscular man with a well worked-out body puts on feminine make-up. This is part of the gay world, but because the media like to pick this up, transgender people are judged by the same standards and this is obviously harmful for the case [of transsexuals] (8).

I think that instead of difference, it is sameness that needs emphasising in transsexual existence. For example, my problem with gay people too is that they should not shout about how different they are; instead, they should shout about how bloody similar to everyone else they are (2).

Nearly all of our respondents reported to have experienced signs in childhood or adolescence that could strengthen a gender identity different from the average. In this context the two areas most frequently referred to were clothing and the relationships with members of the other gender. Rejection of expectations relating to gender-specific appearance, for example clothing and hairstyles, was interpreted as rejection of the gender assigned at birth. In retrospect, many respondents considered their relationship with members of the opposite gender a sign of their transsexuality.

> I put on my mum's clothes, underwear and the like (*giggles*). This is standard, so to speak. And as soon as—when I was alone and all, I put on women's clothes—of course, not in public—as they say in the United States, I was a "closet queen" (16).

According to their current perceptions, they "worked in line with their real gender." This type of adolescent or young adult experience was characterised by insecurity and confusion as it soon became clear that it did not fit the social expectations. To avoid individual and community sanctions for transgression of norms related to appearance and behaviour towards the opposite gender, on the interpersonal level some chose isolation or "assimilation," while on the inter-group level they maintained multiple affiliations. For some time some individuals appeared publicly as members of their birth sex and tried to be successful in certain areas of life, such as studies, professional and community life. At the same time, they tried to organise their private sphere according to their "true gender."

> I remember that I started fantasising about being a boy—what I would play, how I would behave—, and then I made myself a whole fantasy world . . . [with] the people in the real world in it, only I was different. I was a boy . . . and I spent a lot of time daydreaming like this (4).

The need to harmonise the two worlds caused our respondents to decide to take steps to eliminate the confusion caused by ambiguity and to actualise themselves.

> It culminated in me telling my dad . . . this time last year that I would put an end to this (smiles), as I could not live like this any more. Well, they had known for long—my parents—about me. And then I decided that this year 2003 was going to be a good time for decision-making about what I should do about this. . . . Because it was already obvious that I would have to do something. Because I was going down too deep and—that was not good (3).

School was often the first institutional scene where practical problems arose from non-average or non-conformist self-identification. While gaining acceptance from the family—one or both parents and siblings—may have taken place over a longer period in several steps leaving conflicts latent or unspoken, in the more formal school environment they became more apparent. Primary or secondary school may have been inefficient places of socialisation for our transsexual respondents, as they posed expectations from teachers and peers that these individuals did not want to or could not conform to. Experiences included isolation from peers, not being understood, sanctions for the transgression of formal expectations and exclusion.

> They tried to ostracise me or exclude me; I could not play with them for various reasons . . . they told me I was queer and such things . . . well, I did not feel I was one, because—I don't know, it was such a shame for me that I withdrew. I became an introvert. I was a not more of a loner. And of course, I became more aggressive as well, and I tried to retaliate (15).

Gaining acceptance within the family was an ongoing struggle parallel with school conflicts, if the family had any knowledge of such problems. One obstacle to "coming out" in the family may have been lack of knowledge about transsexuality on both sides. Parents did not seem to want to acknowledge their children's "difference." Some tried to make them behave "the right way" trusting that the problem would be just a phase. Some respondents reported parents' fear of the reactions of the wider environment, some experienced total rejection when parents did not want to face possible or realised consequences of gender transition.

> I thought that my family would tolerate this and all would be fine. It did not even occur to me that this might not be acceptable . . . so I came out with it to my family and I was kicked out of the family home. And there I was, completely lonely (2).

> I told them I had taken steps to officially change my name and gender. And they were completely shocked and said what else could I be but a girl, and then I said I had been to a psychiatrist who then passed me on to a psychologist and that was the point I was at, in the middle, or rather towards the end of that consultation, and soon I would have my first referral. . . . And then my father got very violent and shouted that everyone who assists me in this should be killed (10).

Rejection was the most often mentioned reaction from the family. This could appear in the form of denial or rephrasing the problem. Rejection could in some cases be followed by "reconciliation." This generally took place in the phase of medical intervention, when the first changes to the body made clear the irreversibility of the situation. After several years of struggle some had experienced practical signs of acceptance. In our interviews, acceptance by the family was mostly discussed in relation to the parents. We only had one respondent who had to communicate the start of gender transition to their biological children. Some respondents had considered that they may in the future talk openly to their own or their partners' children about their transsexuality. Our respondents understood and to a certain extent empathised with their families' difficulties in coming to terms with transsexuality. They also knew that their needs were not everyday needs.

> I can understand [my mother's negative reactions]; after all, she was raised in a completely different social atmosphere, she may well experience this as a trauma. . . . She

> had not been raised in a discriminative family, or what not, simply at the time when she grew up, there was hardly any awareness that people like me exist (12).

> I can hear their fears. That there is a healthy body, and why does a healthy body want to be cut up? Of course, one tried to avoid the doctor as far as surgery is concerned, if we look at it from a healthy perspective (6).

Some even thought that their parents could benefit from psychological help and specialist information they could familiarise themselves with the phenomenon of transsexuality, become more sympathetic, stop blaming themselves, and prepare for their offspring's impending changes.

> I thought about the matter and told my mum that we should look for a psychologist for her, . . . whom we would both see, because she must be having a hard time. . . . I simply cannot talk to her about this. She is starting to show more understanding, but . . . this is hard to overcome. To come face to face with the fact that . . . she had raised a girl for eighteen years, and then it turned out that it was not a girl but a boy and wants to have sex reassignment surgery. It is hard (13).

Partnerships provided the main interpersonal space for gaining acceptance. Our respondents thought that well functioning partnerships were based on openness, i.e. giving up within the partnership isolation and assimilation techniques otherwise used in relation to the wider society. Our respondents thought that openness was also important in interpersonal relationships within the family, but as one's family is a given and they cannot be "swapped," in some instances our respondents could not build with them an open relationship based on mutual understanding and acceptance. In a partnership, however, acceptance of the partner was a basic requirement, thus the well working partnership could be interpreted as proof of interpersonal acceptance. Accepting partners usually gave a supportive background to the individuals who were transitioning.

> I never felt secure enough to think that I could do it all on my own. I definitely needed someone to stand by me and not to influence my decisions, someone to simply support me. And I am very sure that everybody needs that. It gives you incredible strength and the feeling of security (6).

Gaining acceptance was not an issue for individuals within partnerships, as acceptance was the very basis on which the partnership was built. Some respondents experienced problems in connection with their inability to accept their "wrong bodies," "less than 100%" specific gender status and/or performance, especially in sexual practices.

> [The most difficult thing is] sexual life. Definitely. That for example, I don't undress—I would like to, but I never had the inclination to do it like this. Otherwise I would really like it and all, but—not like this (5).

> Perhaps [the most difficult thing was when] my partner cheated on me with another man. . . . I knew that he was a hundred percent man and I was not. I knew that I could not give her what he gave her. Never. I would never be able to give her that (15).

Sex—or the lack of it—as a problem led some respondents to report "asexuality" as their main experience, this became part of their understanding of their own identity.

Most respondents envisioned "average, ordinary" lives they wished to achieve in the future. In connection with this, gender transition was thought to be a prerequisite for a "simple, normal" life, ridding the individuals of an overwhelming and disturbing sense of distinctiveness.

> I have no great expectations—[just] basic things like I think a normal average person is able to get. And to be recognised—[that] when I introduce myself and say my own name and in the meantime I can see a big question mark on their faces—so I would like this to be average. This is all I would like. I don't think that's much to want to achieve (7).

> One of my dreams is to have a family I can be with, meaning a wife, child, and a job, and that's it. I would try to live an ordinary life (15).

The contents of an envisioned normal life, of course, were very varied. Most respondents tried to achieve an "average, ordinary" life by turning to the health care system.

Transsexuality as "Illness"—Interviews With Professionals

Almost all of our experts agreed that the main characteristic of transsexuality is the need for the harmonisation of body/soul, outside/inside. While some psychiatrists picture a transgender spectrum allowing for the possibility of successful psychotherapy in some cases, others—the surgeons and one psychiatrist—argued that in transsexual cases the only solution was physical, surgical intervention. One expert contended that prejudices and false views of both medical professionals and lay people—which would also be worth researching—make it difficult to clearly define transsexuality.

"Cure" in the treatment of transsexual patients may involve the alteration of a medically healthy body as a result of which the patient has to

remain in contact with the health care system in the future: they may undergo life-long hormone therapy; their hormone levels would then need regular check-ups; different phases of gender realignment surgery may be followed by revisions, especially in the cases where the original surgery fails.[9]

Diagnostic Criteria of Transsexualism

Within the discourse of transsexualism as illness, the international literature uses the term *gatekeeping* to describe the function that the specialist, mainly the psychiatrist or various officials and the surgeon fulfil in the life of the transsexual person who enters the health care system (cf. Raj 2002). Persons wishing to change their gender need to convince the health care professionals of their transsexuality and thus entitlement to gender-realignment treatment. Recognition of this entitlement mainly depends on who the specialist considers to be transsexual.

Some of our professional interviewees highlighted the importance of *differential diagnostics* in diagnosing transsexualism. The diagnosis has to exclude mental illness, transvestitism, homosexuality, intersex conditions, personality disorder and that transsexual identification should be a covering story of another problem. Homosexuality and transvestitism were mentioned the most often in opposition to transsexualism.

Only a few experts described transsexual identification as a stage in the development of the personality asserting that the transsexual condition of the individual has a history, which cannot be regarded independent of the social environment. The transsexual individual's path (as confirmed by our interviews with individual respondents) often leads through membership of categories that medical diagnostics seeks to exclude, for example, homosexuality.

[9] The WHO defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." See <http://www.who.int/bulletin/bulletin_board/83/ustun11051/en/index.html> (5 December 2006). It is also described as the "ability to lead a socially and economically productive life" (cf. Declaration of Alma–Ata. See <http://www.who.int/hpr/NPH/docs/declaration_almaata.pdf> (5 December 2006)). These definitions of health reach beyond the disease-centred approach used by WHO in ICD-10, where transsexualism is classified specifically as a "mental or behavioural disorder." Our transsexual respondents most often emphasized the lack of harmony of body and soul when describing their past or present condition rather than any mental or physical illness. Throughout our research, we are concerned with issues of health rather than solely issues of medicine. We do not aim to dismiss the value of any medical treatment requested by individuals who wish to transition to improve their own physical, mental and social well-being.

Practical Aspects of Identifying Transsexualism

Theoretically, the patient's transsexualism is diagnosed with the help of a set of criteria and tests. Our interviews revealed that in the absence of official guidelines the professional in question will determine the appropriate procedure to safely diagnose transsexualism based on his/her insight and experience. These psychological, psychiatric practices may be very diverse.

In diagnosing transsexualism, it is essential that the health professional should accept the credibility of the patient's transsexual self-representation. Some professionals for instance accept only total inability of the transsexual patient to socially integrate in the sex they were assigned at birth. Some patients may be labelled "media-transsexuals" or "livelihood transsexuals," because they talk about their lives and transition stories in the media. It is widely presumed that transsexual people will hide their condition from the world. Stronger than average conformity to gender stereotypes, rejection of or alienation from the gay subculture and heterosexual choice of partners are also among the credibility criteria. Some claim that "real transsexual people" will have had no sexual experience in their birth sex. Fulfilling professionals' expectations regarding sexual life may in some cases be a necessary survival technique for gay, lesbian or bisexual transsexuals: having been informed by others, they often conceal their same-gender attractions from their specialists.

The pursuit of all possible kinds of gender realignment surgery seems to be another significant credibility criterion. According to this, the transsexual individual wants to have surgery even if science or the expertise and technology available within the national health care system cannot perform it on the required level. Fulfilling this criterion can be a serious health hazard and may have high costs. Some specialist will doubt the patient's transsexuality if the patients consider their own needs at the beginning of the transition process, and feel that they can wait with certain treatment until it is safe to perform. Patients with this attitude may find it more difficult to obtain a referral for treatment, without which the most basic official changes—change of name and gender on the birth certificate, change of school certificates—essential for everyday life cannot be made.

The Role of Health Professionals in the Transition Process

While transitioning, the transsexual patient is in contact with health professionals specialising in different fields of medicine. The longest contact may be established with surgeons and endocrinologists. Specialists in

medical fields relevant to phases of gender transition know each other only indirectly or not at all. Specialists, focusing on their own specialised fields, often do not have a holistic picture of transition and may know little of other procedures relevant to different stages of transition. After the psychiatrist has given referral, the plastic surgeon, the endocrinologist, the gynaecologist or urologist will treat the patient's body without any contact with the professional who gave the referral. Surgeons specializing in different fields perform gender realignment surgery in ad-hoc teams depending on whether or not the hospital in question is willing to accommodate the surgery. The specific experience of surgeons is typically limited to a few Hungarian transsexuals.

Our interviews revealed that there were no official guidelines or protocol for the procedures to be followed in the case of transsexual patients. From psychiatrists to surgeons each health care professional will follow their own considerations. At the time of the research an official at the Ministry of Health, Social and Family Affairs confirmed in writing that there was no legal structure for gender transitioning in Hungary. On one hand, the lack of protocol makes surgeons more careful in performing irreversible surgery—every referral is checked several times. On the other hand, the lack of regulation in performing treatment may involve serious health hazard. The letter obtained by the research team from the relevant official in the Ministry also confirmed the lack of guidelines as to how and within what time the results of surgical malpractice should be revised.

Patients wishing to undergo gender transition must mainly count on themselves to find the way from one health care professional to the other within the health care system. Their main obstacle is the complexity of the system.

Success and Failure in the Clinical Relationship

The success of the health care professional in the context of transsexualism may best be measured by the happier and more balanced life of the patient, who can feel that their soul and body are in harmony and that they do not have serious conflicts with their environment because of their ambiguously gendered appearance. As psychotherapy cannot "cure" transsexuality, neither can it successfully teach the individual to live with this condition, surgical intervention is often necessary. Transsexual people often hope that such treatment will improve their life.

Some professional respondents highlighted that medical treatment should begin with appropriate referrals, as the success of the treatment

depends on the correct diagnosis by the psychiatrist as much as on the realistic expectations of the patient. According to these views, it seems to be equally important that the transsexual individuals should successfully integrate into society in their self-identified gender, if possible, even prior to treatment. These professionals believed that after a series of successful surgeries the patient would leave the transitory, transsexual condition behind.

The course of treatment that is to bring peace of mind, however, is prone to failure at several stages. Psychotherapy could assist patients in dealing with unsuccessful surgery. Very few, however, turn to psychotherapy. In this case the lack of regulation or official guidelines is unhelpful, as no one offers transsexual patients psychotherapeutic assistance at the post-operative stage and no one encourages them to seek such help.

If surgery does not bring satisfactory results or fails, the transsexual patient—at that point clinically ill—has a lower chance of survival than before they began treatment. The situation may be further aggravated by the knowledge that there is no guarantee of surgical revisions.

Differences in Private and State Health Care

In Hungary gender realignment treatment is available both within the state health care system and privately. At the time of the research there was no institution with the obligation to accommodate gender realignment surgery, and there was no nominated specialist in the state health care system whose remit included dealing with transsexual patients. Specialists who might have the expertise did not necessarily empathise with transsexuals' specific problems.

In Hungary, recent official information on gender realignment options can be obtained from the Department of Health Policy in the Ministry of Health in the form of a standardised letter (being the only—and not too convincing—evidence that the ministry tries to fulfil the role of provider of information and guidance). However, the official letter does not specify whether psychiatric or psychological referral can be obtained only from the two specialists mentioned in it, who else might be approached for referral; whether the specialists named will see the patient in the state scheme or privately, or whether there is a consultation fee. Our research findings showed that the specialists named in the standard letter from the ministry would in the majority of cases see the patient in their private practice. This practice may suggest that the ministry directs patients to private health care, or indeed that the state health care system is not aware of specialists who will treat transsexual patients within the

system. Patients might reasonably expect to be informed that they may not access state health care.

Transsexual people informing the research told us that professionals in the system are highly likely to refuse to see transsexual patients. Reasons given include lack of expertise and this attitude may stem from an unwillingness to treat another doctor's patient. Such experiences usually cause the transsexual patient to turn to private health care, where the professional's positive attitude can be "bought." Due to the costs involved, however, this is not a feasible solution for many.

Gender realignment surgery requires special expertise grounded in professional experience. In the last decade—as a professional interviewee put it—"ever-growing focus on professional development has brought more interest" in surgical treatments for transsexualism amongst Hungarian surgeons. Another interviewee pointed to tensions between surgeons working in the state and private health care, which is rooted in the lack of financial rewards on one side and vested financial interests on the other. The low number of patients requiring such treatment in Hungary continues to be a problem: It is a financial risk to establish specialist practice for the treatment of transsexuals both in the state and private health care schemes.

We could not obtain information directly from professionals working exclusively in private health care. Our information about private health care comes from indirect sources, mainly from transsexual respondents. We were informed of cases that suggest unclear boundaries between state and private health care. In one case the surgeon helped his private patient to obtain state support for the next surgery. In another case, the surgeon encouraged a patient who had obtained state funding for surgery to register as his private patient, and was unwilling to perform the surgery within the state scheme. In another example, a surgeon who worked in the state scheme told the patient how much money he expected from the patient on whom he was going to perform surgery within the state system.

Our research findings show that at the time of the research there was no official stance on whose duty it is to provide treatment to transsexual people. State and private health care were not separated in the course of gender realignment surgery, and there were examples of unethical professional attitudes.

Support

Our professional respondents agreed that the treatment of transsexual patients could be optimised with support on three levels: professional support, administrative/official help and self-help.

Respondents agreed that optimal *professional support* could be ensured for transsexual patients within a professional team. This would benefit the patient as they could obtain reliable information on the overall procedure at the beginning of transition, including the possible risks involved. Professional help from outside the sphere of medicine may also be needed: social workers could guide transsexual persons through official matters. Several professional respondents saw the need for a place or places which would be centres for transsexual care. Such a centre might be incorporated into an institution with a wider remit and could provide transsexual outpatient services.

In the context of professional help for transsexual patients, *transphobic* and *transpositive* clinical practice can be distinguished. C*linical transphobia* is:

> within the context of the professional working relationship between clinician and client, any belief, attitude, act or behavior (whether therapist- and/or client-generated) *which negatively values, denies, undermines, discourages or disempowers* trans-identified or GV clients in terms of their unique identities and subjective realities (including, but not restricted to, physical sex, gender identity, sexual orientation and sexual identity), quality of life, the pursuit of self-determination and human rights, and the right to comprehensive health care. If clinical transphobia is initiated by the therapist, we can call this "therapist transphobia," and if internalized by the client, "client transphobia (internalized)." By comparison, "clinical transpositivity" can be defined as its diametrical opposite, substituting, where appropriate, the phrase: *positively values, affirms, supports, encourages and empowers* (Raj 2002).

In terms of *transphobic* attitudes, we did not find substantial difference between state and private health care; and our interviews with professionals were not free from transphobia either. Examples of *transphobic* clinical attitudes included: guiding the transsexual patient to one's private practice (otherwise being too busy) and regarding the request for gender transition a luxury or a matter of ethical choice, by which the transsexual person may endanger others around them. A health care professional who thinks that gender realignment treatment helps people achieve an extreme degree of self-expression will most likely refuse to treat transsexual patients. Some professionals may find it difficult or impossible to treat patients against their own convictions.

Interviews with our professional respondents suggest the existence of *transpositive* clinical practice. A psychiatrist treated the process of

gender transition as an integral part of psychological development in transsexual patients. A surgeon emphasized that the types and sequence of surgery is defined by the patient's needs, therefore it is essential to know the patient as a person. Another surgeon and another psychiatrist agreed that for a successful post-transition social integration it is more beneficial if the transsexual person can finish the legal changes of name and gender before any major surgery. Transpositive clinical attitudes may contribute to a successful working relationship of health care professional and patient and also to the successful post-transition integration into society. This nevertheless requires a greater professional knowledge of transsexuality and better empathy towards transsexual persons.

Transsexual people need administrative/official assistance in gender transition especially in amending official documents and records and in relation to financing treatment. The change of personal documents is an essential part of gender transition. Documents can be changed any time—pre-, mid- or post-surgery or other treatment—after obtaining two psychological assessments/referrals. However, this official procedure lacks any legal basis, it is grounded merely in a currently humane—or *transpositive*—official attitude.

Appropriate official attitudes are essential in order to ensure inclusion of gender realignment surgery in the state health care system. Despite irregularities the current situation marks a step forward in the recognition of transsexual's entitlement to gender realignment treatment within the state system: "mastectomy or castration is a type of surgery that can be obtained at any health care provider. However, hormone therapy and genital surgery are not yet provided with financial support."[10]

In an ideal case official help would include reliable and correct information. Real transparency would benefit not only transsexual people but also the state, as current irregularities may lead to unlawful actions as well as unnecessary expenses.

At the time of our research there was no *self-help* group for transsexual people in Hungary, and the persons concerned had mixed views of its necessity. The existence of the internet site TransSexual Online (TSO) suggests a need for reliable and all-encompassing information about transsexualism.[11] TSO provides a forum for the exchange of experiences for transsexual people and thus fulfils a certain role in the representation

[10] See Senior Advisor Tímár's official reply to the written enquiry of researcher Judit Takács (Takács 2006, 180).

[11] See <http://tsonline.uw.hu/> (5 December 2006).

of their interests. Despite its limitations, this form of self-help ensures the flow of information about medical aspects of gender transition, and occasionally helps build an informal network of people with similar life experiences.

Improving the representation of transsexual people's interest within the health care system could be a specialised area within the representation of patients' rights. An organisation specialising in the representation of transsexual rights could work for the improvement and standardisation of the current situation and could call the attention of responsible decision-makers to unresolved issues.

Transsexual People's Rights

§. 54. (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary provides that "In the Republic of Hungary everyone has the inherent right to life and to human dignity. No one shall be arbitrarily denied their exercise of these rights."[12] The right to identity, autonomy, freedom of action and the protection of private life are all included in the right to human dignity.

The European Court of Human Rights considers it to be a breach of Article 8 (right to private life) of the European Convention of Human Rights in cases where a state does not recognise the acquired gender of a transsexual person. It considers it to be a breach of Article 12 (right to marry) when a state does not allow a transsexual person whose acquired gender has been officially registered to marry a person of the opposite gender. It is a breach of Article 14 (equal rights of men and women) if a state does not provide the same rights for transsexual persons as it does for non-transsexual persons.[13]

The violation of transsexual men's and women's rights partly originates from the fact that in contemporary Hungary official treatment of gender transition issues are unregulated. Act CXXV of 2003 on equal treatment and the promotion of equal opportunities is the only piece of legislation that provides direct protection from discrimination on the grounds of gender identity.

Legal aspects of gender transition, while officially unregulated, follow a more or less established legal practice. Having obtained the appropriate gender on one's birth certificate, a matching official name and documents, a transsexual person's rights and responsibilities are exactly the

[12] This part of the paper was written with the assistance and advice of József Kárpáti LL.D., a Hungarian legal expert of LGBT human rights.

[13] See Goodwin v. UK (Ref: 28957/95) and I v. UK (Ref: 25680/94) at the European Court of Human Rights.

same as persons' of the same gender. They can marry their partner of the opposite gender, form a family, and together they are guaranteed all the rights of a different-sex couple.

The Act of 1982 on birth certificates contains no provision for the change of name in the process of gender transition. According to the information obtained from the Ministry of Health the registration of the "new" gender takes place as a correction of the original entry in the birth register. It is unclear whether the change of name and gender can legally require prior medical intervention, and if so, of what type. The current practice suggests that a change in gender does not require prior surgical intervention.

There are two main areas of law where transsexual people might be discriminated against. Their rights as patients and their right to access to state health care might be denied. Similarly, their rights as married partners and parents may not be respected. Transsexual people may request state support for their gender reassignment surgery on an individual basis. It is unclear, however, in what framework the decisions are being made, what surgery will be supported, or whether there is provision for rehabilitation after unsuccessful surgery. Gender reassignment, revision and rehabilitation in Hungary falls under point 2 d) and k) of paragraph 142 of Act CLIV of 1997 on the provision of state health care services. Regarding the treatment of transsexual patients procedures need to be created that respect individual freedom, autonomy and the preservation of dignity and health as laid down in paragraphs 1, 2 and 10 of the same act.

In the field of marital and parental rights, transsexual people's rights may be affected by current regulation, which effectively annuls a pre-existing marriage if one of the partners transitions into the opposite gender, as after transition the married partners would be of the same sex, and this form of marriage is currently not recognised in Hungarian family law. The situation may be even more difficult in a family where there is at least one child, as the child would legally lose one of the parents. Along with the recognition of the acquired gender of a transsexual person, there is a need to make legal arrangements for the families created by two mothers or two fathers.

Lacks and Criticism

When we tried to map transsexual respondents' paths from the recognition of transsexuality to their experiences in the health care system, our research results suggested that it would be over-confident to describe the

changes in the situation of transsexual respondents with the metaphor of a path. We found persevering transsexuals were people treading on unbroken ground rather than a clear path.

Through our research, we identified the following main *milestones of gender transition*:

1. The individual develops the conviction that they are transsexual.
2. The individual decides to take steps to officially change their gender (and name).
3. The individual gathers information about practical possibilities of gender transition.
4. The individual turns to a health care professional.
5. The individual gets psychiatric referrals.
6. The individual applies for an official change of name.
7. The individual starts medical treatment and undergoes surgery.
8. The individual lives their everyday life as a member of their acquired gender.

The sequence of the milestones may vary. It is important to note that previously surgery had been required before the official change of name was possible, while at the time of our research more and more transsexual individuals changed their name prior to surgery, after psychiatric referral. During the research, it was very difficult to identify these milestones: The changing official procedure, the lack of regulations with regard to the whole process, the unreliable and incomplete information and the diversity of individual needs and possibilities meant that our findings showed a plethora of variations in gender transition paths.

The most common motivation for beginning a transition process was that a person was unhappy with their birth sex and the gendered life it prescribed. They had a conviction that they needed to change their gender status and find their "real self." Individual stages of the gender transition process could be interpreted as practical expression of this basic motivation, which, however, often came up against practical difficulties.

Transsexual people have to face several practical difficulties during gender transition of which they were critical. We sorted their *criticisms* under two headings: Firstly, we collected criticisms of the contemporary Hungarian system of gender transition. Secondly, we collected their remarks on their dealings with medical professionals and state officials.

The main criticism of the system of gender transition was the lack of regulations, which may have resulted in arbitrary decisions, unexpected situations and a discontinuous flow of information. This may have made the whole process of gender transition too complicated, and caused some individuals to spend years trying to obtain the necessary infor-

mation, referrals, official permissions and treatment. It seems that the process of gender transition had previously been clearer, as treatment could only start after the approval of a National Health Board and official documents could be changed only after irreversible surgery. By the time of our research the approval of the National Health Board was not necessary and official documents could be changed prior to any surgery. Administration remained complex and slow. The psychiatrists' referrals were the major go-ahead, the "green light" to gender transition. The most severe criticism was that there was no clear set of criteria in deciding on the transsexuality of the individual. Many respondents thought that the professionals dealing with them had insufficient expertise and experience. Insufficient expertise, a lack of attention and the shortness of time could mean that professionals did not necessarily give referrals to those "really" in need of them. Criticisms of the system referred to problems around data protection. Transsexuals, too, have a right to the confidential handling of their data, which in practice does not always happen.

The second group of criticisms referred to the experiences of interacting with health care professionals and officials. Many respondents were unhappy with the quality and impersonality of these interactions.

Most respondents were also concerned about the *financial aspect* of their gender transition. Lack of official regulations of gender transition involved a lack of information on what type of health care service is available within the state health care system, and which consultations or types of treatment and surgery had to be paid for individually. The phenomenon that state and private health care are not clearly separated in Hungary also impacts on the treatment of transsexualism. We encountered an example of privately paid surgery performed in a state hospital, where the institution in question did not receive all the money paid by the patient. Our respondents referred to several instances where the separation of private and state health care was unclear. All our respondents thought that having a certain amount of money was a prerequisite of seeking medical help. Although they were mostly aware of their entitlement to state health care, it was unclear what this entitlement included or how to access available support.

Our transsexual respondents listed several arguments for their entitlement to treatment under the state health care system which, in an optimal case, would be characterised by consistency, transparency, reliability, responsibility as well as financial and psychological support. Our research findings indicated that transsexual people in Hungary could be assisted in several ways, of which peer *support* and state support would be the most necessary: several respondents would welcome centralised,

institutionalised state assistance, within which information and treatment would be accessible under the existing entitlement to state health care. The research results also suggested that gender reassignment could create the conditions for successful social integration therefore it might be understood as treatment to prevent problems like unemployment or isolation later in life; and the state could assist transsexual people by providing reliable information and state services being more aware of the human dimension of their problems.

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The Boundaries of Identity: Bisexuality in Everyday and Theoretical Contexts

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How can bisexuality be placed in the framework of the political movements of sexual minorities?[1] These movements are built on a need of acknowledgment and representation, in a situation of invisibility and prohibition. The "ethnic model" of identity politics—either in a liberal, equality-centred or a radical, difference-centered way—expresses a psychological need for being reinforced, with reference to or in opposition to an oppressing majority, creating its own institutions, forums, events, etc. While it might result in an isolated, "underground" being, it provides a safe space; separation indicates a need and a constraint at the same time. This bond strongly exists, since prohibiting and tabooing strongly exist, too. From a "primary," psychological aspect, these spaces and ways of representation seem to be essential for self-strengthening.

The varied discourses on bisexuality are closely intertwined with the different arguments on the concept of identity in general. Conscious or subconscious standpoints about gender identities have their implications regarding the status of and the attitudes towards bisexuality, too. In one major system of ideas, bisexuality is approached in a framework where sexes, gender identities and sexual orientations are considered clear-cut and stable categories. In this framework, bisexuality may represent a disturbing phenomenon, but also another group that needs to be represented, included into sexual minorities. From a different point of view, however, it can be approached outside of this structure, used for subverting the very system of sex-/gender-based identities. The first group of opinions seems typical for a (semi)politicized LG community, while the second viewpoint is based more on post-structuralist theoretical grounds. I try to explore these major discourses that determine the sub-discourses on bisexuality and to raise the question of whether there are potential passages between them, connecting the theoretical outlines with some experiences I have had in the Hungarian LGBT community.

As for the situation of gays and lesbians in Hungary, they are generally in a *pre-identical*, partly in an identity-vindicating state. What most

[1] An earlier version of this text has been published in Ferens, Basiuk, and Sikora (2006).

LGBT-identified people have to face, is the difficulty of coming-out. This results either in a closeted existence, or an occasional immersion in a hidden and separated gay world. Organizing gay and lesbian communities, festivals, associations (without even including "bisexual" and "transgender" in their names) reinforces the sense of difference along the line of sexuality, while at the same time aims to break out of it.

Since it is the (op)position that creates a community, which is otherwise not homogenous at all, the different sub-identities, which stand outside the most direct interests—among them bisexuality—, are often put aside. These omitted groups may then create their own identity politics that claim to represent sub-identities with their special interests. It has appeared in Hungary too, mostly on the level of naming groups, festivals or publications. Its first steps were about including the term "lesbian." The representation of bisexuality is less an issue. The gay magazine calls itself the only gay magazine in Hungary (while stressing that they are open for lesbians too; bisexuality is basically not thematized). After ten years, the Gay and Lesbian Film and Cultural Festival included "Bisexual" into its name. The biggest LGBT organization is called Háttér Support Society for LGBT People in English, but its Hungarian name is Háttér Society for Gays—although its subtitle states that it works for the equality of LGBT minorities, protecting human rights and providing human services.

Bisexuality is frequently considered a *pre-identity* state, merely a sexual practice without any other personal or political commitment. This approach to bisexuality is probably the major root for biphobia both among gays and straights. The stereotypes around bisexuals indicate a strong defense of the boundaries of identities and sexual orientations (Ochs 1996). The dichotomized conception of sexuality assumes everyone to be straight in a straight world, and everyone gay in a gay community, which maintains the almost total invisibility of bisexuals. In practical terms, bisexuals appear to be weakening the gay community and movement (Newitz and Sandell 1994). In this social and ideological milieu, it seems much more difficult to come out as bisexual, especially to reclaim a bisexual identity or history (Garber 1997). Often bisexuals themselves do not consider their bisexuality more than a sexual habit. But for many of them, facing the social expectations (in many ways different among straights and gays), the internalized fears of condemnation by the dominant society may cause a similar identity crisis to that which gays and lesbians often go through. It is not just the sexes, between which the shift takes place, but also between levels of acceptability and visibility.

I have done a "micro-study," based on two Hungarian Internet forums discussing bisexuality.[2] It is remarkable that the discussion basically consists of arguments "pro" or "contra" bisexuality. The opinions are diverse, with some returning motives either from the "defending" or the "opposing" side. One major group of opinions associates bisexuality with sex-centrism, polygamy or promiscuity, emotional and sexual infidelity and irresponsibility. They take it as evident that bisexuality means parallel relationships with men and women.

> I have a bad opinion about bis perhaps because I've had very negative experiences with them so far. Their sense of morals, in general, is scanty. The other thing is that bis are usually not reliable, they are much more easy-going in sex, too (Buccser, 24 September 2002, Leszbikus tér).

> Bisexuality excludes fidelity from the beginning. If you have a woman, sooner or later some guy also appears in the picture, if you have a husband, male friend, lover, etc., then you need a woman on the side (Edo, 6 April 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

Another, very typical train of thought, often within the same contributions, goes on by declaring that bisexuality does not exist at all. According to these views, this is just a transitional stage, an incapacity for making up one's mind on one side or the other: A temporary excuse, a "developing step" for compromisers or beginners, or a trendy excursion for straights, who may return to the shelter and social privileges of the straight world at any time. These speakers seem to know what bisexuals really are, regardless of self-definitions—either this or that, either straights or "stone-fags." There are two options altogether, and one has to decide between them; there is a wall that one cannot just walk through this or that way. These remarks indicate a kind of "*compulsory homosexuality*" (cf. Rich 1996). Any connection with the opposite sex is thus seen as inconceivable.

> Another thing is that I don't believe in bisexuality from the beginning. Bis think that they are bis since they have orgasm with women and pricks too, while it doesn't mean anything. And I can't imagine being in love with a woman and a man at once. It's rather some transitional stage (Buccser, 24 September 2002, Leszbikus tér).

> According to my observations, when someone goes out with a boy and a girl, there is always some trick. Most of my bi acquaintances turned out to be "stone-fag" or they just tried the same-sex in the name of some sexual libertarianism (ada_monroe, 25 September 2002, Leszbikus tér).

[2] I explored the forums Leszbikus tér (Lesbian space) and Mi a baj a biszexekkel? (What's the matter with bis?) between April and October 2002, proceeded on the site <www.pride.hu>. The forums are visited mostly by gays and lesbians.

> By the way, in my modest opinion and [from my] (not few) experiences bisexuality doesn't exist. I would rather call it a middle stage in a developmental process that leads to homosexuality. When you can't tell, explain, admit either to yourself or to others what the hell you want. (Edo, 6 April 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

Other remarks suggest that it is a more complex, emotionally saturated state that is, however, more difficult to grasp or represent than either straight or gay identity—which bisexuals themselves suffer from:

> I think that you have the same problem with everything that is not concrete. I mean if you don't belong to either group, at least you are unable to classify yourself somewhere, then the community will not accept you either (Lil, 5 April 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

> So do I have to pursue a decision? Certainty? Declaration?—so that I can belong to a real group at last, and be reconciled (Newt, 23 November 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?)?

Going beyond the pro and contra arguments, some participants of the forums try to get closer to the phenomenon; questions and uncertainties are soon raised about defining what bisexuality is, where it begins, whether it has grades, whether it is a sexual practice or a lifestyle. The incapacity and constraint of categorizing themselves along the lines of sexual orientation bring about great discomfort.

> I try to find out from what point we can speak about bisexuality. Am I bisexual if I'm concerned about sex with a same-sex person? Or just in case of the acceptance of a same-sex partnership in everyday life (I'm not thinking about this at all, in fact it is repulsive to me) (Raki, 4 October 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

One pivotal question regarding the nature of bisexuality is whether it indicates the bisexual person's need towards both sexes—or on the contrary: it represents his/her attraction to a certain character, whose sex is actually irrelevant. The former idea is related to an essentialist view of sexes, while the latter one might be seen as a kind of *queer* approach:

> Have you heard about the idea that a female and a male self can be found in everyone? Thus, it may sound logical that we are looking for two people at once. Our female self is looking for the male one, and vice versa. Perhaps bisexuality can be better understood this way (WEGO, 11 April 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

> I think when you fall in love, then it's the other's being, mind, feelings, taste, humour that you love, and this has nothing to do with sex. Of course the body is also important, but since I'm not left cold by neither the female nor the male body, I think it's all the same whether whom I love is a boy or a girl. And then it's her/him who is there, and I don't need anyone else for sex (Iola, 24 September 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

One of the participants links (mixes up?) the attitudes toward bisexuality with the issue of monogamy. S/he sees the main root of biphobia in the compulsory need to possess and at the same time classify others, and thinks the institution of monogamy itself precarious.

> I think when people criticize bisexuality, they insist on thinking about a partnership in the framework of property relations. Bisexuality, in their view, can't be put in this framework. And for non-bisexuals you can figure out simplifying definitions, while for bis it's hard to find one attribute that would cover them properly. This is why it's not possible to talk about bisexual rights, while in the case of gay rights it seems possible (halacska, 8 April 2002, Mi a baj a biszexekkel?).

I made a quick and non-representative survey among LGBT activists,[3] including questions regarding the stability and relevance of the subjects' sexual orientation, the exactness of its categories, their personal attitudes to bisexuals, and their perception of the attitudes of others. The answers rather reflect upon the stereotypes, than display them. People perceive the difficult status, the stereotypical refusal or invisibility of bisexuality within the gay and lesbian community. They acknowledge that it is not an issue within the LG organizations either, while they have several bisexual members. I will return to some of these opinions later.

I also conducted in-depth interviews with a bisexual woman and a "latent heterosexual" man (using his own term).[4] My questions concerned their self-definition in terms of sexual orientation, its aspects and meanings, and its place and relevance in their broader scope of identities.

Both of them realized right at the beginning, how complex and relative self-definition is. My woman interviewee, Klári identifies herself as bisexual, but adds that she almost never declares it, only if she is "interrogated." Her formulation also depends on the social situation she is in. She calls herself bisexual especially speaking to her children. When she is in Labrisz,[5] she calls herself a lesbian. It is not just a question of adaptation, as she does have more, not exclusive identities, and it is her "lesbian self" indeed that Labrisz liberates and reinforces. On the other

[3] 10 activists of Háttér Support Society for LGBT People and Labrisz Lesbian Association answered a questionnaire with 10 open-ended questions in 2002.

[4] The interviews were conducted in 2005. I would call them "sexual life-course interviews" with questions built around the history of and the reflections on the interviewees' sexual identity. My purpose was to choose a man and a woman with complex experiences and/or ideas about bisexuality. Of course they do not represent any general opinions, however, their narratives may present some possible problems from a subjective point of view.

[5] Labrisz Lesbian Association—the first and so far the only lesbian organization in Hungary.

hand, however, there are also social and psychic inhibitions that make it more difficult for her to speak about her "lesbian self" for her children, and her "bisexual self" in the lesbian community.

> I am bisexual. But I've been looking for that for a long time, and even now, I define myself only if it's unavoidable. I don't declare it very often. But when I declare it, there is a feeling that it mitigates homosexuality. For example in front of my children I call myself bisexual rather than homosexual. But in Labrisz, in the lesbian community I like to call myself lesbian because I feel that they want to hear that, it's better if I belong to them. Also, as far as I feel, they are less interested in my heterosexual life and experiences, and they want to keep it away from themselves a little bit. All the discourses are about "those straights." Because they want to strengthen their identity . . . , and my bisexual or heterosexual self weakens this community, and this is problematic for them to accept. . . . At the same time, there is a liberating power that I cannot experience anywhere else.

My male interviewee, István has gay relationships, but every now and then he has fantasies about women. His self-definition is also dependent on the circumstances, but his decision is more a political one.

> This is not so simple. In most cases I say I am gay, in some cases I say I am bisexual. Sometimes I'm very much pissed off by biphobia, and then I say I am bisexual. For a long time I've thought of myself as clearly gay, and it came up 3–4 years ago that I might have something to do with women. But I am a bisexual grown into the gay culture.

His orientation has social, cultural and political aspects as well, over sexuality. It has effects on his circle of friends, his readings and his activist work, with its identification-conflicts:

> I've had problems with the Gay and Lesbian Festival for a long time, because bisexual was not included in its name. I declared for example that I wouldn't translate films for free until this changes. And this year it was included, so I very much praised the organizers for that.

For Klári, the need for self-definition appeared in the particular moment when after ten years of marriage, she had a lesbian relationship, and the relationship finished. Then she felt she had to find a stable direction, to take a side, to decide which way to go further. (She went towards lesbian ways.) But now she does not feel her sexual orientation a prominent part of her identity or personality. Although bisexuality has been an enriching experience, it has not fundamentally influenced her human values.

> I thought I had to decide whether I'm straight or gay, and where to go then. . . . I thought that would help, would give me some safety. And then I went to Labrisz, where I saw a couple of identities and women. So after a while I thought I didn't necessarily have to define myself. This is more important for the society than for me. . . . It doesn't contribute to my human qualities, everything else might contribute more—how I think about poor people, about my job, how I manage my partnerships, my marriage, how I rear my kids, how I can or cannot separate from someone. . . . But the mere fact that my spectrum is wider, that is enriching, I've experienced more, I can understand more situations.

Being a bisexual does not refer only to her actual state, but includes her past, her life-history, and the potentialities of the future, too.

> If I wanted to establish proportions, I would say that it's 80/20 or 90/10 to the the lesbian side. So I've been longing for women more, I've had more relationships with women. But I don't want to exclude from my life anything, which is in there, I don't want to deny anything, which was in there, and which was good, so I don't want to deny anything, neither the past, nor the future. And I don't want to fix anything.

Independence and non-possession are highly important values for her in a relationship. Partly this is why she hasn't had any long-term lesbian relationship so far; she has no primary need for close and forever-committing bonds at all. Her openness, mobility, her independent and pleasure-seeking personality might step from the fact that bisexual attraction has always been a source of pleasure rather than of crisis for her.

One of my interview questions was related to the classic problem regarding bisexuality: whether it is something special and different that they find in women versus men, or whether they are attracted to certain persons, attributes regardless of their sexes. The difference between the sexes appears not just in the quality or the extent of sexual attraction felt towards them, but also in the level of consciousness and social expectations related to this attraction. We can see this especially in Klári's case, but István also suggests that his attraction towards men is not primarily a question of biology. Quoting Klári:

> There was more consciousness in my straight relationships. . . . A woman is more familiar, my job is easier, since I know how she works, I can get close to her more easily, I can provide her something that a men can't. This means pleasure and a sense of achievement for me. The exciting thing in a man is just his strangeness, that he works differently, that I have to learn he is different. . . . It's probably also a question of conscience, for example when I had parallel relationships, I reassured myself that it was not a betrayal, since it was a different thing. This is a self-deception of course, as this is not so different, just one is better than the other, and I choose the better one. The commitment is different, but my emotional energies are taken up with only one. At the

same time, if I had to choose in that situation, I would have opted for my kids, even if I was in love.

As for István, it is more a "type" of a person that he finds attractive, bodily and intellectually—and he finds this figure more frequently in men.

I think I'm looking for the same in men and women, bodily as well. . . . But accidentally—or not accidentally, but for cultural or biological or whatever reasons—I find it more in men.

He does not feel comfortable with the term "bisexual," since it stresses the role of sexes, which are not necessarily the major factors of attractions. He also problematizes bisexual identity as the possible basis of a community or a political movement.

I also think that bisexuality is an amazingly paradoxical label. It specifies the least important thing: sexes. . . . I think it paradoxical to be organized on that basis, but once definitions occur along this line, it might be necessary. And also because of biphobia. . . . Clearly, if one doesn't have such a "we" identity, then it's more difficult to do a mass movement.

He prefers to use the term "latent heterosexual" to designate his own sexual identity. He uses this formulation in order to express his authentic feelings, but also to provoke people to reflect upon the categorization and "natural identities" themselves.

I also say sometimes that I'm a latent heterosexual. And I think this completely seriously. I live a gay life, but I have this interest in women, which is latent, and latent heterosexuality describes it very well. On the other hand, this is a paradoxical label that is suitable for challenge, people are forced to think, to ask back, then I start to explain, and these explanations may loosen these categories.

The latter ideas may lead us over to the ground of (de)constructivist theories of sexual identity. This theoretical standpoint—that may have consequences for possible political actions, too—, taking its roots primarily from Judith Butler's works (e.g. Butler 1990, 1991, 1993) suggests that identity-based politics, instead of superseding marginalization, actually works for reinforcing it. Postulating a repressed and homogenized identity that should be discovered, acknowledged and represented, may resolve some obvious inequities, but while doing that, conceals other fundamental questions. By claiming an independent identity, we can reverse or struggle with an oppressive gaze, but we cannot back out of it and

replace our muted or distorted identities with a real and authentic one. Fixing an autonomous identity always presumes a fixation of the "interpellating Other" (Althusser 1984), a "respond to a request" (Butler 1993, 13). Paradoxically: the moment of subjection necessarily implies oppression.

A typical symptom of a two-folded discourse that reduces and at the same time reinforces the marginal status of sexual minorities, is the popular habit of asking "experts" about the issue of "homosexuality." A well-known psychologist in Hungary has recently been asked about the possible effects of the education program of Labrisz Lesbian Association:[6] "What is the standpoint of science in connection with [homosexuality and education]?" The expert commented on the program in a basically supportive and liberal way; his rhetoric, however, is deeply typical of the relation to sexual "otherness": "Informing the youth about sexuality [sic], including the knowledge on homosexuality, is very important . . . Homosexuality is an attribute we are born with, and in no way can it be changed during the life-course. So there is no danger for the mis-education of children in this field" (Ranschburg 2002, 10). The psychologist's words suggest that "homosexuality" is an inborn thing, which can be defined and described in opposition to the norm. There is something that is "responsible" for this alteration, and that is why they are different from "us," obviously including me, the expert. The expert's opinion also suggests a polarization of the world for straights and gays; but it is straights who make the division, putting gays into a controllable category of "minority." On the other hand, while (or since) identity is produced from difference, it also carries multiple differences in itself. Differences and contradictions are emerging not just between identities, but also *within* them (Fuss 1989). Since the *relation* between the self and the prevailing "Other" is multiple, identity cannot be grasped and fixed either, it slips out of our hands. When we try to make it fixed and unified, we ignore a couple of further differences. Not because individual experiences are so diverse and so individual, but rather because the self-other relation, the constructedness is so multiple. It is the politics of this constructedness that is really interesting—the process, in which representation and identity mutually and continuously reflect and produce each other.

Gender identities and sexual orientations represent a field where this contingency and constructedness are very easy to ignore. Naturalizing mechanisms and social interests that strive to essentialize the role of

[6] In the scope of the program—that has been going on since 2000—Labrisz organizes discussions with high school students and prospective teachers about LGBT people and related issues.

sexes or erotic attractions, and to make them coinciding elements, work strongly from all sides. This approach does not reckon with the complex ways of sexual bondings that cannot be expressed in the prevailing categories. "There are no direct expressive or causal lines between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy and sexuality" (Butler 1993, 25). This makes categorization impossible and unnecessary, stating that the different subject positions should not be multiplied, but need to be destroyed, subverted. Instead of a "strategic essentialism," we should choose a strategic provisionality. It does not necessarily lead to the depolitization of LGBT efforts, but rather points out that identity-based politics could (should?) be followed by politics of identity-disruption. To consciously show the constructedness and (compulsory) performativity might be a starting point for an opposing strategy. As Jane Gallop puts it: "Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question" (Gallop 1982, xii). Or quoting another remark that depicts the necessity and fluidity of identity from the other side: "There must be a sense of identity, even though it would be fictitious" (Marks 1984, 110). Referring to Butler's vocabulary, gender is a performance, an imitation which has no original version. Taking the example of the Aretha Franklin song "You make me feel like a natural woman . . .", Butler is captivated by the idea that this "you" has endless possible versions: "What if she were singing it to a drag queen, whose performance somehow confirmed her own" (Butler 1993, 27–28)?

If identity itself is not identical and stable, but a contingent, unclear and temporary field, then instead of being a firm base, it might become a destabilizing force. After a certain point difficulties may emerge in deciding on what basis, in the name of whom and for whom we want to speak. This argument frequently comes up in implicit or explicit ways within the "community" while organizing a social event, editing a book or giving any public manifestation.

The complicated issue of representation has been raised in connection with a Hungarian commercial TV-program. In one of the reality shows, a gay man and a lesbian woman had been selected, and then voted into the show by the audience. The characters received rather mixed reactions from the viewers and the media. But there are big debates also within the gay community, basically on the question of whether these people should represent "us," whether they are the good ones and this is the good way for the "proper" representation. Some state that this kind of mission cannot be expected from them, while others say that they are doing it anyway, whether it is their intention or not, at least in the eyes of the millions who watch them. Apart from the inevitably biased media

selection procedure of choosing characters who strongly reflect the general stereotypes, it is equally problematic to decide from "inside," who can represent "us" and how to show what we are "really" like. It is probably only a diversity of representations that could equilibrate the biases or constraints.

To specify the question to bisexuality: its contingent and precarious—personal, political and theoretical—status often seems threatening not just for the movement, but also for the conception of fixed and exclusive sexual identities. However, it might be more productive to consider it a potentiality that may help to challenge the very dichotomies of sexual orientations and the prominent role of sexes in erotic attraction (Esterberg 1997; Jagose 1996). From this point of view, the "mission" is not to justify that bisexuality is more than just a stage, but to show that identity in general is "just a stage," in every sense.

For some people—as we could see that in István's case—, naming themselves bisexual is more a political statement than a sexual practice (as for others, or at other occasions naming themselves gay or lesbian might be the same), through which they can designate the potentiality and contingency of sexual orientations and practices themselves. This is close to a certain *post-identical*, queer state that imagines sexuality in much more complex ways, along much more diverse axes than sex or sexual orientation. This is a less typical attitude among LGBT people in Hungary, whether politically active or not. Among the activists who filled in my questionnaire with open-ended questions, there were only two people (two lesbians) who represented an attitude of this kind. One of them—answering the question "To what extent do you feel the category of your sexual orientation a stable, exact and relevant one?" – wrote the following:

> I don't think that identity necessarily reflects sexual practice. I can imagine being attracted to a man, but for this I won't define myself as bi- or heterosexual.

This answer suggests that sexual orientation might have parts that look over the sex of the actual partner. Another answer to the same question specifies some cases when the person consciously chooses the category she identifies with. It seems to be at least as much a political gesture as a personal one:

> I'm a lesbian, but in some moments, when I'm pissed off by biphobia, I call myself bisexual. I'm not attracted to men though, and usually it's easier to essentialize [my lesbian sexual identity]. It's not very subtle, as in many ways I don't have much in common with a couple of lesbians. But for the outside world this is a relevant category. There

are moments when you cannot specify too much—e.g. speaking with a homophobic creature or a rushing politician.

Her answer on another question, regarding the definition of bisexuality, reflects upon the potential and vague character of it:

> Bisexuality may refer to someone who can feel attracted to any gender. But it's difficult to define, as there may be people like that, who still don't call themselves bisexual. There is a kind of future-potential in it as far as I feel. That is, I think someone bisexual if s/he says that s/he can be attracted to any gender at present, or s/he thinks that it will be possible in the future.

Some years ago, a couple of people in Hungary founded the Group of Genderless People (NINCS). Its ideology basically coincides with a radical Butlerian standpoint, denying biological states as the bases of gender roles and sexual orientations:

> It is a mistake to think that one is attracted to some (of the) sexes. There are a lot of attributes of the other among which anatomic sex is only one. When we are in love, we are usually not tied to the genital of the other, but to the whole person. Therefore it is a false idea to consider someone hetero/homo/bi/a/poly, etc. -sexual. The term of "sexual orientation" is compelled into our mind in order to fix, observe, manipulate and exploit our personality.
> . . .The real challenge for "normality," i.e. heterosexual dictatorship, is so-called bisexuality. There is a great helplessness regarding its status, from the part of those affected, "normal people" and "homosexuals" too. Who is the bisexual? A "normal person" who is winding down a bit and wants to have fun? Or a gay who partly submits to the norms? . . . The best would be if gays did not practice their sexuality as gays. If we had no word for that, if it was not an issue at all. Gay liberation is harmful in this sense, as it reinforces this self-consciousness. It is not the gays who need to be liberated, because then they always remain the group that can be oppressed in different ways (Juhász and Kuszing 1996).

Gay discourse, according to the NINCS-activists, reinforces the scale between two extremes, homo- and heterosexuality. It does not assume that people may interpret their sexuality *regardless* of the sex of their partner. They recognize it as a success that we can choose between homo-, hetero- and bisexuality, but at the same time protest against the obligation of choice:

> Say that someone is attracted to fat people. S/he is looking for her pregnant mother in every partner, together with the power and safety that the mother used to provide. Therefore s/he falls in love and has sex with fat men, because their social roles and appearance represent the attributes s/he is looking for. One day s/he meets a lesbian

> woman who is strong, protective—and fat. Falls in love with her. Can we say that this person is either hetero- or homosexual? Does the term "bisexual" tell anything significant about his/her sexuality (Kuszing 1997)?

The group in its original form does not exist any more, and their work has not really influenced mainstream LGBT activism. NINCS did not have a real scope of social or political activities, and the queer conception swallowed the marginalized sexual identities that still needed to be represented and acknowledged. Since then, another association, Habeas Corpus Working Group has been established by more or less the same people. The organization, taking into account the prevailing gender system, is doing wide-ranging work for discriminated LGBT-s, as well as abused women and children.

Finally, I quote from one of the NINCS–leaflets, construction that by repeating and exaggerating the most typical stereotypes, shows the absurdity of the "how one became sexual" kind of questions. The text, entitled *John Smith: A Bisexual*, is a fictive autobiography, an identity-fiction that exposes the fictitious nature of identity through a parody-like narrative built around the protagonist's sexual behaviour:

> I was born on 10 May 1973. My mother loved me very much, she always warned me against dangerous things, wouldn't let me climb a tree, and told me not to play soccer, because it is rude, and this is why I became a bisexual. I say I'm bisexual because I don't dare to admit that I'm actually homosexual. For there are no bisexuals, I think; people are attracted either to men or women" (Kuszing 1998).

The inconsistent and controversial mixture of arguments is going on the same way, providing a tool for rewriting and revealing the arbitrary rhetoric on the process of gender identification.

It is a question whether the two viewpoints—to put it simply: identity politics and the politics of identity subversion—may have intersections. Identity politics is probably "just a stage," too, and probably an inevitable one. The struggle for the liberation of identities might be followed by a struggle for the liberation *from* identities. If discrimination is not a problem any more, then the need for a declared identity and a safe sub-culture will decrease, too. This does not necessarily involve a total assimilation and depolitization, but perhaps makes a more mature identity politics possible, taking into account the needs and necessities as well as the casual and constructed "nature" of identities—including bisexuality.

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"It is Only Extra Information ..." Social Representation and Value Preferences of Hungarian Gay Men

Judit Takács

Introduction

Nowadays the grounds for existence of homosexual identities can be questioned: in an increasing number of societies we can witness that homosexuality loses its identity constructing capacity. In these places homosexuality is not a focal point of social attention any longer, and while same-sex attraction can remain an important factor in organising one's individual life, it will not hinder the social integration of individuals. Thus if homosexuality still has a strong identity constructing capacity in a society, it can suggest that the given society is dominated by exclusive monolithic homosexual and heterosexual identity patterns which can threaten the successful social integration of people.

The presupposition of my research is that the salience of homosexual identities—attributed by outgroups, and internalised by ingroup members—is a social symptom. The (potentially unifying) concept and the practical realisation of homosexual identity can be seen as the product of social stigmatisation and discrimination: the greater the proportion of signs of rejecting individual difference, the more widespread personal and group identities are organised by and around these differences. This type of stigmatisation can be interpreted in general as a social symptom reflecting the rejection of the right to be different.

This paper presents findings of empirical research conducted between 1998 and 2000 in Hungary on the social representation and the value preferences of Hungarian men identifying themselves as gays.[1] In the first part of the paper I will present quantitative research findings on the specific value preferences of Hungarian gay men that could be interpreted as indicators of the existence of homosexual identities. In the second part I will present qualitative findings focusing on the connection between social representation of homosexuality and the development of threatened identities.

[1] These research findings have already been published in Hungarian (cf. Takács 2004).

Value Preferences as Identity Indicators

This part of the article presents findings of a quantitative research project, where I applied the Rokeach test, designed to measure individual value preferences (Rokeach 1973), which does not include any items with direct relation to homosexuality. At the beginning I had a sample of 221 Hungarian gay men (as a result of my own research) and a representative sample of the Hungarian population, with findings of the Rokeach test.[2] At the next step I filtered out from both samples those people living in the countryside and by applying a two-dimensional (age, educational background) weight variable I re-designed the composition of the representative sample to be as similar to my original gay sample as possible. (Table 1 shows the distribution of the four samples according to age, level of education and place of residence.) This way I gained two additional samples: a gay (BPGAY) and a "non-gay" one (WEIGHT), indicating significant differences in value preferences which could not be explained by the different—age, educational background, place of residence—compositions of the samples.[3] Therefore I assumed that homosexuality—remaining the only well-identifiable differentiating mark between the re-designed samples—had to play an important part in interpreting the differences in value preferences apparent when comparing the findings of these samples.

[2] The sample of 221 Hungarian gay men is referred to as "GAY—original." The representative sample of the Hungarian population is referred to as "ALL—original."

[3] The re-designed sample gained from "GAY—original" is referred to as "BPGAY." The re-designed sample gained from "ALL—original" is referred to as "WEIGHT."

Table 1

	ALL–original (%) N = 1521	**WEIGHT** (%) N = 107	**BPGAY** (%) N = 132	**GAY**–original (%) N = 221
AGE				
Under 30	14.9	48.9	50.8	48.9
30–39	13.7	26.5	26.9	26.9
40–49	17.2	16.9	13.1	16.4
50–59	17.0	5.7	7.7	5.9
60–	37.2	1.9	1.5	1.8
Total	100	100	100	100
EDUCATION				
Max. Elementary	40.0	2.4	2.3	3.7
Vocational Training	22.9	7.9	4.7	7.8
Secondary	25.1	36.9	34.9	36.2
University	11.9	52.7	58.1	52.3
Total	100	100	100	100
PLACE OF RESIDENCE				
Village	34.2	0	0	9.5
Town	29.9	0	0	17.6
City	17.0	0	0	13.1
Budapest	18.9	100	100	59.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Note: The distributions of the samples according to age, education, residence are significantly different (ANOVA-test).

On the basis of ANOVA-test results,[4] in the four samples there was no significant difference in the preferences of two terminal values (*satisfaction of well-done work*, *self-respect*) and four instrumental values (*courageous*, *responsible*, *forgiving* and *independent*), indicating that these six values seem to be preferred by everyone in all of the samples approximately the same way irrespectively of age, level of education, place of residence and gay identification. Comparing the WEIGHT and BPGAY sample pair,[5] six additional terminal values (*material well-being*, *equality*, *exciting life*, *freedom*, *social recognition*, *salvation*) and three additional instrumental values (*imaginative-creative*, *intelligent*, *polite*) seemed to be equally important or unimportant for both populations, indicating that these value preferences depend more on one's place of residence (living in Budapest), one's age (being under 30) and (higher than average) educational background than one's gay identification. (However, according to the ANOVA variance-analysis results the Budapest gay sample indicated more homogeneous value preferences concerning age and educational level categories than the WEIGHT sample.)

[4] Level of significance = 0,05.

[5] Independent Samples Tests: t-test for Equality of Means; *Equal variances assumed* option.

By examining the preference of terminal values in the four samples (see table 2), we can find the greatest difference in the evaluation of the following ones: *family security*, *national security*, *inner harmony*, *true friendship*, *true love* and *beauty (in nature and art)*—*family security* and *national security* being much less, while *inner harmony*, *true friendship*, *true love* and *beauty (in nature and art)* being much more preferred in the gay samples than in the other ones.

Table 2

ALL (original)	**WEIGHT**	**BPGAY**	**GAY** (original)
3 family security	4 peace	3 inner harmony	3 inner harmony
3 peace	5 family security	4 true friendship	4 true friendship
5 happiness	6 happiness	4 happiness	4 happiness
5 material well-being	6 inner harmony	4 true love	4 true love
7 inner harmony	7 true love	7 peace	6 peace
8 national security	8 material well-being	7 freedom	7 material well-being
9 true friendship	8 true friendship	7 material well-being	8 freedom
9 satisfaction of well-done work	8 freedom	10 exciting life	9 family security
9 freedom	9 wisdom	10 family security	10 satisfaction of well-done work
10 self-respect	10 national security	10 wisdom	10 wisdom
10 social recognition	10 satisfaction of well-done work	10 satisfaction of well-done work	10 self-respect
11 true love	11 exciting life	11 self-respect	11 exciting life
12 wisdom	11 self-respect	11 enjoyable life	11 enjoyable life
12 equality	13 social recognition	12 beauty (nature, art)	12 equality
13 enjoyable life	14 enjoyable life	13 equality	13 beauty (nature, art)
13 exciting life	14 equality	14 social recognition	13 social recognition
15 beauty (nature, art)	16 beauty (nature, art)	14 national security	14 national security
17 salvation	18 salvation	18 salvation	18 salvation

Note: Terminal values in the four samples (Median).

Lower preference of *family security* by gay respondents can be explained in two dimensions: on the one hand, if their family environment reflects the negative social perception of homosexuality, as is often the case, it can become a potential source of tension between them and their family members. On the other hand, legal and practical difficulties in establishing one's own family and living together with a same sex partner as well as the present day normative family definition, often limited to the classic heterosexual nuclear family, can prevent gay respondents from considering *family security* as a value to be achieved. In this context *true friendship* and *true love* can be seen as logical substitutes for the often problematic and institutionally denied *family security*.

Interpreting the favourable perception of *inner harmony* and *beauty* (*in nature and art*) in the gay samples, and that of *national security* in the non-gay samples, we can use Inglehart's materialist-post-materialist value orientation model. According to Inglehart advanced industrial societies can be characterised by a shift from materialist (or *survival*)

values, emphasising the importance of national security and the maintenance of social order, among other things (cf. Inglehart 1997, 112),—to post-materialist (or *well-being*) values emphasizing self-expression instead of deference to authority, tolerance of other groups and the perception of exotic things and cultural diversity as stimulating and interesting, not threatening (cf. Inglehart 2000, 220).

This value orientation model can also be applied to interpreting the different perception of two instrumental values in the WEIGHT and BPGAY samples where the most salient difference can be seen in the preference of the values of *loving*, *cheerful*, *open-minded* and *disciplined* (see table 3). In this context high preference of *open-mindedness* and low preference for being *disciplined* can indicate post-materialist value orientation (in the BPGAY sample), while high preference for being *disciplined* and low preference for *open-mindedness* can be seen more as features of materialist value orientation (in the WEIGHT sample).

Table 3

ALL (original)	**WEIGHT**	**BPGAY**	**GAY** (original)
5 honest	6 responsible	4 intelligent	4 intelligent
6 responsible	6 intelligent	5 honest	5 honest
7 courageous	6 honest	5 loving	5 loving
7 intelligent	6 courageous	7 courageous	6 open-minded
9 clean, tidy	8 logical	7 responsible	7 courageous
9 helpful	9 disciplined	7 open-minded	8 responsible
9 disciplined	9 imaginative, creative	8 cheerful	8 cheerful
9 polite	9 independent	8 helpful	8 helpful
10 independent	10 helpful	8 imaginative, creative	8 clean, tidy
10 cheerful	10 loving	8 clean, tidy	8 imaginative, creative
10 loving	10 clean, tidy	9 independent	10 logical
10 logical	11 open-minded	9 logical	10 independent
11 open-minded	12 forgiving	12 forgiving	12 forgiving
11 imaginative, creative	12 cheerful	13 disciplined	13 disciplined
11 ambitious	12 capable	13 polite	13 polite
12 forgiving	13 polite	14 capable	14 capable
12 obedient	14 ambitious	16 ambitious	16 ambitious
12 capable	16 obedient	17 obedient	17 obedient

Note: Instrumental values in the four samples (Median).

Higher preference for the other two instrumental values *loving* and *cheerful* in the gay samples can also make more sense if we think of the earlier mentioned reasons for unfavourable perception of *family security*, and the much more favourable perception of its "substitutes": *true friendship* and *true love*.

As we could see, the examined Hungarian gay samples showed specific value preferences that could be interpreted as indicators of the existence of homosexual identities (or segments of them). These specific

features included preferences concentrating on individual attachments, like *true friendship* and *true love*, which can be seen as alternatives to the often lacking *family security*; a special kind of more *post-materialist* value orientation where quality of life concerns include *inner harmony* and a certain degree of social and individual acceptance of homosexuality; and consequently a greater emphasis on *open-mindedness* being a value of special significance especially among those suffering from prejudice and discrimination, including Hungarian gays.

However, this (quantitative) method of analysis—besides indicating the existence of gay identity segments reflected by specific value preferences—cannot provide any insights into how gay respondents interpreted their own relation to the social category of homosexuality. For more information on this matter we have to bridge the quantitative research findings with qualitative ones.

Social Representation and Threatened Identities

In my qualitative empirical examination of the changing social representation of homosexuality in Hungary the broader framework of analysis included theories of social identity and social representation.[6] The common sense content of social representations (being synonymous with social beliefs and social attributions) reflect the ways in which individuals and groups interpret reality, and these reality interpretations serve as a base for building up individual and group identities. The interaction of social representations and identities is a central feature of Breakwell's theory on identity processes (cf. Breakwell 1986): in order to understand identity threats—hindering the effective functioning of identity processes—as well as strategies applied to cope with these threats, it is necessary to examine social representations.

Therefore I interpreted homosexuality as a possible base for developing threatened identities in which process the social representation of homosexuality plays a very important part. My analyses indicated that the social category of homosexuality gains its identity constructing capacity mainly from the negative contents of the social representation of homosexuality, which negative contents appeared as identity threats for my respondents.

This qualitative research was based on 49 semi-structured interviews conducted with men identifying themselves as gay.[7] My main intention

[6] An earlier version of this chapter has already been published in German (cf. Takács 2003).

[7] Average age: 33 (range: 19-69). Educational background: 23 had a university or college degree; 23 finished secondary and 3 finished elementary school. Place of residence: no exact data available—but more than 50% from the capital. Marital status: 43 single; 1

was to present *typical cases* in order to reconstruct general patterns of behaviour and self-perception from the life stories of respondents.

The Hungarian "Homosexual Situation" in the 1980s

By using the findings of a qualitative research conducted in 1983 (cf. Kassai 1983) I was able to compare to a certain extent the social situation of Hungarian homosexual men before and after the political system change.[8] On the basis of this comparison the social representation of homosexuality in the early 1980s seemed to be much more negative than that of today. In describing the Hungarian "homosexual situation" in the early 1980s the following seemed to be the key words: concealing self-identity (as a consequence of the impossibility of coming out in the given social environment), "illusory normality" (i.e. being compelled to play the "normal heterosexual roles"), self-hatred, and escape (in certain forms of "emergency exit," such as nominal marriage, emigration, or even suicide).

In the 1980s the social situation of Hungarian gays was characterised by cognitive isolation which could be experienced in several dimensions. For example, more than half (almost 70% of the fathers and more than 50% of mothers) of the respondents' parents did not know about their son's homosexuality. The main reason for this was the fear of rejection by the family. Therefore most gays could come out only among other gays. Keeping one's homosexuality secret seemed to be a major survival strategy. Because of limited social visibility of homosexuality, gays could meet only in certain bath houses, on the street, in a *presszó* (cafeteria), private parties and in public toilets. The main motivation of meeting other gays was finding sexual partners, as developing and maintaining a long-term, more visible, "normal" relationship seemed to be unrealistic or even unthinkable in the given social environment.

According to about 80% of the respondents the social perception of homosexuality was very negative in 1983: only the "decent" ones could count on a certain degree of social acceptance or toleration—where being a "decent homosexual" was interpreted as keeping homosexual preferences secret—but for many, giving the life long performance of illusory

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married; 5 divorced (among them the 4 oldest respondents aged 50–69)—19 respondents reported to be in a steady relationship with another man.

8 This qualitative research was based on 49 in-depth interviews conducted with Hungarian men identifying themselves as *homosexuals* or *men-loving men* in the early 1980s. (Average age: 30. Educational background: 17 had a university or college degree; 26 finished secondary and 6 finished elementary school. Place of birth: Budapest—31; outside Budapest—18. Place of residence: Budapest—44; outside Budapest—5. Marital status: 30 single; 5 married; 8 divorced; 6 provided no information.)

normality seemed to be too high a price to pay for successful social integration. It was a general belief that in foreign countries—in Western-Europe, the US and even in East-Germany—, where gays did not have to spend their lives *in the prison of leading a double life*, the situation of homosexuals was better than in Hungary; though some negative foreign examples—such as the Soviet Union and Romania—were also mentioned.

Social rejection and discrimination were also experienced by the respondents in several fields. These included the negative public opinion about homosexuality, promotion related and other problems in the workplace—for certain positions having a "normal family background" was a precondition—, housing difficulties for single men, a missing legal framework for same sex couples to live together, lack of the socio-cultural infrastructure for homosexuals—there were no gay-friendly places to go out, no organisations to turn to—and the practice of the police that in certain criminal cases one's homosexuality automatically made one a potential suspect.

In comparison to the 1980s the social representation of homosexuality has changed significantly. On the one hand, present day findings include positive aspects of homosexual life that were completely absent in 1983. On the other hand, with the improvement of the socio-cultural infrastructure and visibility of homosexuality, the social representational space of homosexuality became more extensive and articulated: gay and lesbian organisations can openly represent their interests; gay bars, regular lesbian parties, and LGBT cultural festivals can provide people with various more overtly functioning settings for entertainment and social life than the previous secret scenes (such as public toilets). In 1996 a legal framework was established for same sex partners to live together, though it is more similar to common law marriage than registered partnership (having more symbolic significance than practical advantages). However, in the family and workplace environments—though to a somewhat lesser degree—the previously also well-known identity threats, to be grasped best in the dynamics of secret-mongering and exposure, could be still detected.

Examination of the terminology used by respondents to define themselves also indicates that the social representational space for same sex relations has become extended. In the 1980s respondents defined themselves almost exclusively as *homosexuals* or as *men interested in men*. By the late 1990s a gradual separation in meaning could be detected between the word "meleg" (gay) and "homoszexuális" (homosexual)—where "meleg" was seen by most of the respondents as expressing a more useful, freely chosen, less limiting framework for the homosexual way of

existence—, while some respondents reported attempts to neutralise the traditionally negative connotations of the term "buzi" (Hungarian swear word—similar to faggot, queer). These developments in language use can be seen as expressions of the strengthening claim for a more free self-determination among Hungarian men attracted to same sex partners.

Is It Good to Be Gay (In Present Day Hungary)?

According to about a third of my respondents it is good or relatively good to be gay in present day Hungary, while more than half of them expressed the view that it was not a good thing to be gay in Hungary. A third type of view could also be identified according to which being gay or not gay is not an important factor when deciding whether it is good or not so good to live in Hungary:

> Why? Is it good to live in Hungary at all? Sometimes it is good, sometimes it isn't but it doesn't necessarily depend on your being gay (András, 38).[9]
> Naturally we have special problems which straights don't have, but the number of these is much less than our common problems (Noffir, 19).

When evaluating the Hungarian situation my respondents mentioned several points of comparison: most importantly the past (*it is better nowadays than it used to be years ago*), one's social position (*it is easier for people of higher social position than for ordinary people*) and geographical location (*it is easier in Budapest than in the countryside; when being faraway from home than when living close to one's family, it is better here than in the countries East of Hungary but worse than in the West*).

From the interviews it turned out that gay life in general can be seen as a good thing for several reasons: in comparison to *straight life* it means a more interesting, more exciting life, more sensitivity, more working capacity and creativity. One typical explanation for these was that "they transform into intellectual creativity what they had to suppress in themselves" (Endre 50).

When highlighting positive aspects of gay life, respondents emphasised their needs for alternatives to the normative (heterosexual) masculine gender role:

> I have very good relationships with women. I have no aggression, no 'bull fighting' in my life. . . . I think, I am much more open emotionally than the straight guys I know. They just look and can't understand anything (Bálint, 22).

> It is a well known fact that men earn more than women, so a household consisting of

[9] A pseudo-name and the age of respondent follow each quotation.

two men can earn even better, not to mention the fact that they don't have to provide for a wife (Gabi, 24).

I really don't feel like living as an ordinary heterosexual man: working, having a beer in the evenings, wife, children, and weekend house—being locked in this "male compartment" (Kálmán, 69).

To see more, to feel more . . . the option that I can cry on the street and no one can fucking say anything about it, because "yes, I am a crying fag and what the fuck do you have to do with it." You see, I am sure that men do like to cry too (Rudolf, 33).

I personally love it that I am not pressured by the must of founding and maintaining a family. I do what I like and I even have enough money to do so. Does it sound strange? Well, everything is relative: while others stay at home on childcare allowance, I work and pay tax; while others would like to prohibit even my simple existence on behalf of god, I support them with my tax payments. Everything has its price (TS, 32).

They also emphasised their need for community membership. This need was rooted in personal experiences of disadvantages related to a—sometimes multiple—minority existence.

I am much more ambitious than the others. Like other second order citizens, for example, a young gypsy or women in general, I have to catch up from a disadvantageous position (Simon, 19).

We develop a sort of defensive and offensive alliance, exactly because we are social outcasts. It's good to know that you are not alone with your problems, and common problems keep people together (Miklós, 44).

I am Jewish and I am gay which means a strange outsider/observer position for me, while living in the middle of this straight, Goy [non Jew] mass. This status provides me with sensitivity to other people's sufferings and the ability to enjoy the comicality of otherness (Ruben, 48).

A possible positive aspect of gay life was described by respondents as experiencing the joys of finding oneself in the—sometimes exhausting—search for a self-identity.

For me it is good to be gay because I can be what I would like to be. So I can be myself (Szabi, 28).

Being gay is a tiring training but it can make you more open-minded (Viktor, 41).

Paradoxically, social rejection can educate gays: they can encounter social issues and phenomena which they wouldn't know about otherwise. For us self-discovery is a matter of survival, while straights are provided with prefabricated patterns to follow on almost every level of life reflected by the media, by family, convention, morality etc. (TS, 32).

The possibly positive aspects of gay life in present day Hungary were described in three main dimensions: on the social level—in the context of the gender role system—they were expressed in the form of criticising the somewhat stereotypically described heterosexual masculinity ideal; on the intergroup level as the need for community formation and belonging; and on the personal level as the necessity of self-analysis.

Still, the majority of respondents—more than half of them—stated that it was not good to be gay in Hungary. The main reasons for this included prejudice, rejection, conservatism, lack of healthy mentality in society: the fact that "homophobia is a characteristic part of the majority identity" (JD 31). About half of the respondents suffered physical or verbal mistreatment at least once in their life because of their homosexuality. In six cases problems at the workplace were mentioned: when one's homosexuality was discovered, one was fired, did not get the promised promotion or became isolated. In one case the husband's homoerotic attractions were used against him in a divorce, in another case one was banned from his religious community when discovered, and in one extreme case one got imprisoned with homosexual charges (when still living in Romania). Many respondents reported cases of verbal abuse. For example, many complained that people use the term "buzi" as a swearword without any personal reference but this practice is still a very bothering one:

> "hülye buzi" [stupid fag]—people say this automatically. It shouldn't bother me but in fact it does bother me because it is not good what it implies (Koppány, 24).

Usually public coming out led to negative experiences. Therefore some people in the sample came to the conclusion that it was better to keep homosexuality in the very private sphere and avoid any kind of *indecent* forms of behaviour in order to be tolerated.

> In my view, those who have bad experiences are also responsible for the bad treatment themselves. It is because of their provocative behaviour. I think, people are much more tolerant than gays would imagine (Béla 48).

> I didn't have any bad experiences but you wouldn't be able to tell from my appearance that I am gay. I always behave in an appropriate way (Jakab, 47).

Avoiding "extravagance" in manifesting one's gayness still seemed to be a useful coping strategy for many. Of course, extravagance can be interpreted in different ways:

> The situation is not too bad, but of course, I am not marching on the streets with a banner saying that I am gay (Feconi, 22).

> In foreign countries it tends to become trendy to be gay. This is a bit extreme. You shouldn't parade it (Lindoro, 20).

The presupposition of these camouflage-strategies is private homosexuality, which can be opposed to another approach: seeing homosexuality as a public matter.

> Being gay has several dimensions: it is in someone, it is practised by someone, it is done in a self-conscious way. The practical realisation can be done within a relationship or in an activists' group . . . in my view, if you take this matter seriously in present day Hungary, you must become an activist (János, 36).

Most of the respondents followed the community building actions (such as organising Pride marches and LGBT cultural festivals) of activists with a certain reservation, but they seemed to agree about the importance of coming out, i.e. the possibility to reveal one's gay identification in gradually broadening circles of friends, family members, colleagues and others. While coming out was interpreted as an issue of individual choice (shifting from private to public homosexuality, at least to a certain degree), becoming aware of one's homosexuality was seen by many as a matter of accepting a biologically determined fact.

In the context of coming out identity threats were represented by doubts about one's "true homosexuality" raised by oneself or by others including friends and parents with "comforting" remarks such as *it is only a temporary phase*, or *you will grow out of it*. Stereotypical misconceptions of what it means to be gay could not only contribute to non-accepting attitudes of others, but also be internalised by gays themselves. However, rejection of the stereotypical homogenisation of gayness was also present in the interviews:

> Being gay is not my primarily important feature—it is only extra information. First of all I am a human being, a healthy, individual human being (Sobieski, 25).

Conclusion

Reports of respondents evaluating their own social situation supported the supposition that the social representations of homosexuality in present day Hungary can be interpreted as identity threats to gays. These reports included references to fears and negative experiences gained in family or workplace environments. The search for and completion of self-identity were mainly hindered by the rejecting social atmosphere, rooted in the belief that the homosexual and the heterosexual catego-

ries can be rigidly separated from each other, and—consequently—in the discriminatory social practices affecting homosexuals (expressed in institutional settings, such as legislation). This interpretation was echoed by those respondents who emphasised that the conceptual unity of homosexuality—seen as the symmetrical counter pole of heterosexuality—, and assumptions about the homogeneity of homosexual representations should be challenged. Therefore in this context it is a valid statement that sexual practices can have identity constructing capacities only via the social meanings attached to them.

Interpreting homosexual identity as a type of threatened identity and examining the identity threats reflected by the social representations of homosexuality raised the question whether homosexual identity would at all exist without the threatening social environment. In this context homosexual identity seems to be much more a social fiction produced by social discrimination than one of the main supporting pillars of individual self-identity.

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Families We Choose

The Czech Lesbian Family Study: Investigating Family Practices

Eva Poláková

Introduction

Families comprising of two people of the same sex seem to oppose the ideal of the "classic heterosexual nuclear family." Nevertheless, the existence of such families undoubtedly reflects a series of changes which have been shaping different forms of family life, mainly during the last few decades. Homosexual parenting represents a quite recently emerged form of non-heterosexual intimate relationship: gays and lesbians attempt to create family-like unions as a result of two interconnected processes residing in both the developments in the gay and lesbian social world itself and in de-traditionalization of family and intimate relationships in general (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). So we can talk about simultaneous changes that deconstruct traditional contents of gayness on one hand, and family on the other. Within the gay and lesbian community, the concept of family has been understood mainly as a deliberate and carefully constructed choice of a social network—home that was to replace the net of blood relations disrupted or ruined by coming out. Therefore, the term "family" is being used by gay and lesbian people to denote a broader community than just a family of origin. It represents "an affinity circle, which may or may not involve children, which may or may not include members of the family of origin, but which has cultural and symbolic meaning for the subjects who participate or feel a sense of belonging in it" (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001, 9). Since these elective families are often described as "chosen" and/or "created," the academic literature reflects the narrative of self-invention and refers to them as "families of choice" (cf. Weston 1991).

Legislative Background in the Czech Republic

After nearly fifteen years of struggle on the part of Czech gay and lesbian activists, the Registered Partnership Act was passed in March 2006. Nonetheless, it is necessary to point out that it was vetoed by the country's president. The presidential veto was then voted down by a single

vote in Parliament. Act N. 115/2006 Coll.[1] came into force on July 1, 2006 and it represents the first legislative amendment ever granting gay and lesbian couples legal security in the laws of the Czech Republic. During the first three months after its enactment 153 couples decided to get registered as partners. About one third of this number includes couples from the country's capital with the older gays and lesbians prevailing. In the opinion of some representatives of LGBT organizations the total figure by far exceeded their expectations. They had supposed that the initial massive media attention would have discouraged many gay and lesbian people. Those same-sex couples who officially registered their partnerships during this time period referred to the registration as "a symbolic act" or an "attempt for full recognition of their relationship" rather than as an opportunity to gain their full rights as partners. This statement supports the general perception of the law by the LGBT community. The current version of the law is a result of a long-term negotiating process between gay and lesbian minority activists and legislators. Many issues included in the original wording of the law have been reduced or even left out on its way to ratification. The act regulates contracting the partnership, conditions for its nullification or dissolution, joint property ownership relations between the partners, mutual rights and duties to each other, to institutions as well as to the state (GLL 2006). However, the law does not include provisions of any adoption arrangements for the registered couple or individual, in fact it explicitly excludes any individual with the registered status from the child adoption process regardless of other circumstances (i.e., it also applies to a situation when a same-sex partner wants to adopt a biological child of his/her partner). The Czech Family Act enables both married couples and single individuals to adopt children or take them into foster care with the condition that a proper environment for the child's upbringing is provided. The suitability of such an environment is then judged in an administrative process supported by expert evidence which can reflect the social attitudes and human qualities of the people in charge of the decision-making process. As we can see, the right of adoption was radically restricted by the Registered Partnership Act of Same-Sex Persons as it totally excludes all gays and lesbians who chose to get registered. It may be assumed that this provision will serve as a precedent also when judging the convenience of adoption by homosexual persons who are not registered. By doing so, the act indirectly supports discrimination of gays and lesbians (GLL 2006). Nevertheless, there are a few cases, mainly of single lesbian

[1] Czech Legislature Collection.

women, who managed to get a child adopted or plan to do so. Not surprisingly, there are no official figures available since these women opted to conceal their sexual identity in order to improve their chances in the parent evaluation procedure. However, some opponents and defenders of the act predict that its adoption will facilitate the future status of registered partnership of same-sex persons to the same level as common-law marriage, including the possibility of adopting children.

The Study

The issue of non-heterosexual parenthood still remains unexamined in the Czech Republic, and the first and only achievement in this field is a research project carried out by the author of this article and her colleague.[2] The main objective of the research was to explore the many facets of everyday lives of Czech lesbian families (e.g., variety of forms, motivation factors during transition to parenthood, parenting styles, division of roles, and reproduction of gender roles in the family) and provide a deeper insight into this topic in the national context. An integral part of the research design was the idea of benefiting from an interdisciplinary approach combining the authors' different theoretical backgrounds in sociology and psychology.

The research was conducted as a qualitative ethnographic study. Selecting the qualitative approach was determined by the research aim which was to provide a profound and detailed insight into the personal "life world" of lesbian families. In addition, as lesbian-headed families represent a hard-to-reach social group,[3] we were aware that we would not have been able to recruit enough respondents in order to conduct a large-scale study. Unlike the majority of empirical studies about gay and lesbian parenting focused on developmental outcomes for children being raised in such families, we intended to concentrate primarily on the experience of the parenting couple. Therefore, we were looking for lesbian identified same-sex couples sharing a household and rearing a child or children together. Concerning the methods, we employed semi-

[2] The study was funded by the Czech Science Foundation (Doctoral Project 403/03/H135) and the Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University in Brno (MSM 0021622406).
Dr. Kateřina Nedbálková was the co-author of the methodological design and my research fellow during the first year of the project.

[3] Throughout the text I use the terms "lesbian family," "lesbian-headed family" and "lesbian-led family" interchangeably. However, the term "lesbian family" can be misleading, since it may suggest that all members of the family are same-sex oriented, including the children. The latter two terms provide a better and more concise description of this particular family structure (cf. Hare 1994).

structured interviews and participant observation. The data was collected between March 2004 and September 2006.

Sample and Method

The research sample included a total of 10 Czech lesbian-led family units consisting of 20 female parents and their 13 children. Six units achieved parenthood via donor-insemination within an already existing lesbian relationship while three other units were blended families with children conceived in previous marriages. One family belonged to both groups combining both of the mentioned means of conception. Out of the 20 women, there were 11 birth mothers and 9 social mothers.[4] The mothers were aged between 20 and 42. They did not differentiate markedly regarding socioeconomic status, size of hometown and educational level. All the couples resided in the country's urban centres with populations ranging from 100.000 to 1 million and most declared a middle class income. However, half the sample originally came from less populated places and moved to a bigger city at some point in their past. Half of the women had a university degree while the others had secondary (8) and elementary education (1). The length of their relationship ranged from 2 to 13 years. Despite the fact that the Registered Partnership Act was passed during the time our research was being conducted, none of the couples took the advantage of being registered or planned to do so in the near future. The children (6 boys and 7 girls) were aged 1 to 19 years. The sample was gathered almost exclusively via the snowball method. Only one couple responded to an ad that was circulated via lesbian organizations and support groups' e-mail lists. The first couple were two mothers known to us from previous public debates about lesbian mothering that had been organized by the local LGBT organization STUD Brno. After being interviewed themselves they then referred us to other potential participants.

Our research interest was aimed primarily at the parenting experience. All women in the sample underwent joint and individual in-depth interviewing. The joint interview preceded individual dialogues; both were usually conducted during a single visit to the family with the exception of a few families that were visited repeatedly over a period of two and a half years. The semi-structured interview schedule covered

[4] By the term "social mother" we refer to the non-biological parent in the lesbian couple. Contemporary academic literature lacks a unified terminology for the lesbian birth mother's life partner. The terms such as "non-biological mother" (Tasker 2002), "co-mother" (Gartrell et al. 1996), "co-parent" (Nelson 1996) or "co-parent partner" (Hare and Richards 1993) have been used frequently.

the following main areas: decision-making process during transition to parenthood, distribution of roles, the family's social network, child-rearing strategies and goals. The interviews ranged from one to four hours. All respondents granted consent for the interviews to be audio-recorded and consequently transcribed verbatim. Any identifying data about the respondents was removed. The choice of the place where the interview would be conducted was left to the respondents. However, since we offered to meet the women in their home towns so that they did not have to travel to the university for their appointments, all families were interviewed in their own homes. This arrangement turned out to be an advantage since the home environment was the safest, most convenient, and comfortable place for our participants. At the same time it provided us with a unique opportunity to observe the family dynamics in its habitat, including also the children who were present in a majority of the cases.

The acquired data was processed according to the principles of qualitative methodology. Since our research interest was to grasp the topic from the perspective of the women themselves, we opted for the approach that perfectly serves this purpose: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is designed to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world. Researchers using IPA are looking for meanings that particular life experiences, events, states, etc. hold for participants (Smith and Osborn 2003). Selected themes that emerged from the data are presented in the following section of the chapter.[5]

Key Topics in Experiences, Communication and Behaviour

Diversity of Family Arrangements

There is a wide variety of different parenting arrangements in families led by same-sex couples, which is clearly illustrated by many studies (e.g. Patterson 1992; Patterson and Chan 1999; Golombok 2000). It is crucial to point out the impossibility of speaking about a unified category of gay fathers and lesbian mothers. One of the main sources of variety is the origin of the parenting relationship with the child i.e., how the same-sex couple got their child. Based on this criterion we can distinguish two basic models of gay and lesbian families. Firstly, we can discern families with children born into previous heterosexual relationships of one or both of the parents (blended families). Secondly, there are families

[5] Due to the character of the data available the Atlas/ti (version 5.0) qualitative software package was used to support the textual analysis.

into which children were born deliberately or were adopted after the parent(s) openly declared their homosexual orientation. In recent years, the trend of family planning based on lesbian/gay cohabitation has intensified; moreover, it inevitably brought along the question of the ways to parenthood (both legal and illegal) offered to gays and lesbians. In general, the chances of lesbian women are higher in this respect; mainly owing to the indispensable fact that taking partial steps such as acquiring gametes of the opposite sex, conception, pregnancy and eventually delivery of the baby requires much less medical or other assistance for women in comparison with men.

There are no official facts or figures referring to the number of children living in *homoparental* families in the Czech Republic. Also, no representative sociological or psychological studies dealing with the phenomenon have been conducted so far, with the only exception of a study by Jaroslava Talandová (1997). She has conducted sociological research within a lesbian community in the country's capital (Prague), in which she combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Talandová reaches the conclusion that motherhood is not a marginal issue in the lesbian community: 37% of women in her sample (N = 111) expressed their desire to raise a child in the future. These women mostly referred to the use of assisted reproduction technologies or sexual intercourse with a man they know. However, the latter option has proved to be fairly rare in our sample, as the respondents have excluded this possibility mainly for the two following reasons. Firstly, the idea of getting intimate with a man was equally unacceptable for both female partners. Secondly, the women feared that the potential interference of biological fathers in their children's upbringing could menace the relationship structure in the already existing family unit. (A summary of means of acquiring the child by lesbian couples in our sample can be found in table 1.) Thus, the second and last legal possibility that remains is self-assisted insemination using sperm from a known or anonymous donor. The chance of acquiring a child through non-biological means, i.e. via adoption or foster care, is negligible for a gay or lesbian individual under the present Czech legal conditions.

Table 1
Means of Acquiring the Child by the Lesbian couple in Our Sample

MEANS OF ACQUIRING THE CHILD	NUMBER OF FAMILIES
Previous heterosexual relationship (marriage)	3
Self-assisted donor insemination (known donor)	1
Anonymous donor insemination at a clinic	4
Co-parenthood with gay couple	2

Anglo-American practice is that lesbian women frequently choose to be inseminated with the sperm of an anonymous donor in assisted reproduction clinics (Daniels 1994; Gartrell et al. 1996). However, Czech legislation does not permit such a solution (women without a male partner are excluded from applying). Czech women who do choose this option, either travel abroad to use a foreign clinic's paid services or, in some cases, manage to get past the standard procedure (illegally). For the four mothers in our sample (see table 1) opting for this method, anonymity of the biological father represented the key criterion in the decision-making process. On the contrary, mothers voting for co-parenthood with a gay couple or those who knew the donor, considered the involvement of the biological father desirable and wished to provide a masculine role model through these means. Mentioning the gay couples we must note that they are in an even worse position. We will leave out the situation when one or both partners are fathers of a child from a previous heterosexual marriage and they are allowed to take part in its upbringing. Gay couples or individuals are then restricted to only play the part of a sperm donor for a lesbian couple that permits, after mutual agreement, their participation in the upbringing, or they can conceive a child with a heterosexual woman—most frequently a friend who longs for a child herself and agrees with the biological father's participation in its rearing.

> Well, of course we are somewhat different. You can see right away that we are a different family. Whenever we come anywhere, I realize we are not just a usual family but on the other hand, I live it every day and therefore it's normal for me. I don't feel exceptional in any way, but you will see that we are different when seen from the outside (Helena, 34).[6]

Everyday Life Experimenting—Choice of Children's Surnames

Decision-making process about choosing a child/children's last name was another theme that emerged repeatedly from data of several families. This procedure was an important matter of discussion before and during pregnancy primarily for donor insemination (DI) couples since their situation requires them to choose a family name for their newly-born.

Out of the 10 couples, we identified four different naming patterns for choosing the children's surnames (see table 2). Seven couples had one child and the remaining three were rearing two children. Out of these three families, two couples had two children born to the same birth

[6] All the names mentioned here are invented. The number next to the name denotes the age of the respondents.

mother and in one family each woman gave birth to one of their two children.

Table 2
Naming Strategies

APPLIED NAMING STRATEGY	NUMBER OF FAMILIES
Birth mother's surname	4
Biological father's surname	3
Family surname (using the birth mother's surname)	2
Alternative family surname	1

The birth mother's surname strategy applies to four families who decided to name their child after the birth mother i.e., the biological parent and her child had identical surnames, while the social mother retained hers.

The biological father's last name was used only by children coming from their biological mothers' previous marriage. These blended families decided not to undergo any name change in order to protect their children's best interests. The mothers were convinced that changing the children's names would attract undesired attention and could stigmatize them (all children were school aged). For the same reason, unifying the mothers' names (using the social mother's last name) in these couples was not taken into consideration, because the biological mother-child family bond declared to society via the shared name would be broken. In addition, the mothers doubted whether the biological fathers would give their consent.

Parents in two families decided to adopt the biological mother's surname as a new name for all members of their family unit. Social mothers in these families considered the act of re-naming after their partner and accepting a shared name as a demonstration of their commitment to the relationship and family, and also as a way to gain public recognition of their family.

> Now we are a real family, with the names everybody can see right away that we belong to each other. And by this Martina can also see that I am serious about the relationship with her and our son. I wasn't attached to my original name anyway which made the decision even easier. It really changed somehow; bearing the same name makes me, Martina and the kid into "us" (Lenka, 32).

The alternative family surname strategy applied to only a single family in our sample resembling the previously described solution: All members changed their current surnames for a completely new one. This new name differed from the original names and was created with the intent to express the family's nature:

> We were proud of everything we have accomplished together in the relationship by that time and started planning a family, everything had its time, you know, and we had every little thing figured out in detail in advance. It was the same with the name, we both had our own different last names and we knew long before that we didn't want to use any of them for our future children. So we picked a name that was completely new, we wanted it to express our feelings. The children got the name and we changed ours too in order to be a complete family (Jitka, 34).

In both latter cases stated above, family members registered a name change at the Registry Office. In general, couples planning a second child anticipated giving their second child the same surname as their first-born.

This "family practice" (Morgan 1996) of selecting or even inventing a completely new name represents an illustrative example of what for instance Giddens (1992) refers to as everyday life experiments. The absence of readily available social guidelines (related to naming conventions in this particular case), placed the women in the situation in which they had to actually "create" these rules for themselves. It is also important to note that a majority of the couples lacked previous experience and information about how to "do a lesbian family" (Almack 2005). Only a couple of families from the country's capital sought other lesbian partners with children as role models and sources of information prior to their own conception.

Distribution of Roles

As we live in a society where we tend to think in "naturally" complementary dichotomies of the masculine and feminine, we project these expectations onto relationships between two men or two women. Hence the wide-spread view that in a homosexual couple "one always represents a woman and the other one a man." Kurdek (2004, 2006) claims that in the everyday reality of gay and lesbian relationships a stereotypical distribution of traditional male and female roles appears rarely. Similarly, the data acquired from our sample also proves that a gendered distribution of roles does not work in that way in the lesbian families we examined. Women regarded the feeling of equal distribution of power within their relationship as an important indicator of its quality and furthermore, it was important to reject explicitly the traditional role distribution patterns while talking about their lives. Yet again, this distinction can arise from the reflection of one's own behaviour and the sense of being different from people following other relationship patterns. At the same time, we must acknowledge that the clear sex-role polarization in society

as a whole—the ideal of the dominant father who is in charge of financing family needs and the empathic mother who provides the family with emotional care—is in decline.

> What are you telling me? Gee—we are two girls and we just both do what needs to be done. There is nothing like the function of mother or father. Both of us, all of us at home are doing everything (Lucie, 36).

A more precise role division is preserved in parental roles and the dividing line is distinguished by biological motherhood, which determines primary competencies in childcare, especially at an early age. All biological mothers in our sample stayed on maternity leave with the child while their female partner agreed to accept the role of a social parent.

> I give way to Hana to have closer contact with the children. I care about them too, I'm not an aunt who lives with them, we are simply two mothers. But I give way to Hana when the children need someone, the roles are clear then. As for household chores, from taking care of the garden and the cars, who washes the floor and who cooks, it is absolutely equal there (Dora, 30).

The following quotation is somewhat exceptional in its character and illustrates the fact that it is not possible to view stereotypical distribution of male and female roles only as oppressing and restraining; however, it can also contain the aspect of soothing certainty, predictability and protection.

> There is no real distribution of roles between us, I guess. And I'm sometimes getting tired of that a bit. Now and then I'd be glad if the roles were divided. From time to time I feel that I don't like being the emancipated and feminist lesbian with no roles. Sometimes I'd like to be able to say: "Well, do this or that, just like a woman can say that." And the guy says: "Why should I do that?" and I say: "Because you are the guy" (Zita, 42).

Biological and Social Motherhood

The majority of the couples consisted of one biological mother who gave birth to all the children being raised in that particular family and a social mother. There was only one exception when both partners decided to give birth to one child each. There were two different ways in which the women in our sample became social mothers: some started a relationship with a partner having a child from a previous marriage, while others had children with their life partner via donor insemination.

In every family, both maternity types (biological and social) were individually defined in a slightly different way. These differences were even

more apparent in the blended families. In general, the non-biological mothers were hesitant to call themselves a "mother" and preferred to be referred to as a "parent." This finding was consistent with results gained from another method used in the course of individual interviewing. The women were asked to choose one role they perceive to be their most important role in the functioning of the family. A list of several roles was offered (such as partner, parent, economic provider etc.) or they could come up with their own. At the next step they were asked to do the same for their partner. In the majority of the cases social mothers opted for the "parent figure," while their partners were evaluated primarily as "mothers." However, the DI couples were much more likely to describe their roles as "mother" and the "other mother" while talking about their everyday tasks and situations. They reported having an equal authority over the children despite the fact that they had no *legal* authority. Perhaps surprisingly, the social mothers did not perceive any significant difficulties caused by the legal barrier they would have to face while for example accompanying the child for a medical check-up or dealing with teachers at school.

It is worth noting how the arrangement of double motherhood was expressed in the language of the family's everyday life. The way both mothers were being addressed by their children serves as a good example. We identified three different approaches (see table 3).

Table 3
Means of Addressing the Parents

WAY OF ADDRESSING THE PARENTS	NUMBER OF FAMILIES
Mum and Mum	1
Mum and Aunt	3
Mum and "Name"	6

The "Mum and Mum" address was unique within the sample and was chosen by a DI lesbian couple that stressed the importance of equality of both parents. Any other address was not viewed as sufficient and appropriate. "I'm not her aunt or anything. I'm her parent and I'm a woman and that makes me her mother" (Tereza, 35).

The "Mum and Aunt" version was preferred by families with children born already within the lesbian relationship. In their opinion, the biological motherhood bond is specific and therefore there should be only one Mother for the child. The address "Aunt" fulfilled their requirements as it indicates both family relations and represents a significant female character.

"Mum and Name" (where name stands for the first name of the non-biological parent) was the most frequent choice. All couples with a child

from their previous heterosexual relationship belong to this group. In their view, the "aunt" address is not specific enough; children are surrounded by several aunt characters in their social lives. In the case of grown up children it was a matter of mutual negotiation.

With this particular example, we can see once again that matters that are self-evident in heterosexual families become a matter of further reflection and negotiation in families led by two people of the same gender.

> We kept wondering what we would be. Like two mums or what? Then I remember me standing in the hospital corridor and I picked up Tonda and I put him in front of Dora and I said: "Look, this is your other mum." And my mother kind of shuddered and said: "Well, it'll have to be solved somehow." And Jane felt really unhappy about it and I was kind of passive then, I did not want to have the feeling spoilt and try to settle something and so I didn't say anything. Jane said later about this that she didn't feel like a mum anyway, she felt like a parent and not a mother, everyone has just one mother. And so it evolved into an aunt (Daniela, 30).

Reproduction of Gender Roles—"Who Taught Him That?"

Some of the parents in our sample expressed worries about providing their children with adequate gender role models due to the lack of the complementary masculine and feminine elements of heteronormativity; and they were also concerned about particular aspects of the children's healthy development, such as their future sexual orientation, gender identity and gender role behaviour.

According to previous empirical studies on conveying adequate gender patterns from parents to children, for example, Kirkpatrick, Smith, and Roy (1981) found that in projective tests there were no differences between children of homo- and heterosexual parents, and that the two groups identified themselves in accordance with their biological sex. Furthermore, children did not differ in choosing favourite TV programmes, TV characters, favourite games or toys: in both groups they were consistent with the conventional preferences (Green 1978; Steckel 1987; Golombok, Tasker, and Murray 1997; Chan, Raboy, and Patterson 1998). Certain subtle differences were traced in families of lesbian mothers, where these mothers seem not to stick to gender-stereotypical games and toys so anxiously; for example, their daughters were playing with toy-cars or tools (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). On the other hand, other parents were confident about sufficient exposure to gender role models via their wider family social network and some findings even show their efforts to break up gender stereotypes through upbringing.

> I have *Aspekt*[7] here, yeah? "We are not born women, we become them" and I have read through that really carefully, just before giving birth I was saying to myself I would read *Aspekt* about that, I really changed my mind then. And just with Tom there are some things considered as male things . . . we didn't force him into that. He has a toy-kitchen as well, you saw him cooking there. But how he cooks there! And who showed him to hack the plasticine with a hammer? He was a year and a half, he couldn't talk yet, but he already mumbled for himself. He took a toy-car into the playground and started riding with it right away. I know a girl could do that too, but who taught him to hold a pot lid like a steering wheel and shout: "I'll smash the car, I'll smash the car!" Who taught him that? (Lenka, 30).

Other mothers were proud to express their joy over the fact that their three-year-old daughter was trying on high-heeled shoes; in their opinion, it confirmed her healthy development.

> Our little Mary, she knows well that there are men and there are women. She knows that men get married to women, she can see her grandpa and grandma, her brother's got a girlfriend. We have guinea pigs, she can see that one is male and the other is female. She's definitely not confused—her psychological and sexual development is just fine (Anna, 42).

Conclusion

Despite the specificity of the research design and methods employed, we can state that our findings correspond with the results of large-scale studies on homosexual parenting. Many gay men and lesbian women, as well as many heterosexuals, consider parenthood an essential part of their lives. As supported by empirical evidence in foreign studies over the past years, there is a growing number of children raised by same-sex couples in a gay/lesbian lifestyle setting, i.e. these men and women choose to become parents after coming out as gays and lesbians. Although there are no exact figures that could refer to the number of such families in the Czech Republic, we can assume the trend to be very similar. Once again, we consider it necessary to emphasize the fact that same-sex parenting does not represent a unified category and one of its characteristic traits is a diversity of forms. This was clearly illustrated also by our sample with its rich variety of family arrangements in both donor insemination and blended families. By omitting this fact (both intentionally and unconsciously) we can put ourselves, as researchers, in danger of creating a "lesbian family prototype" which would most probably lead to portraying lesbian parenthood in a distorted and therefore unrealistic way.

[7] Feminist magazine.

We are aware of limitations implied both by the research design (working with a non-representative sample) and also by the limited space provided for this article. All the discussed themes would deserve a more detailed investigation as the examined family practices are tightly interconnected with the wider concepts of family identity and negotiating biological and social parenthood.

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Do They Have a Choice? Reproductive Preferences Among Lesbians and Gays in Slovenia

Alenka Švab

Introduction

In Western Europe the contemporary gay and lesbian political agenda is increasingly dominated by the issue of personal relationships (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 1999a). Gay and lesbian partnerships and families are both generators of social changes in late modernity and also the "consequences" of these changes. Homosexual marriages and related regulation of partner relations and rights, as well as the issue of the adoption of children, inevitably confront norms of reproductive behaviour, which rest on the exclusive link between heterosexuality and reproduction, and thus preclude parenthood from homosexual identities. Gay and lesbian families and partnership are trapped in the heteronormative social framework, which has a dual effect. On the one hand, it is exclusive, and hence the source of many difficulties for homosexuals, but on the other, it also pressures gays and lesbians into adopting traditional heterosexual patterns, norms and conduct. The social pressures imposed by heteronormative society are also reflected in the strongly self-controlled preferences of gays and lesbians regarding parenthood and the high level of their awareness about the negative consequences of homophobia and violence that would potentially affect the children of same-sex couples.

Additionally, the reproductive preferences of especially the younger generations of gays and lesbians can be interpreted in a different context, too. According to Slovenian research findings on youth, young people in Slovenia increasingly postpone strategies regarding parenthood and family life, and although family life seems to be important for young people (Ule et al. 1996, 2000; Rener and Švab 1998; Rener et al. 2005, 2006), parenthood is not the first priority in their lives. It seems that such value orientation holds true also for young gays and lesbians who often report other subjective priorities than parenthood and creation of their own family (Švab and Kuhar 2005).

This article uses data from the first sociological research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia to analyse their reproductive preferences.[1] We were interested in the opinions gays and lesbians hold regarding parenthood, and the influence of heteronormative society on their views and potential decisions. The first part presents a short overview of our survey research findings regarding the wishes and plans of our respondents about parenthood. Subsequent parts analyse material gained from focus group interviews. The main goal of this article is to demonstrate that the reproductive preferences of gays and lesbians in Slovenia are largely influenced and conditioned by the social context that does not accept gays and lesbians, and especially reject any kind of parenting that falls out of the heterosexual matrix.

Who Wishes to Have Children?

According to Slovenian survey results 42% of respondents wanted to have children, 40% did not want a child, while others were undecided. There were no significant gender differences in this respect. The percentages of men and women who wanted to have children were the same, but more women than men were undecided, and fewer women said that they did not want to have children. These differences between genders, however, are not statistically significant (see table 1).

Table 1
Desire to have children by gender

	Gender		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Yes	39.4	39.7	39.5
No	39.7	33.8	37.7
I don't know	15.4	21.2	17.4
Other	5.5	5.3	5.4
Total	100	100	100

Note: F = 0.916; df = 3; sig = 0.433.

The desire to have children varies with age. Younger lesbians and gays want to postpone this decision seeing family life and similar issues as distant events in their life courses. On the other hand, older respondents

[1] The research comprised two empirical parts. The first, quantitative included face-to-face structured interviews on a sample of 443 gays and lesbian carried out from April to June 2003. Sampling was done using the snowball method. The second, qualitative part of the research, was carried out from May to July 2004, included group interviews with 7 focus groups (4 male and 3 female) that included 36 people. The director of the research project was Alenka Švab. For details see <www.mirovni-institut.si/glbt> and Švab and Kuhar (2005).

expressed a kind of resignation and acceptance of the fact that in Slovenia a homosexual person has only a small chance of having a child. The share of older gays and lesbians who do not wish to have children is higher than that of younger ones. The proportion of younger respondents who did not want children was also high, however there was a greater chance that they would postpone decisions regarding family life. For the same reason, there are also many undecided young gays and lesbians (see table 2).

Table 2
Desire to have children by age (in percent)

Age						
	16 to 20	21 to 25	26 to 30	31 to 40	41 and more	Total
Yes	52.5	45	41.6	31	15.4	39.5
No	37.5	26.5	34.5	48.7	69.2	37.7
I don't know	7.5	25.2	20.4	11.5		17.4
Other	2.5	3.3	3.5	8.8	15.4	5.4

Note: Differences between age groups were statistically significant (p = 10.877; df = 3; sig = 0.000).

There is an interestingly high share of those who do not want children in the third and fourth age group, especially if we take into account the share of the undecided, which is significantly smaller in comparison with the second and the third age group. When becoming older, gays and lesbians probably become reconciled with the fact that in Slovenia the chances for them to have children are slim. Women without male partners in general are not entitled to artificial reproductive treatment, and at the same time gay and lesbian couples cannot adopt children in Slovenia.

Rationalization of Desire

Because of the absence of socially prescribed patterns of reproductive behaviour for same-sex couples (as there are for the heterosexual population), gays and lesbians may create new ways of family and living arrangements like "families of choice" (Weston 1991; Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a). Their statements, views and decisions about parenthood are left to be subjective to a greater extent than one might expect to be the case in the heterosexual population. Gays and lesbians are free to create their own reproductive choices that do not exist within the matrix of heteronormative reproductive behaviour, and can therefore reinvent the dominant discourses about family life.

> When you declare yourself as a lesbian, you find out that life is not just about templates that are imposed on straight couples, but much more (Eva, 26).[2]

On the other hand, having fallen out of the heterosexual reproductive matrix, they are exposed to the pressures of the heteronormative social context since same-sex parenthood is socially perceived as undesirable and made legally impossible. In this way, gays and lesbians are exposed to several obstacles, problems and fears regarding parenthood and children. Reasons for not having children or expressing reservations regarding parenthood may have various objective and subjective backgrounds,[3] but in some cases the rejection of potential parenthood can in itself be a mechanism to deal with the heteronormative reality and with the obstacles that arise from social contexts that are unfavourable to gay and lesbian parenthood.

The desire to become a parent remains a question of principle for both gays and lesbians in Slovenia. According to the stated statistics, a significant share of gays and lesbians would like to have children, but as focus group participants stated, they are also aware that the chances in this respect are slight. They also expressed anxiety regarding potential negative reactions on the part of the society, and effects on their potential children. Some openly admitted that they suppress thoughts about having children, because of fear that any serious consideration of how to get their own child would be too burdensome given the small chance.

> I haven't thought about these things often, because I don't have the courage for this, because I would immediately become depressed. . . . Because I think, on the one hand gays and lesbians are robbed of a basic mechanism of socialisation. We are absent in the part in which children are added into the partnership. . . . And this part can be very crucial in the development of every individual. . . . Maybe a family with a child would be a qualitative shift in the way of thinking (Borut, 30).

In facing the limited possibilities of becoming a parent, gays and lesbians use various coping strategies. The most common is some form of rationalisation of the situation. Some gays and lesbians completely dismiss the idea of becoming a parent by stating clearly that they do not want to

[2] All names mentioned here are invented. The number next to the name indicates the age of the participant in the focus group.

[3] In some cases, sexual orientation is not directly linked to the decision of not having children. Some do not want to have children and explicitly state that this has nothing to do with their sexual orientation: "All this care [for children]—I don't know, the fact that I'm a lesbian has nothing to do with my desires" (Amalija, 26).

have children at all, and expressing an anxiety that they will most probably never become parents. Such anxiety is present in everyday life, for example in facing heterosexual peers, who have already become parents:

> And then they [some friends from high school] became parents and suddenly they started to show their children around. When you meet them, they are with their children—Then I ask myself: "What is this? When am I going to be a parent?" Or when I go through the park and see fathers of my own age playing with their children. And this burdens me because then I start to think about it (Gašper, 27).

The anxiety may even lead to the experience of guilt and denial of the right to parenthood:

> I have this need and desire and I admit it. At times it seems to me a bit controversial. As if I felt guilty for having that desire, because I'm gay. In the past year and a half I sort of got rid of it. Of course I can have that desire, where is it written that I cannot? (Gašper, 27).

Concerns about the negative impacts of heteronormative social contexts on potential parenthood and children may also lead to the argument often presented in public debates about the right of gays and lesbians to parenthood, namely that heteronormative society is not mature enough to accept same-sex families and the fact that gays and lesbians are parents. Although stated in a different context than in the arguments against gay and lesbian parenthood put forward by conservative opponents, some gays and lesbians also express such arguments indirectly:

> I don't know, I wouldn't have a child because of this society. I wouldn't like that child to be picked on by everybody. Although, I know it would be picked on for other things too—no, and I'd also like to get more from life, not only—perhaps when I'm older (Vivika, 27).

> I don't accept the argument that we cannot adopt because we are not progressive enough. But, on the other hand, I think that if I myself find it sometimes difficult to endure all these states of mind in our society, then perhaps it wouldn't be any easier for the child either. . . . Can you create a context free of these prejudices at all? (Gašper, 27).

Replacement of actual parenthood by taking over social roles similar to parental roles (e.g. being an uncle or an aunt, a family friend and similar) is another mechanism of dealing with questions of parenthood. For some gays and lesbians having contacts with children (other than their own) from their social networks of friends and family members is

enough to satisfy their desires for having children to a certain degree:

> I have no need to have my own child. I have just enough contacts with children (Ksenja, 30).

Some even create an idea of imaginary motherhood which functions as a sort of replacement for a real motherhood—another mechanism to deal with anxieties regarding gay or lesbian parenthood:

> I got used to my imaginary motherhood or to have motherhood and children on an imaginary level. . . . I became reconciled with this. . . . As lesbians, we cannot give birth to children out of a lesbian love. I'm always telling this to myself (Ksenja, 30).

Gays and lesbians use various coping strategies related to potential parenthood as at present none of the societies (not even the Western ones) seems to be completely open to gay and lesbian parenthood and family arrangements: "Stigma in various forms, despite all the changes that have taken place, is always a potential experience of lesbians and gays, however 'respectable' the relationship" (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 1999b, 313). However, the extent of using such strategies and the level of self-suppressing of the desire of becoming a parent can largely depend on the extent a society is pervaded with homophobia and the "institutional hatred of homosexuality" (Stacey 1996, 107). As Slovenia is a country with a high rate of homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians (Švab and Kuhar 2005), frequently expressed anxieties of our respondents regarding their reproductive preferences are probably a reflection as well as a direct product of the given social circumstances.

Do Gays and Lesbians Hold Conventional Views on Parenthood?

Within gay and lesbian family and living arrangements various forms of social parenthood are becoming increasingly practised in Western countries (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 1999a; Stacey 2006). Some of our respondents were also in favour of unconventional options of parenthood and family life.

> If I had a very good female friend, who would let's say be a lesbian and would also like to have a child, and neither of us could become parents, then we could make an alliance. This is only one idea on how the thing could function (Andrej, 25).

However, others in contemplating their possible options for acquiring a child, often emphasize biological aspects parenthood. As in the case of the heterosexual population, some gays and lesbians seem to be also

more in favour of biological parenthood:

> It's a little bit tragic that you cannot have a child physically with a woman you love. This seems to me a very painful side of the issue (Vida, 28).

> And I also dislike it a bit that it cannot be the child from both of us (Monika, 26).

Social parenthood or adoption on the other hand is often seen as a fall-back option. Although frequently mentioned, it is often framed within an ethical awareness, and not explicitly as a realistic option of becoming a parent:

> Although I would absolutely adopt every child if he or she needs help. This is not a problem (Miha, 38).

> I don't have any need to have my own child—like for example, it seems to me the same case as to buy a dog with pedigree while so many dogs are in the shelters (Maruša, 27).

All participants in the focus group interviews actually talked about *potential* options regarding parenthood as none of them were parents themselves. Facing the situation where one actually decides to have a child can produce additional anxieties. In that case one might confront some ethical questions that can also represent barriers to becoming a parent:

> Yes, of course I thought about that [how to become pregnant], yes, but it's a torment for me. Another way is to have sex with someone just like that—but—how can one go and look around for some guy just to be inseminated? And you don't get pregnant immediately and you go into a discotheque ten times. When you start to think about it concretely it becomes a torment. And then you can also have a child with someone you know. No way would I ask a friend to inseminate me. I think, what kind of a man could he be to inseminate me and then the child would be just mine and he wouldn't want to have anything to do with him/her. You don't find such people around. Therefore I was quite in distress for some time (Tara, 30).

Besides the often expressed importance of biological aspects of parenthood, some gays and lesbians have reservations regarding the unconventional options of becoming a parent, especially those which result in unconventional family living arrangements:

> I don't think it's fair to go with one woman just to make her pregnant. The option that one gay couple and one lesbian couple have a child together—I don't approve of that. If I wanted a child I would adopt him/her, although this also has some other negative

> aspects—a child could reproach me with the fact that I'm not his father, "You have chosen me from a catalogue!" (Matjaž, 25).
> Then, there is that other option—that one partner has a child. If my girlfriend, ok, my wife, had a child, then I'd not be a part of that picture. I'd not be a part of that child. I don't like this idea (Vivika, 27).

> It seems absurd to me to make a reservation with Ryan Air and fly to London to have an appointment with a doctor for artificial insemination and then fly back home. It's absurd. It looks to me like a film of Almodovar's. I cannot see myself in this option (Tara, 30).

Some gays and lesbians might hold traditional views on parenthood and emphasize the importance of the (two) gendered role-model of (heterosexual) parenting for the "proper" psychological development of children, and biological aspects of parenthood that are commonly incorporated in the ideology of heterosexual parenthood.

> I do not agree with children growing up in homosexual partnerships, because a child really needs a strong father and a tender mother and two gays or two lesbians cannot give him/her that. No way (Gabrijel, 40).

This can lead to the question whether such statements could be interpreted as conventional and conservative views on parenting. While we do not have a clear answer, we can assume that (at least some) gays and lesbians do not differ regarding some views on parenting from the heterosexual population, thus conventional views on parenting are present to a certain extent regardless of sexual orientation. On the other hand, one cannot overlook specific social contexts that might influence gay and lesbian (un-conventional) views on parenting. They might function as a (self-defence) mechanism through which gays and lesbians deal with social stigma of homosexual parenting and also with personal desire of becoming a parent.

The importance of the "proper" upbringing of a child and the concerns regarding gender roles, gender identity and even future sexual orientation of a child, expressed by our respondents, can be related to the fact that heteronormative societies neither acknowledge the existence of gay and lesbian parenthood nor provide social patterns to be followed by them in this respect. This might put pressures on gay and lesbian parents not only to invent new parenting practices on a daily basis but also to prove to the society and to themselves that they can successfully carry out parental roles. Polaskova (2007) notes, for example, that some gay and lesbian parents expressed concerns regarding particular aspects of their children's healthy development, and some were even "proud to express their joy over the fact that their three-year-old daughter was

trying on high-heeled shoes" as a sign of child's healthy development. Although previous research extensively reports on findings emphasizing that there is no difference between the psychological development of children living in heterosexual or homosexual families (Golombok 2001; Clarke and Kitzinger 2005), it is clear that influence of traditional ideas of parenting and views that arise from two-role model theory are still very much persistent, also in the gay and lesbian population.

The rather traditional views on parenting and proper upbringing of children may also be linked to the widespread and socially imposed high imperatives of parenting, putting pressure on parents to provide their children with as good an education, upbringing and welfare as possible (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1999; Švab 2001). As heterosexual parents, same-sex parents too perceive the care and well-being of the child as the most important responsibility and they may place it over and above the relationship itself (Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 1999a, 96).

> I'd have them [children] but on the other hand it seems to me that once you're a mother you cannot simply say "now I won't do it any more, I'll go on a ten-day holiday." I think it is a great responsibility and for the time being I don't see myself in this (Ana, 26).

> I do want to have a child, but first I want a job, and lots of money—for the child. And an apartment with a separate room for the child (Monika, 26).

Falling out of the matrix of heteronormative parenthood and lacking social recognition, gays and lesbians face obstacles that bring additional pressures on the issues of parenting and upbringing, not characteristic for the heterosexual population. The imperative of supportive parenthood—being always there for the child at all costs—may also arise from social anxieties regarding same-sex families, and consequently the predictable negative reactions that children of these families would face due to the parents' sexual orientation (Švab and Kuhar 2005; Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy 1999a, 96).

> I would like to have children but definitely won't have them, because I'm a lesbian. There is an option but this would mean that I had to come out 100% everywhere and absolutely, and only then have a child to whom I could offer an absolute support (Eva, 26).

Although they are aware that the problem originates in a homophobic society, responsibilities for the consequences of homophobic reactions are transferred to gays and lesbians themselves, emphasizing the importance of the "right" upbringing of children in homosexual families.

In their view, the task of homosexual parents is to protect the child by preparing him/her to handle the homophobic reactions of society:

The thing is only in the upbringing of a child: if the child is unprepared for the treatment on the part of society, it is the same as if it is unprepared for teasing because it is not a Slovene (Martin, 25).

Although such interpretations of gay and lesbian parenthood are in good faith, they also unintentionally reproduce negative views on same-sex parenthood by consenting to the argument that homosexual orientation of a parent in itself would have negative effects on a child in the form of homophobic reactions on the part of society.

> Such and such numbers of children live in families where fathers or mothers are alcoholics, or they live only with mothers . . . and if those children grow up, why couldn't they grow up in homosexual relationships? (Igor, 27).

Such defensive arguments can easily fall into the trap of reproducing discriminatory distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual parenthood, and are common in debates about same-sex parenthood, for example in the debates about the notion that children (especially boys) need male role models. Although arguing against the role-model theory, defensive arguments are usually based on idea of replacement of the male role model within the broader family and kinship networks or in society at large (i.e. children of same-sex parents have sufficient number of role-models within a kinship network and in other spheres of social life). Polaskova (2007) states for example, that some parents in her research "were confident about sufficient exposure to gender role models via their wider family social network." By such argumentation gays and lesbians unintentionally remain in the context of role model debates, which in turn sustain traditional understandings of gender and sexual development (Clarke and Kitzinger 2005) and a social organisation of family and private life that favours heterosexual living arrangements.

Conclusion

Research on everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia (Švab and Kuhar 2005) revealed a specific process of privatisation of everyday life of gays and lesbians. The pressure of the heterosexual norm compels many gays and lesbians to restrict the expression of their same-sex orientation to seemingly safe private spaces. Gay and lesbian parenting and non-heterosexual living and family arrangements in general seem to be a prominent example of this phenomenon. Drawing from the statements of gays and lesbians when talking about their parenthood and reproductive preferences, it could be said that it is exactly the issue of parenthood where gays and lesbians are caught in the closet to the most radical extent, leading to a denial of possible parental identity and roles and putting pressures of the issue of upbringing on gays and lesbians themselves.

While some Western countries are facing the so-called "gayby" boom, "a situation wherein lesbian women and gay people are opting into parenthood in increasing numbers" (Dunne 2000, 12), it seems that in general non-heterosexual parenthood is still tabooed (Golombok 2001; Švab and Kuhar 2005). Out of the stories of non-heterosexual parenting, identified by Weeks, Donovan, and Heaphy (2001), in Slovenia only the story that non-heterosexual identity precludes parenting is being told, while the stories of non-heterosexuals becoming parents either in a (past) heterosexual context or by negotiating various other options (adoption, artificial insemination, co-parenting etc.) are very rare, hidden in a private sphere or made impossible.

The analysed statements of gays and lesbians in Slovenian research show that gay and lesbian thoughts about parenthood are primarily shaped by the obstacles imposed by a heteronormative society. Their preferences regarding parenthood and children are either suppressed or rationalised. Often, a fear of the consequences of their sexual orientation might have on their potential children, precludes the idea of becoming a parent anyway. The consequences of this fear are additionally reinforced by the mere fact that gay and lesbian parenthood still has no legal background in Slovenia and some options of becoming a parent (such as adoption and assisted insemination) are not legally available for gays and lesbians.

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Who Does The Dishes?

Jana Kukučková

Introduction

This article focuses on everyday life practices of twelve lesbian couples and the division of housework in their same-sex households. The article presents qualitative research findings exploring the division of housework in lesbian relationships in three Central-European countries, and examining some of the factors underlying this division.[1] The findings were gained by analysing in-depth interviews conducted with twelve lesbian couples:[2] 6 couples from Slovakia, 3 from the Czech Republic and 3 from Hungary.[3]

There is extensive literature covering the topics of equality, relationship satisfaction, and role division among lesbian and gay couples (Tanner 1978; Peplau 1981; Lynch and Reilly 1985/86; Peplau and Cochran 1990; Johnson 1990; Weston 1991; Basow 1992; Huston and Schwartz 1996; Dunne 1997). These authors suggest that gay and lesbian couples share the household tasks rather equally and show great role flexibility in the arrangements of housework, whereas heterosexual couples tend to di-

[1] The research was conducted as part of my MA thesis. For more detailed analysis see Kukučková (2005).

[2] Three out of the twenty four women identified themselves as bisexual and one as a "slightly bisexual lesbian." Nevertheless, I decided to use the term "lesbian couples" since the majority of women (20) identified themselves as lesbians and since all of them are currently in a lesbian relationship with another woman.

[3] I found my Slovak respondents via the Altera and Podisea lesbian organizations, Hungarians via the Labrisz lesbian organization and the contact with couples in the Czech Republic was established through Podisea's mailing list. Except for one case all the interviews were conducted in April 2005 in the cities where these women live. The first part of the interviews with Dori (31, HU) and Kamila (30, HU) were conducted separately in November 2004. They answered additional questions by e-mail in April 2005. I asked my respondents for permission to tape the interviews assuring them that no one will have access to the recordings except me. Moreover, I told them that their names will be changed in order to preserve their anonymity. The interviews took from half an hour to one hour, 45 minutes on average. I asked an average of 27 open-ended questions related to the topic of the division of housework. I decided to interview both partners in each couple in order to gain information from both sides and thus be able to see their division of housework as a whole. Additionally, this enabled me to identify possible discrepancies that might occur in their responses.

vide tasks along traditional gendered lines—women do more housework, men pay for more items (Peplau and Spalding 2000). Moreover lesbians and gays were found to be less traditional not only in the division of housework but also in childcare compared with heterosexual couples (Peplau and Gordon 1982, Peplau 1982, Schneider 1986, Peplau and Cochran 1990, Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam 2005).

Most of this literature has been written in the US and in the UK. While these topics have not been much addressed in Central and Eastern Europe, my analysis of interviews conducted in three Central-European countries agrees with the thesis that there is a high level of equality in the division of housework in lesbian relationships.

Theoretical Background

A lot of research has been done on the division of housework in heterosexual households. Authors usually distinguish "women's work" from "men's work," where women's work is the work done mostly by women such as cooking, housecleaning, laundry, shopping and caring for children. "Men's work," on the other hand, is usually described as gardening, car maintenance and repair work in the household (Blair and Lichter 1991; Hiller and Philliber 1986; Kamo 1988; Presser 1994; Lindsey 1997; Hochschild 2003; Robinson and Godbey 1997). In this article I also employ these terms together with "feminine tasks" and "masculine tasks" when referring to the traditional gendered division of housework.

Previous research findings indicate that the distribution of domestic work in heterosexual households is rather unequal (Stafford, Backman, and Dibona 1977; Hochschild 2003; Shelton and John 1996; Blair and Lichter 1991; Presser 1994). This is also true for "dual-earner" families where women are in full-time employment. Although men and women often share some of the household chores, women still end up doing the majority of housework (Shelton and John 1996). As Hochschild (2003) describes in her influential book *The Second Shift*, "[e]ven when couples share more equitably the work at home, women do two-thirds of the *daily* jobs at home, like cooking and cleaning up—jobs that fix them into a rigid routine" (Hochschild 2003, 8–9). This suggests that women have to do household work as part of their daily routine, while men have more control over the time they devote to housework. Hochschild also states that women more often do two things at once, while men do either one thing or another, and "also do fewer of the 'undesirable' household chores: fewer wash toilets and scrub the bathroom" (Hochschild 2003, 9).

Since men are traditionally perceived as the primary breadwinners, "the needs of a husband in a traditional marriage come first, including rest and relaxation in nonworking hours" (Allen and Webster 2001, 900). Women remain responsible for the majority of household chores, "while their wage-earning activity is viewed as supporting or supplementing the primary breadwinner's efforts" (Allen and Webster 2001, 900). Furthermore, a man's career is often perceived as more important than the woman's, and hence it is more likely that the family will adjust to the demands of the man's work (Skinner 1984; Giele 1988).[4]

Some authors, such as Parkman, claim that "[h]ousework does not have a neutral meaning; its performance by men and women in households defines and expresses gender relationships" (Parkman 2004, 766) as well as reproduces them. Gender is often used to explain why women tend to perform the usually "feminine tasks" and men the so-called "masculine tasks." However, since there have been—some rather slow—changes in the division of housework among heterosexual couples, this explanation does not apply to all cases. As Allen and Webster state, "[d]ecreasing role differentiation within marriage allows for a shift in couples' motivation to stay together. Economic dependence (among wives) and the obligation to provide for (among husbands) are less influential than in the past" (Allen and Webster 2001, 900).

Although most of these findings come from Western literature, the results are not different for the context of Central Europe. Lukács and Frey point to the fact that women in Hungary still spend "2.6 times longer on housework" than men (Lukács and Frey 2003, 69). Similarly, Kotýnková, Kuchařová, and Průša (2003) state that Czech women spend much more time on housework and childcare than their husbands.

Research conducted on the division of housework in gay and lesbian couples shows a higher degree of equality in financial sharing and decision making within lesbian relationships. For example, Lynch and Reilly (1985/86) in their study of 70 lesbian couples found that besides the equality in financial sharing and decision making the household responsibilities tended to be performed individually, but no role-playing was evident. Schneider (1986) compared the relationships of cohabiting lesbian and heterosexual couples and came to the conclusion that lesbian couples divide their household responsibilities more equally than heterosexual couples. The responsibility for each individual household chore was also more likely to be divided evenly by lesbian couples. A comparative study of gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples by Peplau and Cochran (1990)

[4] As cited in Lindsey (1997, 182).

found that, if there was any specialization in household tasks amongst lesbians, it was usually based on individual skills and interests. Furthermore they emphasised the fact that nowadays "most lesbians and gay men are in 'dual-worker' relationships, so that neither partner is the exclusive 'breadwinner' and each partner has some measure of economic independence" (Peplau and Cochran 1990, 344). Similarly, Weston (1991) in her book on gay and lesbian kinship pointed to the aspect of financial independence when stating that out of 40 lesbians and 40 gay men she interviewed, only four were financially supported or supporting their partners. For all of them this was only a temporary situation.

Despite the fact that women are often discriminated in the labour market and earn on average one third less than men this does not affect the division of housework as much as it might be the case in heterosexual households. Regardless of the job status of the partner, household tasks in lesbian homes are usually shared fairly evenly (Johnson 1990). This is supported by Dunne (1997) in her study of British lesbian couples, where she makes a connection between a more equal division of household tasks and its influence on career development. Other authors also conclude that homosexual relationships in general are found to have certain advantages such as role flexibility and greater equality (Peplau and Gordon 1982; Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam 2005; Peplau 1982; Heaphy, Donovan, and Weeks 2002).

Results of most of the research on the division of housework and equality among gay men and lesbians show that homosexual couples are rather resistant to adopting the gender roles that are traditionally present in heterosexual relationships. The division of housework in gay and lesbian households is usually based on individual preferences, and the division into "feminine" and "masculine" tasks performed solely by one partner usually does not occur. Age, occupation, income and other factors were not found to be very influential in this respect. Similarly the majority of lesbian couples I interviewed share housework equally and do not follow the traditional division of tasks into "men's work" and "women's work." Moreover, they also show a high level of financial independence, and either partner's higher income does not usually lead to an unequal division of housework.

Results

When examining the equality in the division of housework between the partners I focused not only on who does how much and what type of housework, but also on factors that may influence this division such as

the idea of breadwinner and the gender-biased division of tasks into masculine and feminine tasks. In the first part, I concentrate on the financial factor by establishing an abstract connection between the income of the partners and the level of their participation in the household. I base this approach on the traditional division of housework as identified in heterosexual households, where the man, who usually earns more, performs much less housework than the woman.[5] Further on, I analyze the division based on the task allocation and assess the level to which the couples I interviewed follow the traditional feminine/masculine division of household tasks.

The Role of the "Breadwinner"

Out of the 12 lesbian couples I interviewed, nine reported incomes, where one partner earns significantly more than the other. I referred to these partners as "breadwinners" and I compared their participation in household chores with that of breadwinners in heterosexual couples. According to findings on the division of housework in heterosexual couples the man usually fulfils the role of "breadwinner," even if the female partner has her own income and is financially independent. This leads women to take on most of the household chores so as to support the primary breadwinner. Money and housework are not unrelated concepts: Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) noted that those who earn more (men) do less housework than those who earn less (women). Financial dependence of women was shown to be one of the reasons why they perform most of the housework (Brines 1994; Walby 1986; Curtis 1986; Delphy and Leonard 1986). Therefore, in spite of the fact that in seven out of nine lesbian couples the partners divided their household expenses equally, I decided to preserve the "breadwinner" category in my analysis.

Concerning the relationship between higher income and the amount of household work done, I divided the couples into four categories: In the first category there are couples whose higher-earner does approximately as much housework as her partner. Couples in which the higher-earner does most of household tasks are in the second category. The situation in which a higher income goes with lower participation in the household is placed into the third category. The fourth category contains couples whose partners reported having similar salaries and no clear "breadwinner."

[5] For more detailed analysis see Allen and Webster (2001), Skinner (1984) and Giele (1988).

More Money / Equal Work

The prevailing pattern within the nine unequally earning relationships was that the inequality in earnings did not affect the equality of the division of housework as is often the case in heterosexual relationships. Five couples in this group have an equal division of housework. Kristina (32, SVK) who earns more, and her partner do the shopping together and divide the household tasks equally. She described it in the following way:

> There is just one window and we haven't washed it for a year. I think that it came out somehow without words, that one does one thing and the other some other thing. This is especially true for the big cleaning during the weekend. During the week it may be a bit different but I don't think that it would be right if one of us did everything. So I don't think it is like that. And we don't have any conflicts about housework (Kristina, 32, SVK).

Her partner Zora (24, SVK) described the division in even more detail:

> Kristina cooks most of the time. I cook spaghetti or scrambled eggs. But I'm always in the kitchen, helping her. And ironing—both of us iron what we need. Kristina puts the clothes into the washing machine. Taking the clothes out, that's usually me. And Kristina usually puts them away. We do the ironing in the morning, before we go to work. We have one window—and I haven't washed it yet. Kristina waters the flowers. I vacuum and dust. We both wash the dishes, and she cleans the bathroom and the floor. And we do the big cleaning once a week together (Zora, 24, SVK).

In this case the breadwinner-role did not affect the participation in domestic work, since both partners were actively involved in the housework[6].

In the case of Dori (31, HU) and Kamila (30, HU), Kamila earns considerably more than Dori, who works from home, putting her into a potentially disadvantaged position. Being the one who spends more time at home, she could have been expected to do most of the housework, as is the case in heterosexual households (cf. Hochschild 2003). Moreover, this is one of the couples where the lower-earner is almost completely dependent financially on her partner. When asked about finances Dori replied: "We don't divide it, so it is perfectly shared. We spend all the

[6] A similar situation could be seen in the household of Julia (29, SVK) and Nina (25, SVK) who perceive housework as a necessity to be done by both of them equally. They do not make any strict division of the tasks and it is mostly based on who has more time. In the case of Lara (23, CZ) and Natalie (21, CZ) it was harder to identify the division of housework since they share their flat with three other people. However, based on their responses they divide the responsibilities equally, although Lara earns more than Natalie.

money together." Kamila, despite the fact that she earns much more and is the "breadwinner" of the household, does a lot of housework as well.

> So even when she works so much, and even when she earns more and works seven hours a day, she does a lot of housework which probably wouldn't be the case if she were a man. And I don't have to do everything—and I never thought that it takes so much time. So she basically works as much as a man, because they usually have more jobs [in our country] and then still washes and cooks (Dori, 31, HU).

This couple divided the house work rather equally, despite the fact that one woman is the breadwinner and the other one spends most of her time at home.[7]

More Money / More Work

In two other couples, the division of housework was the opposite of the traditional gender division if we perceive the "breadwinner" as the less participating one. In these cases the partner who earned more was at the same time performing a larger amount of the housework. However, none of them perceived this division as unequal. The concept of the "breadwinner" in these cases was only abstract, since both couples divided their household expenses and equally paid for the rent, food and other things needed in the household.

Melissa (31, SVK) who is the higher-earner explained why she is the one who does more work, starting with describing the cooking arrangements:

> I cook. I cook, I cook, but I cook only in this relationship. When I want or when I want to make her happy, or when I think about it, that she needs it. . . . She doesn't cook, because she doesn't know how to cook and she just helps me around. And I don't even want her to, because I cook very well and it somehow just naturally went like this, that I started with it—and I do everything the best—that's what I suffer from still, so even if she cuts the onion the other way, I am able to do it again my way (Melissa, 31, SVK).

Melissa stressed that she often believes that she can do the things better and therefore doesn't leave much space for her partner. Her girlfriend

[7] In the case of Monika (30, SVK) and Sylvia (21, SVK), Monika who represents the traditional "breadwinner," since she covers most of the household expenses, does most of the cooking and also performs most of the housework. However, it is somehow balanced by the fact that, as she stated: "Sylvia spends more time with my son. I work a lot, so she plays with him, picks him up from school and so on." And since taking care of children is also one of the much gendered tasks within relationships, the fact that one of them spends more time with the child is in my opinion also a significant element to be taken into consideration when evaluating the division of housework.

Linda (23, SVK) still performs some of the household tasks though. In this case it seems that the personality of Melissa contributes to the fact that higher earning does not lead to lower participation in the household, since she enjoys taking care of her partner.

In the case of the second couple, Izabela (21, CZ) who is the higher-earner seems to be performing even more household tasks than her partner. However, as in the case of the previous couple, she perceived the division of their household tasks as equal:

> [We cook] as it is needed. I eat a lot, so we cook for me. But otherwise who has time and who feels like it.
> Q.: And who does the cleaning?
> As it is needed—I think the one who has time does it. Like we know who is good at what so we do that (Izabela, 21, CZ).

These examples support the idea that in lesbian relationships the partner who earns more and provides the majority of the household's income still often performs an equal share of household tasks, or even a larger amount of housework.

More Money / Less Work

Only in two of the nine couples was the person representing the "breadwinner" doing less housework. Emma (35, SVK) and Tanya (26, SVK) divide their household expenses equally although Emma has a higher income. Emma's participation in the household is less than that of her partner. This may be explained by the fact that she works and at the same time studies at university. Compared to her partner she has less time. She cooks less, but as she said it is more about the adjustment to their life situation:

> It depends on time. When Tanya went to school I used to cook and even bake. Now I don't bake at all. . . . Now when I go to school and it is mostly on her. And I have to say that now I got used to the fact that she is taking care of most of the things. I somehow leave them to her and I am better off (laughter)—but still, I cook sometimes. Even like two to three times a week. And I like to make something for her as an expression of my gratitude that she is helping me so much (Emma, 35, SVK).

She admits that Tanya not only does most of the cooking but also the rest of the housework: "I usually wash and Tanya irons. But it is very simple, since the machine does the work. Some of the clothes we wash by hand. It is also about time. Cleaning and vacuuming are mostly done by

Tanya." Tanya seemed to have adjusted to the situation since as she said: "When we have time, we do it together since it is faster. And when Emma has to study I do it myself." In this couple the partners have adjusted to the situation in which one of them has considerably less time due to combining work and study. It is not a fixed pattern, since both partners mentioned that the division was different before. When Tanya was studying Emma was doing more of the housework. In this case the unequal division of housework is not a result of more power of the person with higher income; rather it is the result of an adjustment to a specific life situation, especially if we take into consideration that the division of household expenses is equal and that the pattern of doing the housework has changed throughout their relationship.[8]

Equal Money

The remaining three couples reported having very similar salaries. In all three cases they divide their household expenses either by both paying half of each bill, or one of them paying the rent and the other putting aside the same amount of money for food and other things needed for the household. Of these three couples two share the household tasks equally without having any strict division. They perceive doing the housework as a necessity and do not base the division on individual preferences. In the third couple the division is rather unequal, since Sonia (41, SVK) does most of the housework except cooking. They agreed that Klara (29, SVK) would cook more often. The rest of the household tasks are done by Sonia who took over the typical women's role in the household. She described her participation in the household as follows: "As to the rest of the housework, I do everything else including washing windows and so on. But I don't mind it. Usually one of us cooks and the other washes dishes. So I wash them more often." Klara does very little of the housework, but as she stated: "On the other hand, I do mainly the man's work, like putting furniture together and so on." This division is not influenced by income, since they have similar salaries and share the money together. Rather as Sonia expressed it: "I think it is mainly about my personality, the way I function in relationships."

From the analysis of these interviews it seems that money did not play a significant role creating a strict distinction between the breadwinner

[8] The household of Gabi (32, HU) and Diana (32, HU) has a similar pattern of adjusting to the needs of one of the partners. This results in the situation where Diana who earns more than Gabi performs less housework. However, there is no strict division within this couple that would make one of the partners the sole provider and the other the sole caretaker within the household.

and caretaker among the respondents. The prevailing pattern of housework division indicated equality among the partners regardless of their income status. One of the possible explanations for this is the fact that these women did not expect the other one to support them financially, and if they did, then only for a short time. Therefore financial independence may be one of the factors that can lead to greater equality in lesbian couples.

Who Does What and Why?

The majority of couples did not divide their tasks based on gender categories. When describing the tasks they perform, only one woman said that she is doing "men's work." The rest of the women described the "men's work" as practical tasks. They did not perceive it as anything special that they were able to do this kind of work in the household. In seven out of twelve couples, both partners stated that they are able to do most of the "masculine" tasks. However, despite this fact, the "masculine" tasks were not as equally divided as the "feminine" ones, since only in one case both partners were doing this type of work. Lara (23, CZ) and Natalie (21, CZ) share all household tasks equally, including the "masculine" tasks.

> Well, I would say that maybe I [do most of the men's work], but now I think that Natalie [does it] as well. I think we grew up similarly, that if you don't mend it, it will stay broken. I'm the kind who likes to do those things. And I think it is similar for Natalie.
> Q.: And who calls the workers, if they are needed?
> I leave that to Natalie [laughter], I don't like doing things like that (Lara, 23, CZ).

Her partner, Natalie also mentioned that when deciding on who will do the work, time and certain skills also play an important role: "Who is at home, who has time and who knows how to do it, does it. It depends on what it is of course."

In the remaining six couples, even though both partners claim to be able to do masculine type of housework, one of them performs most of it. The reason for this division is usually in the enjoyment of these tasks. As Julia (29, SVK) stated: "What is only my domain and I wouldn't let anyone do it, are the technical things, because I enjoy them very much—but it is not about the way that I am dominant and therefore I do it, but because I really enjoy it." Although Julia insists on performing most of the technical work in the household she is also participating equally in other household tasks that would be perceived as feminine. Overall, in cases where both partners are able to do technical work, usually one of the partners does it as a result of a mutual agreement.

Nevertheless, there were also five couples, in which only one partner was able to do the repair work. Generally among these couples, the person who takes care of mending is also much involved in other more feminine housework. For example, Izabela (21, CZ), who does most of the manual work participates equally, sometimes even a bit more in the rest of the housework, doing the traditionally feminine tasks such as cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing etc. Similarly, Monika (30, SVK), although being able to do only small repair jobs, combines both spheres since she does most of the cooking in their household as well as other feminine tasks.

The division of housework according to feminine and masculine categories was most visible in the household of Sonia (41, SVK) and Klara (29, SVK).[9] The division among these two women resembles the usual division of feminine and masculine tasks. Sonia is responsible for "90%" of the housework except cooking which is done by Klara "on the basis of an agreement." Nevertheless, it was Klara who used the term "doing the men's work." Similarly, Sonia described herself as "act[ing] more like a woman." She explained this position by referring to her up-bringing and the influence of her mother. In this case one of the possible explanations for their unequal division of housework may be the difference in their "gender ideologies" (Hochschild 2003),[10] since it can be deduced from the interview that Sonia has a more traditional perception of women's roles than Klara.

Conclusion

The analysis of the division of housework among the twelve lesbian couples I interviewed shows a high level of equality in the division of housework regardless of their income. The difference in earnings usually does not lead to a situation in which the higher-earner would not participate equally in the housework. Furthermore, the findings indicate that these couples in most cases do not follow the gender-based division of tasks into masculine and feminine but combine both equally. They divide the housework according to preferences (who likes what), abilities (who

[9] The resemblance with a traditional division of housework appeared also in the couple of Diana (32, HU) and Gabi (32, HU), where Diana does less of the feminine tasks in the household while doing all the repairing. Nevertheless, she still participates in other household tasks such as cleaning the bathroom, and does most of the cooking and ironing.

[10] As Hochschild states: "A woman's gender ideology determines what sphere she wants to identify with (home or work) and how much power she wants to have (less, more, or the same amount)" (Hochschild 2003, 15).

can do what) or time (who has the time). Thus it can be concluded, that although there are differences among these couples as to the level of equality in the division of housework, over all they are rather equal while not following the usual division of household tasks as it is often present in heterosexual relationships.

It is important to stress here, that the results of my research should not be generally applied to all lesbian couples in the region. The fact that these couples show a high level of equality in the division of housework is not to suggest that lesbian couples are equal in all spheres. I acknowledge the fact that lesbian couples experience many problems in their relationships similar to the problems of any other couples (such as alcoholism, domestic violence, etc.). However, one of the main aims of this article was to demonstrate that an equal division of housework is possible. As my analysis has proved, the high level of equality in lesbian relationships is neither significantly influenced by income nor by gender-based division of tasks in the household.

Yet, the question remains, why do lesbian couples show a higher level of equality in the division of housework than heterosexual ones. While research on heterosexual couples points to a close connection between income of partners and their participation in housework, it would be insightful to investigate what factors contribute to the equal division of household tasks in lesbian couples. According to Risman and Schwartz "it may be that after the conventions of gender are removed, power inequities are so unflattering to both that partners are intensely motivated to avoid the costs of greater power and powerlessness alike" (1988, 135). Among the factors influencing the level of equality, my respondents pointed to the influence of parents, who shared their housework equally and thus provided an example to their children, or to their up-bringing as independent and self-sufficient individuals.

All these different aspects provide more topics for further research on the division of housework in lesbian relationships. I believe that more research is needed on this topic, especially in the region of Central Europe.

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Representing "Others"

Queer as Metaphor: Representations of LGBT People in Central & East European Film

Kevin Moss

Queers and queer desire are virtually invisible in feature films from Central and Eastern Europe before the eighties.[1] While homosexual acts had been decriminalized in a number of countries in the region in the 60s and 70s, homosexuality was certainly not accepted or encouraged by the state. Lenin's dictum that film is the most important of the arts coupled with the fact that most film studios were state run meant that control over film production was even tighter than over book publishing or theater. While there no doubt were gay and lesbian directors, screenwriters, and actors, they do not appear to have smuggled much if any covert gay meaning into their films. Homoerotic images—images presented as or read as the objects of same-sex desire on the part of either the viewer or a character in the film itself—could be found: women's bodies have always been objectified in film, and Socialist-Realist films often presented male bodies for admiration as well. There were a few films about homosocial relationships with homoerotic overtones: Wajda's *Promised Land* (*Ziemia obecana*, Poland, 1975) and Zanussi's *Camouflage* (*Barwy ochronne*, Poland, 1977), for example; and occasionally stereotypical gay characters were included in episodes for comic relief, for example in Živko Nikolić's *Beauty of Sin* (*Lepota poroka*, Yugoslavia, 1986), where the swishy gay character wears makeup and makes fruitless passes at the visiting village macho. But only in the 1980s, with increasing relaxation of political scrutiny, did the first gay and lesbian characters appear as the focus of feature films.

Politics in Hungary: Gay Spies and Lesbian Dissidents

The first film in Eastern Europe to feature homosexuality openly was Károly Makk's *Another Way* (*Egymásra nézve*, 1982). It was also the first

[1] By the terms "queers" and "queer desire" I mean any persons or desires that do not fit the standard heterosexual model of biologically and gendered male desiring biologically and gendered female and vice versa.

film in Hungary to refer to the events of 1956 as a revolution, rather than a counter-revolution. Makk's film was therefore groundbreaking in its portrayal of both sexual and political dissidence. The screenplay by Makk and Erszébet Galgóczi was based on Galgóczi's 1980 novel, *Another Love* (Galgóczi 1983, original title: *Törvényen belül*, literally "Within the Law"). The film centers on the love between two women journalists in the aftermath of 1956. In his article on Hungarian film in *Post New Wave Cinema in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, David Paul writes that "at first glance the issues of lesbianism and censorship may strike one as unlikely twins," (Paul 1989, 192) but the connection between sexual and political dissidence should be obvious, and the parallels are drawn brilliantly in both the film and the novel. Makk, one of Hungary's top directors, confessed that the story grabbed him both because of its dramatic tension and because it contained two taboo subjects: 1956 and lesbian love (Bagota 2000). Makk's film, which won the 1982 FIPRESCI critics' award at Cannes, continues to be popular.

Éva is politically the more outspoken and the more out of the two journalists. At the newspaper she crusades for revealing the truth about the methods used to coerce farmers into joining the collective, and her refusal to compromise results in her losing her job. Éva is much more cautious in her affair with the married Lívia, who obviously loves her, but is less willing to brave the consequences. When Lívia finally tells her husband Dönci she's leaving him, he shoots her, perhaps leaving her paralyzed for life. Lívia then rejects Éva again, and the latter is shot trying to cross the border.

One might argue that the shape of the plot is homophobic, since one lesbian is killed in a quasi-suicide and the other is shot by her jealous husband and paralyzed. Vito Russo documents numerous Hollywood films in which homosexuals are punished by death at the end of the plot, but the suicide and homophobic violence in *Another Way* are not meant to confirm heterosexual values. Dönci's actions are meant to turn the audience against brutal homophobia, and Lívia calls Éva a "martyr"—Andrew Horton is right that our sympathies are with Éva as a political dissident *and* a lesbian (Horton 1999a).

Éva and Lívia are played by Polish actresses Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieślak and Grażyna Szapołowska, and Jankowska-Cieślak won best actress at Cannes for her tomboyish street-smart crusader playing against Szapołowska's more femme sensuality. The predicament of real lesbians in Hungary is revealed both in the authorities' ignorance about lesbian sex (one investigator asks, "how do you do it?") and in a scene in which the police harass the pair for kissing on a park bench. After checking

their documents, the policeman reminds Éva that "we are not in America," she is detained, and Lívia is warned to return to her husband.

The overall effect of the changes introduced in moving from the page to the screen is that the theme of lesbian love is expanded at the expense of political dissidence. Given that the novel was written by a lesbian and the director and co-author of the screenplay is a heterosexual man, this shift is somewhat paradoxical. Perhaps Galgóczi, who was conflicted and in the closet for much of her own life, showed restraint by reflex in her own novel that Makk had no stake in preserving. The soft-focus eroticization of the women's bodies in the love scene suggests that there may also be something of the traditional heterosexual male fantasy of lesbian love involved. More likely Makk's motivation was political: in a film that broke two taboos, political and sexual, the sexual taboo may have been equally controversial, but it was less politically risky than calling the events of 1956 a revolution. The lesbian plot served both as a smokescreen, as a distraction from the fact that Makk's film was pushing the political envelope, and as a metaphor for political dissidence itself. Balázs Varga suggests that while the film should have been forbidden for political reasons in 1982 like Mészáros's *Diary for my Children* (*Napló gyermekeimnek*) and Erdély's *Version* (*Verzió*), "paradoxically the breaking of the second taboo, the depiction of a lesbian relationship, 'defused' the bomb" (Varga 1999). Critics of the day focused on the lesbian theme while remaining silent about the fact that the film was unequivocally critical of the system.

The year before it was won by Makk's *Another Way*, the Cannes FIPRESCI award went to István Szabó's *Mephisto* (1981), which also won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Szabó's next film, with the same team, including Klaus Maria Brandauer in the lead, was *Colonel Redl* (*Oberst Redl*, 1984). *Colonel Redl* is a fictional film inspired by John Osborne's *A Patriot for Me* (Osborne 1965) and, as the opening credits put it, "the historical events of our century." The central event that inspired the film (and Osborne's play before it) was the affair of Alfred Redl, the high-ranking intelligence officer in the Austrian military who was found out as a spy and committed suicide in 1913. The real Redl became the archetype for society's distrust of homosexuals as a security risk, and Osborne played up Redl's homosexuality. Szabó—again one of Hungary's top directors, on the contrary, downplays Redl's homosexuality as a cause for his treason. Instead he is an innocent pawn, a scapegoat framed by the Imperial machinery. For Szabó, Redl's tragedy is that he is a career man who has divorced himself from any identity other than his rank in the Imperial service. In an interview about the film, Szabó explains that "Osborne's play is chiefly about the problem of homosexu-

ality" (Szabó 1984, 15), while that is not a topic he wanted to make a film about. Unlike Osborne and others, Szabó and his colleagues saw Redl's story "through Central-East European eyes." Redl is "a protagonist who wants to be somebody else, who wants to be a different person from what he actually is," and this conflict of identity leads to his tragedy. Other characters in the film can comfortably inhabit their class, their family background, their nationality, and their sexuality. Redl attempts to conceal his, and it is his lack of identity that makes him an ideal scapegoat.

Szabó plays down Redl's homosexuality, yet while he may say he is not interested in making a film about homosexuality, he does not eliminate it. Homoerotic scenes remind the audience throughout the film of what they know of the historical Redl's sexuality. Sexuality first enters Redl's world when he visits his aristocratic friend Kubinyi, and the boy's grandfather places his hand on Kubinyi's while praising Redl. Redl may be infatuated with Kubinyi, but some of his attention spills over to his sister Katalin, who also uses a ruse to put her hand on his knee, then move it up his leg. This scene is then echoed by the boy's piano teacher, who casually puts his hand on young Redl's leg while he is playing. Homoerotic tension is palpable between Redl and many of his colleagues, especially Kubinyi. When they visit a brothel, Redl seems more interested in hearing from the whore about Kubinyi than in making love to her himself. He even spies on his friend having sex with another girl for inspiration. On his way out of the brothel, an officer stops him on the stair and kisses him. Redl's affair with Katalin is fraught with suggestions that it is really her brother he loves, and he admits that he was thinking about her brother when they first made love. Accusations of homosexuality also play a part. A fellow officer is accused of being an invert or a homosexual, and Redl's commander warns him that he has heard a rumor that Redl is homosexual—the rumor Redl's abrupt marriage is meant to quash.

In the scenes leading up to the denouement Redl is seduced by Velocchio, who like the historical Redl is a homosexual involved in spying for money. Szabó's beautiful depiction of their courtship takes three brief scenes, all of which are completely wordless. First we see them on horseback in a snowy wood, their playful glances suggesting their infatuation. The second scene—again without dialogue—takes place in a piano store, where the Papageno/Papagena duet from Mozart's *Magic Flute* takes the place of dialogue. They play a few tentative notes, the other responding, then chords, then finally a fully arranged version for four hands. The final scene in the development of their affair shows Velocchio apparently naked and asleep in bed, while Redl, wearing a robe, looks on lovingly. Edward Plater points out that this is an expression we have not

seen before: "Redl has completely abandoned his posing here so that his outward appearance offers no obstacle to our effort to peer into his soul" (Plater 1992, 54). But the unmasking comes at a price, since the following scene shows that he knows Velocchio is a decoy.

Both Makk and Szabó show queer desire in a favorable light, but showing real queer reality is not the primary goal for either of these great Hungarian directors. The queer in the film is used to make a political statement. Both films are set in the past—the 50s for *Another Way*, pre-WWI Austria for *Redl*. A third film from Hungary, Péter Timár's 1989 thriller, *Ere the bat has flown his flight* (*Mielőtt befejezi a röptét a denevér*) can also be read as a metaphor for politics. In this film, set in contemporary Budapest, single mother Teréz falls for a colorful but manic policeman László, who in his turn becomes obsessed with her teenage son Róbert. László attempts to control both Teréz and Róbert, but after an attempted seduction in the shower things rapidly deteriorate, leading to Teréz's suicide and Róbert's revenge on the predatory pedophile policeman. While the plot is interesting, László's infatuation is never quite believable, and the film does not read as a realistic portrayal of queer desire. Instead the policeman's lust for the boy appears as just one more aspect of his manic desire to control everything around him, which itself can be seen as a metaphor for authoritarian police control, which was self-destructing in 1989 all over the region.

It is hard to find anything specific to Hungarian queer life in these films, though one small detail does appear in all: reference to the baths. In *Another Way* Dönci rants that his recruits are "not soldiers, but dancers . . . or fag whores at the Rudas baths." In *Redl* the hero is shown twice in a Turkish bath with a fellow officer—both scenes that hint at their homoerotic attraction. In Timár's film the scene is a private, not a public bath, but seduction with two men in the shower is still the crucial turning point in the film. Given the importance of the public bath as both a Hungarian institution and a major locus of cruising for gay men, it may be no accident that the two are connected in these films. Surely most straight Hungarian men would have seen gay desire primarily at the baths.

Violence and Gender in the Balkans: Virginas and Transvestite Prostitutes

Two films from Yugoslavia in the early 90s feature transgendered heroes / heroines: Srdjan Karanović's *Virgina* (*Virdžina*, 1992), about a girl raised as a boy in the early 1900s, and Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass* (*Dupe od mramora*, 1994), about a transvestite prostitute in contemporary Beo-

grad (Moss 2005). Set in the mythic past, Karanović's *Virgina* is about a sworn virgin—a village girl raised as a male because the family had no male children. *Virgina* shows a culturally conservative society in which the expectation that the sworn virgin will live as a man comes into conflict with her desire to live as she wants. In the West we usually think of transvestites and transgendered people as going against societal norms to perform their desired identities, but in the case of sworn virgins, it is the patriarchal society that forces the women to live as men. Though informed by ethnography, Karanović's film does not strive for complete cultural verisimilitude, and he writes about the many significant changes from conception to final completion in his book *Virgina: Diary of a Film* (*Dnevnik jednog filma: Virdžina 1981–1991*) (Karanović 1998).

Karanović was inspired to make the film *Virgina* by reading a newspaper story about an Albanian woman who lived for 25 years as a man, fought with the Partisans near Trieste, and was wounded and discharged, when it was discovered that she was a woman. (Karanović 1998, 7) Karanović set the first screenplay for *Virgina* among the partisans in WWII near Trieste. Subtitled "a love story about freedom" Karanović's screenplay was meant to be universal and metaphorical: "through her fight for liberation of the country the main heroine fights for her own personal liberation, her identity and right to be what she is—a woman!" (Karanović 1998, 28).

Guns as a characteristic male attribute play a central role in both the plot and the symbolism of the film. Carrying guns and participation in war and blood feuds are strictly men's activities and are regularly mentioned in accounts of real sworn virgins.[2] The film begins when yet another girl (Stevan) is born into a family whose bad luck is ascribed to the lack of a male child. Her father Timotije, who carries a gun through most of the film, takes her out to a field to shoot her, but then relents and declares he will raise her as a boy. At Stevan's christening Paun (whom we later learn is a sworn virgin himself–played in the film by a man) asks to "see his gun"—meaning his penis—but is stopped by Stevan's father just in time. At the end it is Timotije who is shot by Paun, which frees Stevan to escape his oath and live as a woman.

Karanović's "Love Story about Freedom" is about Stevan's freedom to live life as he—or rather she—chooses, as a woman. We see her expressing her inner, essential desires as she avoids her fiancée, is attracted to Mijat, and most of all as she longs to play with her sister's doll. The doll

[2] Whitaker even claims that for some Albanians shooting and participation in blood feud were the only male activities, all other work, even hard labor in the fields, being performed by women (Whitaker 1981, 150).

serves as a kind of antonym to the gun: while the family places the gun in Stevan's hands again and again, she herself steals the doll from her sister and even hides it and lies to deny her theft. At the end of the film Stevan breaks her oath in order to flee with Mijat to America, presumably leaving the patriarchal oppression of life as a sworn virgin behind.[3] Western critics have pointed out that the conclusion, in which Stevan reclaims her female identity as wife and mother, is hardly feminist (Iordanova 1996; Daković 1996). The film is thus less about the transvestite figure causing gender trouble than about reaffirming essential gender difference. In a crucial scene she says she wants to leave in order "to live my life as I want"—and Paun, also a sworn virgin, understands and supports her. As he dies, Stevan's father realizes that he has been wrong to insist on her remaining a man, giving her the best compliment he can with his dying breath: "I now have a son, the best!" (Karanović 1998, 320)—a woman who claims her identity as essentially female is thus worthy of the highest compliment, being called a son. And Stevan's last line confirms her chosen identity as wife and mother, as she agrees to go to America as Mijat's wife, taking her infant sister with them as their daughter.[4]

Though hegemonic gender constructions are challenged neither by the sworn virgin tradition, in which women are raised as men to preserve the patriarchal family, nor in Karanović's film about them, in which the transvestite reclaims her essential female identity at the conclusion, another film from Yugoslavia—Želimir Žilnik's *Marble Ass*—proves much more radical in its critique of culture. Žilnik's heroine, Merlinka, is a male to female transvestite prostitute. In the traditional world of *Virgina* female to male transvestism was motivated by the pressures of gender inequality in rural Balkan society. Male to female transvestism, on the other hand, was viewed in the Balkans as deviant and regulated with hatred and ridicule. Because female work and female dress were con-

[3] Interestingly, Alice Munro's story, "The Albanian Virgin," concludes much the same way. In it, a British woman is captured by Albanians and becomes a sworn virgin to avoid marriage to a Muslim. She is eventually smuggled out of the country with the help of a Franciscan priest, who abandons his own vows to marry her and move to Canada (Munro 1994).

[4] In her otherwise excellent study of sworn virgins, Antonia Young misreads the conclusion, or had it described to her incorrectly: she claims Stevan's sister is a boy and that she gives the child away to Paun, thus confirming Stevan's own status as household head; (Young 2000, 63). In the film Stevan says, "I will be your wife, but you know, we already have a daughter" (Karanović 1998, 322). The *virgina* tradition appears in two more recent films, Karin Michalski's documentary short, *Pashke and Sofia* (2003), which includes scenes from an earlier Albanian film, and Nicholas Kinsey's disastrous Canadian feature film, *Women Without Wings* (2002).

sidered shameful for a man, dressing men in female garb and parading them through the town was even used as a form of punishment, especially for those who refused to go to war (Vukanović 1961, 106–107).[5] Žilnik inverts this practice by making the heroine of his anti-war film a transvestite.

The star of *Marble Ass* is Vjeran Miladinović, alias Merlin or Merlinka. Merlinka was a real transvestite prostitute played by Vjeran in real life. I use the word "played" here advisedly, because according to Miladinović's autobiography *Terezin sin,* which he published in 2001, his performance was exactly that, calculated to get him laid and to earn some extra deutschmarks (Miladinović 2001). Miladinović gives an account of Žilnik meeting Merlinka at her workplace and being so intrigued that he decided to make a film about her. Žilnik claims that when they met on the street during the war in Bosnia, Merlinka said, "Hey, I used to be the weirdest person in Beograd, but now everything here is so weird that I'm the only one who is normal!" That's when he decided to shoot a film. According to Miladinović, Žilnik first wanted to make a documentary, but Merlinka refused, insisting on a full-length film instead.

What resulted was indeed a full-length feature film, but one that had substantial input from Merlinka and some of her transvestite prostitute friends, which means there is a good bit of reality to the depiction. Merlinka and Sanela, the two lead trans characters, play themselves and use their real names. Much of the dialog, according to Merlinka, was improvised or written by her. Yet at the same time the film is much more political than Miladinović's autobiography. The film is a subversive romp, its style completely in keeping with the sensibility of the drag queens who are its heroines. The moral is "make love, not war," sex is better than violence, and Merlinka's tricking is shown to be much more moral than her soldier lover Johnny's murderous plots.

The most interesting scenes in terms of transvestism occur with the appearance of Ruža, a biological woman who knew Merlinka before her current incarnation as a female. As the transvestites are referred to throughout the film in the feminine gender, it is striking when Ruža uses the masculine and Merlinka's male name: "Dragan, what have you done?"[6] But in an inversion of the Hollywood staple of the gay/transvestite trying to act butch (*La Cage aux Folles*, France, 1978; *The Birdcage*, USA, 1996; *In and Out*, USA, 1997), here it is Merlinka who tries to teach

[5] The practice recalls classical Greek themes from Achilles' youth on Skyros disguised as a girl to avoid the Trojan war to Pentheus' punishment in Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which he is paraded through the streets dressed as a woman.

[6] "Dragane, šta si to uradio?"

Ruža how to act as a woman and a prostitute.[7] Merlinka dresses Ruža and explains how to pick up clients, but Ruža eventually fails the condom test and goes back to her domestic role—cooking.

Transvestism is also a central plot device in a more recent film from the region, Ahmed Imamović's *Go West* (Bosnia, 2005). *Go West* focuses on a mixed gay couple in Sarajevo: Kenan, a Muslim, and Milan, a Serb. Though set in the '90s, when some sort of gay community surely existed in Sarajevo, there is no evidence of any such community. Kenan (Mario Drmač) reads as convincingly gay, unlike his partner Milan (Tarik Filipović). There is no chemistry whatsoever between the two supposed lovers. The two plan to emigrate to the gay-friendly Netherlands, but the war strands them in Serb-controlled territory, and Kenan adopts female drag to avoid being found out as a circumcised Muslim. They escape to Milan's village, where the disguise is maintained through a traditional wedding. These two men barely kiss onscreen, though Kenan, who is bisexual, is shown having sex at least twice with Ranka, the village prostitute. Ranka eventually outs the gay men to Milan's father, while Milan is drafted into the Serbian army and killed. Though firmly anti-Serb and anti-war, the film reads as ultimately misogynistic. The sole woman among the leads is the cause of all conflict, while Milan's father and best friend accept his gay affair with equanimity.

The connection between violence and gender in the Balkans is captured in a saying quoted by Kenan: "Ako ne nosiš suknju, onda nosiš pušku" (If you don't wear a dress, then you carry a gun). Kenan wears a dress and, unlike Milan, is spared being drafted into the army. Stevan in *Virgina* is given a gun to symbolize his manhood. In *Marble Ass* Merlinka wears a dress, but her boyfriend Johnny lives and dies by the gun. During the wars nationalists derided homosexuals as traitors to the nation. Anyone against the war was "not a real man" because a real man is a "čovek s puškom" (a man with a gun) (Čolović 2000, 75).

Violence is central to the other three recent feature films from ex-Yugoslavia, though they show lesbian, rather than gay male, desire: Maja Weiss's *Guardian of the Frontier* (*Varuh meje*, Slovenia, 2002), Dalibor Matanić's *Fine Dead Girls* (*Fine mrtve djevojke*, Croatia, 2002), and Dragan Marinković's *Take a Deep Breath* (*Diši duboko*, Serbia, 2004). *Guardian of the Frontier* is the first Slovene film directed by a woman and the first to show lesbian desire. Three women take a canoe trip down the Kol-

[7] This seems to be characteristic of films about real transvestites, as opposed to the Hollywood version: Willy Ninja of *Paris is Burning* went on to teach models how to walk the catwalk.

pa, which divides Slovenia from Croatia. Like *Heart of Darkness* crossed with *Deliverance*, the film itself straddles the boundary between realistic thriller and fantasy, as the girls confront a man who is either a right-wing family-values politician, or a rapist murderer, or the king of the forest. Alja leaves her boyfriend at home and Žana, who is confrontational and butch, and good-girl Simona vie for her allegiance. At one point the girls cross to the other side, where they find a male couple, one of whom is a famous actor. Simona runs away, spooked by the gay household because "it's not natural,"—which presages her reaction to finding Žana and Alja entwined later in the tent. Homophobia and sexism are incarnated in guardian of the frontier / the mayor, who criticizes the girls for being too independent and for swearing. The mayor's speech makes it clear that homosexuality is not a part of Slovene nationality—he wants to defend his country from it, to draw a boundary between good and evil, Slovene and foreign, straight and gay. He and his two male followers may or may not rape Simona in the forest, but the threat is felt by all.

In *Fine Dead Girls* Iva and Marija move into an apartment building that is home to a rogues' gallery of characters: a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress, a prostitute paid to break up the couple by one girl's religiously-motivated father, a homophobic gorgon landlady, and her son, a slacker mama's boy who rapes one of the pair to prove his masculinity. The film takes aim at the brutality and amorality of contemporary Croatian society, targeting patriarchy, nationalism, and the Catholic Church, as well as homophobia. It obviously struck a chord, becoming the audience favorite at the Pula festival in '02 as well as Croatia's nominee for an Oscar the following year. Though convincingly anti-homophobic, *Fine Dead Girls* still hews to some stereotypes: the women are shown making love for the titillation of the audience, and the more butch of the pair is murdered, while her femme girlfriend (conveniently bisexual) marries and has a child.

Take a Deep Breath portrays a younger generation that blames parents for the dire situation of contemporary Serbia. Here we have a middle-aged conservative judge who attempts to retain patriarchal control over his family. His wife has a secret affair with a younger man, while his daughter Saša plans to leave the country with her boyfriend. When the boyfriend is hospitalized after a car accident, Saša switches her affections to his sister Lana, who has come from Paris to help out. This film, too, presents a soft-focus playful eroticism in the affair between the two women, but the father eventually has his way and uses his power to disrupt the girls' idyll. When Lana tells Saša's father she is her lover, Saša chides her, saying, "This is not Paris, Lana," echoing *Another Way's*

"We are not in America." Lesbianism is a foreign phenomenon. Disturbingly, the film not only ends with vignettes of happy straight couples, leaving the fate of the lesbian affair open to speculation, but it also hints at the evil father's latent homosexuality, presumably caused by a childhood molestation in an orphanage. The film thus argues for tolerance of lesbian love, but reinstates homophobia in the form of paedophilia as a root cause of the father's psychological trauma that drives the plot. All three films are by straight directors, two by men, and all three show a world in which lesbianism is a choice. The three lesbian pairs are totally isolated, with no representation of any lesbian community. All confront the nationalist homophobic conflation of lesbianism with the foreign—it is an import, a choice, a contagious disease, and while the films contest this construction, they do show it to be the dominant discourse in the region, especially among nationalist ideologues.

Exploiting Gay Rent Boys in Prague

Wiktor Grodecki's three films about Czech rent boys, *Not Angels, but Angels* (*Andělé nejsou andělé* 1994), *Body without Soul* (*Tělo bez duše* 1996), and *Mandragora* (1997) purport to be objective, honest documentaries in which (in the language of the video box) the boys' "frankness and need to talk become the engine that drives the film."[8] In reality, Grodecki's films are both highly manipulated and highly manipulative in ways that serve to enforce "normal" sexuality while demonizing various "abnormal" sexual practices (Moss 2006b). At the same time they portray these practices as an import from the colonizing capitalist West.

The first film, *Not Angels, but Angels,* comes the closest to being a documentary, with interviews with the rent boys arranged by theme to tell the story Grodecki wants us to learn: these are innocent straight children exploited by gay men from Western Europe. Religious music and intercut shots of statues of angels emphasize by contrast the evil of what is happening. Grodecki never asks if the boys are gay or why they left home for the streets of Prague. The second film, *Body without Soul*, introduces us to a pornographer as well. It is obviously partially scripted, and Grodecki takes advantage of the pornographer's other job performing autopsies in a morgue. If *Not Angels, but Angels* juxtaposed the experiences of the boys with *contrasting* spiritual statues and music, *Body without Soul* employs montage to shock by *association*, almost like aversion therapy. Grodecki cuts from Rousek directing naked boys in the film to

[8] Produced by Miro Voštiar, packaging © 1995 Water Bearer Films.

Rousek dissecting naked bodies in the morgue. The parallels are brilliant and effective. In Grodecki's world the boys are invariably sucked into a cycle of sex, drugs, AIDS, and death: they will end up in the morgue themselves.

With his last film in the trilogy, *Mandragora* (1997), Grodecki gives up all pretense of making a documentary—though the box still claims that "all the events in this film actually occurred, and were photographed just as the street kids described them." *Mandragora* is in fact a feature film, scripted by Grodecki and one of the rent boys, David Švec. It is the dramatization of Grodecki's fantasy of the boys' experience, this time with no messy testimony by the boys themselves to get in the way of the director's interpretation of their lives. A boy, Marek, comes to Prague from a provincial town after committing a petty theft. In the main station (which we already know as a site of prostitution) he is robbed and beaten himself and falls into the clutches of a pimp. He is drugged and raped, then beaten again. Another boy, David, befriends him, and they try to move out on their own, but keep falling back into the cycle of beatings, crime, drugs, prostitution and pornography. The villains are either foreign—like the rich British queen who first puts Marek on a pedestal—literally—then beats him, or quasi-foreign, like the returned Czech émigré who wears a cowboy hat and rapes David with a pool cue. In the end a nightmare suggests Marek may have contracted AIDS, and his father's attempts to save him fail, as we see Marek overdose in a toilet stall. Still, there are some scenes of what are supposed to be gay bars in Prague, complete with drag queens and backroom orgies, but they are all grotesquely exaggerated.

Another film from Prague, David Ondříček's *Whisper* (*Šeptej*, 1996), also includes prostitution as a secondary plot motif in a film that is mostly about amoral Czech youth. The film centers on Anna, who comes to Prague from the provinces and falls in with Filip, whose male lover Kytka picks up tricks at the train station. Filip eventually leaves his boyfriend for Anna. As Andrew Horton points out, the film is not really a serious treatment of what it means to be gay in Prague in the 1990s: "Filip's homosexuality is flippantly passed off as a passing phase, and the audience is meant to breathe a sigh of relief at the film's end, as Filip rightfully assumes his heterosexual role, while his jealous boyfriend is portrayed as a crazed and hysterical anomaly" (Horton 1999b). A similar picture is painted in the Hungarian film *This I Want and Nothing More* (*Nincsen nekem vágyam semmi*, 2000), by Kornél Mundruczó. These films present gay hustling as just one aspect of life in contemporary Prague or Budapest, without entering into the subjectivity of the boy who might be

hustling as much for desire as for money. Aside from cruising, hustling, and isolated affairs in which one of the pair is invariably bisexual, no queer life is represented in these films.

Compared to other parts of Central and East Europe, Prague's gay scene was more fertile ground for prostitution and pornography. While Grodecki's "documentaries" capture some of the ethnographic detail and geography of these worlds, they do so in an extremely moralizing way. They also present a world in which Czechs are innocent straight victims, while gay men are all old, ugly, and Western. In *Mandragora* Grodecki pulls out all the stops, creating some grotesquely bizarre characters to drive his point home even more. Since making these films, Grodecki has returned to Poland, where he directed a screen version of Ignacy Witkiewicz's 1930 dystopian novel *Insatiability* (*Nienasycenie*, 2003). Here too he distorts the original to emphasize the corrupting influence of sexuality in general, with the gay hunchback cripple Putrycydes shown as a particularly repellent character who wears a wolf pelt when he rapes the boy one night in the forest. Grodecki seems obsessed with sex, particularly gay sex, and his portrayals certainly do not reveal queerness in a realistic light.

Festivals, Documentaries, and the Hegemony of Western Representation

LGBT people in Central and Eastern Europe looking for representation of themselves in feature films would find mostly an image created and presented by straight directors as a metaphor for something else. In this respect, film representation of the LGBT minority is not unlike that of another minority: the Roma. Dina Iordanova has argued that "Balkan films abound with Gypsies, but they are not made by Gypsies or for Gypsies but by and for the dominant groups," (Iordanova 2001, 215) for whom they act as a metaphor for the marginalization of the Balkans. Queer characters appear in most of these films not as themselves, but as a metaphor for political dissidence, or for capitalist exploitation and corruption. Homosexuality is presented as an isolated phenomenon or as an import from the West. With the exception of *Marble Ass*, which features real transvestite prostitutes, these films show only isolated queer characters, not real queer people or a local LGBT community.

Another phenomenon worthy of mention is the use of Central and East European queer characters in films scripted and produced in the West. Eloy de la Iglesia's *Bulgarian Lovers* (*Novios Búlgaros*, Spain, 2003) is set in Spain and Bulgaria, with the Spanish hero Daniel falling in love with a

"straight" Bulgarian Kyril, who dabbles in hustling and organized crime. While a full picture of one Spanish gay community is represented, no equivalent Bulgarian gay life is shown. Kyril's cousin does try to seduce Daniel in the woods, but this is an isolated incident, and the plot in Bulgaria centers on family and Kyril's wedding. Alain Gsponer's *Kiki and Tiger* (Germany, 2003) shows the unrequited love of Tiger, a Serbian immigrant in Berlin, for a straight Albanian illegal immigrant Kiki, but again it is an isolated phenomenon that comes to naught. Nicholas Kinsey's *Women without Wings* (Canada, 2002), with its exploitation of the Albanian *virgina* phenomenon, would also fit into this category. In all cases the queer East Europeans in these films are either imagined exotic others or convenient plot devices. These are not films in which LGBT people from the region would recognize themselves.

Of course in the 21st century access to media representations of queerness is not restricted to local feature films. Not all of the films discussed above received wide distribution in theaters: *Another Way*, *Colonel Redl*, *Fine Dead Girls*, and *Whisper* surely did, but not *Marble Ass* or *Not Angels, but Angels*. Many more films would have been viewable on the festival circuit, particularly at gay and lesbian film festivals, which are increasingly popular. The oldest in the region is no doubt the Magnus festival, now called the Ljubljana Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, which started in 1984. Now there are similar festivals in Prague, Brno, Budapest, Zagreb, Bratislava, Sofija, and Skopje. Films shown at these festivals tend to be 90% or more of Western (US or Western European) origin, but there are usually a handful of local and regional films, particularly shorts and documentaries. These are more likely to be made by LGBT directors and for LGBT audiences.

In Hungary films by and about real lesbians have been produced by the Budapest Lesbian Filmcommittee, notably Katrin Kremmler's short spoof *Puszta Cowboy* (2004) and her *Pink Ferret* (*Rózsaszín Görény*, 2003). Also interesting are two Slovak films by Vladímir Adásek, *100% Pure Love II* (*100% Čista laska II*, 1996) and *Hannah and Her Brothers* (*Hana a jej bratia*, 2000). These show queer characters in Bratislava in an oblique and very stylized light: the hero of *Hannah* is Martin, an 18 year old queer boy who at the end of the film finds a kindred soul in the leader of a queer cabaret act. It is a kind of queer culture, but there is little or no queer desire or explicit self-identification involved. There is no sex between the two queer characters, though Martin earlier makes an unsuccessful pass at his girlfriend's lover. Queerness is reduced to flamboyant gender-bending performance.

Documentaries about real queer characters include several from the Czech Republic: Vladislav Kvasnicka's *Forbidden Love* (*Zapovezena Laska*, 1990) includes interviews with gays, gay rights leaders, and homophobes; Iveta Kratochvílová and Tereza Kodíčková's *My Body Is* (*Moje tělo je*, 2003) presents eight lesbian women and their views on body image. Karin Michalski's *Pashke and Sofia* (2003) presents real Albanian *virginas* on their own terms. A Serbian short film, Marko Popović's *Intolerance – Ivan* (*Netrpeljivost – Ivan*, 2002) portrays the gay-bashing of a student in Beograd. Another short from Serbia, Milica Mitrović's *Flower and the Band* (*Cvet i kaiš*, 2004), deals with lesbians and the homophobic reaction of a small town.

A few new feature films from the region also show queer characters. Albert Vlk's *Supper Man* (2004), from Slovakia, is a coming out film in which the parents put their son into a sanatorium in an attempt to cure his gayness. The latest film to show queer desire comes from Romania: Tudor Giurgiu's *Love Sick* (*Legături bolnăvicioase*, 2006), based on Cecilia Stefanescu's novel of the same name. Two young women are infatuated with each other, and in the film one also has an ongoing incestuous affair with her brother. Though the film has been shown at gay and lesbian festivals and was in the running for a Teddy at Berlin in 2006, when I asked the distributor for a review copy, I received the characteristic reply, "Please note that *Love Sick* is not viewed or intended to be a gay film, but a different kind of Romanian film."[9] Again, so they say, it's not really about gays or lesbians. Grodecki makes a similar claim for his films, even acknowledging that they tend to be excoriated at gay and lesbian festivals. He confesses that "homosexual prostitution became for me a metaphor of many other things" (Volchek 1999) and laments that many people failed to understand this.

In this age of globalization, it seems much more likely that LGBT people anywhere will get their media representations of LGBT identities from the same sources: predominantly US and Western European media. US television programming now receives wide distribution all over the region on cable, satellite, and regular networks. If American gay youth get their image of gayness from *Will and Grace*, so do gay youth in Budapest and Beograd. *Six Feet Under, Queer as Folk, Sex & the City, The L Word*, even *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* have been shown in Hungary, Slovenia and elsewhere on both state and commercial networks. The question of local media representation may thus be moot, given the overwhelming volume of foreign productions. An American reporter once claimed that

[9] Personal email from Transilvania Film, 7 August 2006.

"gay culture is absolutely uniform across the world. A gay bar in Ulan Bator is no different from one in Chicago or Berlin or Buenos Aires. You'll hear the same vapid dance music, smell the same cologne, hear the rustle of the same neatly pressed Polo shirts, and touch the same tanned, well-moisturized skin."[10] In the mid-90s a gay bar in Brno was named Philadelphia (it closed in 2002)—obviously a reference to the 1993 American film of that name that won an Oscar for Tom Hanks' portrayal of a man with AIDS. It would not be surprising to see clubs called Babylon (after the club in *Queer as Folk*) opening across Eastern Europe. While the claim that a gay bar in Ulan Bator (if there even were such a thing) is no different from one in Chicago is still far from true, globalization of US media images is helping to make it so.[11]

The hegemony of a predominantly American media representation of LGBT identity is a mixed blessing for local communities. Already market-tested, these media images are easily sold to local media outlets and will at least show that LGBT people exist. But US media images are highly contested even on their home turf: they tend to present gay identity as sanitized, upper-middle-class, white, and consumerist. They promote a certain body image and fashion. They perpetuate the youth culture, marginalizing gays over 30. Most also marginalize lesbians. For LGBT viewers from Central and Eastern Europe as well, these images may provide a model attainable by some, but not by all. They may also be accepted too easily: as with gay rights presented top down to comply with EU standards instead of being won by grassroots lobbying, LGBT communities will not have a stake in producing or pushing for airtime for these shows.

Another danger is that the US model of gay identity may eclipse local LGBT models. For example two recent memoirs from Beograd, Vjeran Miladinović's *Terezin Sin* (Miladinović 2001) and Uroš Filipović's *Staklenac* (Filipović 2002) show two distinct models of gay identity. (Moss 2006a) Miladinović favors what Eve Sedgwick calls a gender-transitive model, where men interested in men perform femininity to attract partners who are "real men," while Filipović prefers a gender-separatist model. Gender transitivity encodes same-sex desire in terms of "the trope of inversion, *anima muliebris in corpore virili inclusa*—'a woman's soul trapped in a man's body'—and vice versa." (Sedgwick 1990, 87) (Today this sounds to us much more like a transperson than a homosexual.) The

[10] Windy City Times columnist "G" quoted in Wockner (1995).

[11] Dennis Altman discusses the globalization of American lesbian and gay representation in his article "On Global Queering" (Altman 1996) and his book *Global Sex* (Altman 2001).

contradictory counterpart is the trope of gender separatism, according to which nothing is more natural than that people of the same gender should bond sexually as well as socially. Gay men should be hypermasculine, less like women, since they like women less. The distinction is in part one of class, since Miladinović and his circle are working class, while Filipović is a university professor. Yet to put a different spin on the same phenomenon, Miladinović and company are less colonized by hegemonic Western models of homosexuality. While Miladinović travels outside Yugoslavia only once to visit his mother in Berlin, Filipović and his friends travel frequently and immerse themselves in gay culture abroad, so it is no accident his conception of homosexual identity resembles the gender-separatist model more common in the West. Sasho Lambevski describes a similar juxtaposition of two models of male homosexuality in Macedonia (Lambevski 1999). If the US media representation of LGBT identity becomes pervasive, it may be the US model that will prevail.

Yet another danger of the spread of US media representations of LGBT identity is that the identity itself will be branded as an import from the West. Nationalist and homophobic discourse in Central and Eastern Europe has consistently claimed that homosexuality is not a native phenomenon, but instead something learned from the West. (As we hear in the films, "We are not in America," or "This is not Paris.") Construction of homosexual identity is homologous with the construction of national identity, which makes it a particularly easy target of nationalists. While homosexualities certainly existed in the region, the outlines of the construction of homosexuality *as an identity* have indeed been strongly influenced by the US model, and increasing inroads of US media representation of LGBT identities may make this both more true and more visible to the right wing ideologues who see it as a danger.

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Predecessors and Pilgrims: Lesbian History-making and Belonging in Post-socialist Hungary

Hadley Z. Renkin

Nearly two decades after its promising beginning, Hungary's sexual politics movement is in a paradoxical state. Although the movement got off to an early start compared with most other post-socialist countries (Hungary's first "homosexual" organization was formed in 1988, a year before the official change of system, lesbians and gays were included very early on (1996) in domestic partnership legislation, and the notorious Paragraph 199 of the Hungarian Criminal Code, mandating different ages of consent for homosexual and heterosexual relations, was revoked in September, 2002), lesbian and gay activists still struggle for a coherent political identity and to build a broad-based movement.[1] Most importantly, despite these gains, the development of everyday tolerance of lesbians and gays in Hungary has been far more problematic. The exclusions that many lesbians and gays feel most deeply affect them are thus not primarily legal in nature. Rather, they occur on the level of everyday cultural behaviors and attitudes: the freedom to be visible participants in daily life; the right to *belong* in Hungarian society.

In this chapter I will examine two different types of history-making project undertaken by Hungarian lesbian activists—a book recuperating lesbian ancestors, and two pilgrimages involving recent historical figures—and explore their consequences for lesbians' sense of their own identities, communities, and relations to Hungarian society as a whole. I will argue that these projects construct complex lesbian histories which ground present-day lesbian identity and community in

[1] The Hungarian term of closest equivalence to the English "gay" is *meleg* (lit. "warm"), for "lesbian," *leszbikus*. These terms have their own meanings and histories. Here I translate them simply as "lesbian" and "gay," hoping that this purely practical gesture will be understood as it is intended. If I do not use the terms GLBT, it is because in my experience bisexuals and transgendered people are nearly invisible in the context of Hungarian sexual politics (although the recent publication of a volume addressing the issues facing transgendered people—(see Takács 2006)—should do much to correct this situation). All the projects described in this chapter are the work of lesbian activists. Interestingly, however, in the past few years there has also been an important history-making project involving gay men and a gay male ancestor, Kertbeny Károly.

intimate connections to the past. Critically, however, they do so in very different ways. The first constructs Hungarian lesbians as vital parts of a transnational lesbian history, suggesting that their primary bonds of identity and connection are to a global lesbian community. The other projects articulate lesbians into the dominant structures of specifically national-historical narratives, thus legitimating their presence in present-day Hungarian national community. In creating both these effects, these history-making projects situate Hungarian lesbians ambiguously with respect to national and transnational borders of belonging. Yet because this position is, ironically, emblematic of many tensions currently facing Hungarian society, they therefore produce true belonging.

Efforts to reshape history are a new development in Hungarian sexual-political activism. They appear to demonstrate an increasing concern with history and memory on the part of lesbian and gay activists in Hungary. In my view, this reflects an increasing disillusionment on the part of many activists with more explicitly legal and political approaches to improving the situation of lesbians and gays. One result has been a turn to what, in an anthropological sense, might be seen as more broadly "cultural" methods. These projects thus speak to recent attempts to reframe current understandings of the notion of "citizenship." Developed in response to critiques of traditional views of citizenship centering on legal or social rights and obligations, the concept of "cultural citizenship" seeks to draw attention to other, critical aspects of the ways people actually experience citizenship and belonging, such as their ability to take part equally and openly in everyday forms of public and private life. Such approaches to citizenship also strive to take into account the concrete, everyday cultural practices through which belonging and societal membership are confirmed or denied to certain people and groups according to whether they are seen to participate in fundamental networks of culturally-established connections or not (Pakulski 1997; Richardson 1998; Stevenson 2003). In creating histories that link them to specific pasts, I argue, Hungarian lesbian activists are constructing claims to share in the kinds of connections that determine particular forms of "cultural citizenship."

This chapter is based on ethnographic research undertaken as part of a larger project from 1999 to 2004. Approximately 30 interviews were conducted with members of the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrys Lesbian Collective), participant-observation fieldwork was carried out at a number of events during which these history-making projects were discussed, and textual analysis was performed on published materials associated with the projects.

Lesbians Writing History

In the summer of 2003, the Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület (Labrisz hereafter), Hungary's leading lesbian activist organization, published a book called *Előhívott Önarcképek: Leszbikus Nők Önéletrajzi Írásai* (Developed Self-Portraits: Lesbian Women's Autobiographical Writings).[2] The book traces emotional connections between women from medieval times to the 19th century, highlights romantic correspondences between well-known literary and artistic women in the early 20th century, and then moves on to autobiographical writings and the more explicit concerns with issues of politics and identity of the later 20th century and the present-day. Primarily comprised of writings by non-Hungarians, such as Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Marlene Dietrich, and Audre Lorde, only towards the end of the third section do Hungarian contributions begin to appear. The last two writers—the first openly lesbian activist in Hungary, and the owner of Hungary's first, unofficial, lesbian/gay cinema—discuss circumstances they have faced as lesbians in Hungary. The final section of the book combines Hungarian with non-Hungarian voices, and melds the book's opening mood of emotional intimacy with explicit awareness of the social conditions in which many lesbians live. Bringing the book fully into both present moment and local cultural context, this last section begins with an autobiographical short story by Hungary's only current writer of lesbian-themed novels, moves to reminiscences of adolescence and old age by American and Australian lesbians, and ends with observations by Hungarian, Czech, and Polish lesbians. *Előhívott Önarcképek* thus presents a compendium of lesbian self-description stretching across great expanses of space and time. As its editors describe the volume: "It speaks to diverse languages, time periods, social strata, and generations: from the emblematic figures of the beginning of the century, to the contemporary Western lesbian writers, to Eastern European experiences" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7).[3]

The Labrisz Book as History-Making Project

> When we undertook to research, select, and publish a set of autobiographical writings by lesbians, our goal was that in this way we might do something to create a lesbian narrative, a history, that still didn't exist. That is to say, that besides the documentation

[2] All translations are by the author.

[3] *Előhívott Önarcképek* is not an isolated effort. Although the book was widely hailed as the first of its kind in Hungary, it is actually the third book in a series of books published by Labrisz. Together these construct an essentially unified vision of lesbian history. *Előhívott Önarcképek* thus builds upon already-existing foundations. While I focus here on one text, then, my analysis pertains to a larger project.

> and preservation of stories and texts, [we were interested in] the creation of a broader narrative/history as well (Borgos et al. 2003, 7).

The search for "ancestors" has been a central element in lesbian and gay projects of identity and community-building, and for supporting claims for rights and acceptance. Following the appearance of a gay liberation movement in the United States of the late 1960's and early 1970's, scholars began to document the existence of lesbians and gays in history (Katz 1976; Chauncey, Duberman, and Vicinus 1989). Arguing that they had been ignored by dominant, heteronormative narratives, these researchers strove to recover the historical presence, conditions, and perspectives of such people and groups, and their equally-ignored contributions to society. Since then, a vast edifice of work has grown on these foundations, chronicling the involvements of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people in a range of historical moments (D'Emilio 1983; Faiman-Silva 2004; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Newton 1993).

Analyses of these kinds of history-making projects have shown them to function in several important ways. They correct the impression given by culturally-dominant historical narratives that same-sex relationships and the people involved in them did not exist in the past. Further, the representation of such "forerunners" asserts historical continuity: the presence of lesbians and gays in all historical periods. The sense of temporal depth thus created serves to both strengthen present-day lesbian and gay identities and to establish a sense of trans-temporal community (Boswell 1980; Norton 1997). At the same time, the recuperation of history makes lesbians and gays valid historical agents. By reducing the definitional passivity that accompanies the cultural invisibility of groups excluded from history, the knowledge that they are not alone in time offers present-day lesbians and gays the possibility of responding to their oppression. Finally, the construction of such histories enhances the cultural legitimacy of lesbians and gays. By emphasizing notable "ancestors," lesbian and gay histories constitute embodied counterarguments to hegemonic negative images of same-sex relations and the people involved in them.[4]

[4] It is critical to note here that the claim that people from very different times and places are essentially identical to present-day lesbians and gays is highly problematic for many researchers (McIntosh [1968] 1990; Epstein [1987] 1998; Seidman 1993; Vance [1989] 1998). Such congruence of identity, nonetheless, is actively insisted upon by others (Boswell 1980; Norton 1997). Whatever the truth may be, history-making projects often center on precisely such claims. As long as there are people in the present who are willing for a

In many ways, *Előhívott Önarcképek* is a typical example of a lesbian and gay "history-making" project. Like other such histories, it depends on the identification of women in history who are depicted as having had same-sex romantic/erotic relationships. Through their expressions of same-sex interest and connection, the volume's writers are claimed as "lesbian": essentially similar in desires, perspectives, and circumstances to the readers of their accounts—lesbians in present-day Hungary. As the introduction to the book's first selection states: "The two 12th century verses published here . . . have to do with us; they prove that centuries before this, there were those who felt as we do" (Borgos et al. 2003, 13). Through the identification of such figures, from the 12th century through the 20th, *Előhívott Önarcképek* asserts the depth of lesbian presence in history: that they are not beings merely of the present, but have existed in all periods. Challenging the erasure of such feelings and relations by traditional histories, then, *Előhívott Önarcképek*'s selections present women who despite existing in different times and places possess fundamentally similar identities and relationships. As a result, these figures from the past become embodied "anchoring points" of a history of present-day lesbians; they are not merely relevant to them, but directly connected and leading to them: they are "ancestors." The book thus establishes a coherent "lesbian history."

This combining of different histories into one history critically inflects the book's construction of its vision of history—and that vision's effects. Perhaps the most striking feature of *Előhívott Önarcképek* is the overwhelming presence of writers who are not Hungarian, but American and Western European. The impression this dominance gives is a powerful one: the writings of present-day Hungarian (and other Eastern European) women join with those of canonical lesbian figures from "Western" history, as well as with other, more recent figures of Western European and American lesbian activism. 12th century German nuns, the Ladies of Llangollen, and Audre Lorde become icons of a past shared by Hungarian lesbians, while at the same time, the Hungarian and other Central and Eastern European writers become part of the ongoing history of all lesbians.[5] The book's editors make this interpretation clear,

variety of reasons, strategic and otherwise, to treat such claims as real, they will have cultural consequences. It is these which concern me here.

[5] This is, of course, not at all unusual in terms of Eastern European (and other) sexual politics. Yet while in this sense the publication of *Előhívott Önarcképek* represents a conventional lesbian history (and, indeed, contributes to the "Western"-driven character of much of what has come to be called the "globalization of sexuality"—see Altman 2001; Binnie 2004), in their other history-making projects, as we shall see, Labrisz seems to be challenging precisely this formulation of "global lesbian history."

stressing that despite the apparent distinction between Hungarian and non-Hungarian lesbians a fundamental unity exists, that "[t]he tones of the canonized Western lesbian writers are the same as those of the diverse, though nameless, [other] experiences" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7). This is not just any history; these figures share a unified, universal lesbian history. Explicitly invoking the transnational and trans-temporal connectedness of Adrienne Rich's "lesbian continuum," the editors insist that between all of these different accounts "the continuum is multidimensional: each writer represents her own individual viewpoint, yet the attraction and commitment to women connects them all" (Borgos et al. 2003, 7). Paradoxically, then, at the same instant that they create them, Hungarian lesbians enter the ranks of both universal lesbian history and the global lesbian community it implies.

Előhívott Önarcképek's claim of such connection, however, is not based on merely abstract similarity. As the book's editors state: "[T]he significant part of the narrative[s] document . . . conflicts with, fears of, and self-subjections or oppositions to the outside world" (Borgos et al. 2003, 8). Its writings emphasize the uncertainties of the writer about her own feelings of attraction and trust and the responses of others to those feelings, as in the letters of Emily Dickinson to her sister-in-law, or mourn losses that seem inevitable in the face of surrounding social oppression, such as the story of Lilly Wust and Felice Schragenheim (the Nazi wife and Jewish journalist made famous in the 1999 movie *Aimee and Jaguar*), whose "love finally fell victim to persecution" (Borgos et al. 2003, 10). As expressed in numerous interviews and informal conversations, these are doubts and losses that many present-day lesbians in Hungary confront amid the everyday tensions of living in a homophobic society. Such shared experience of oppression is mirrored by the emphasis of the writings on other strictures that society places on these women's attempts to live their lives in ways that satisfy their desires and senses of self, such as relentless pressures to conform to a heteronormative path. Here the book explicitly indicts both society in general, and its dominant histories, which "completely ignore, or only mention as accidental 'indiscretions' the feelings of these women for other women, or their lasting relationships with women" (Borgos et al. 2003, 70), for amplifying these tensions by persistently refusing to recognize either such pressures or their objects. It is their critical reactions to such constraints on their desires that *Előhívott Önarcképek* reveals its protagonists as women powerfully aware of their fundamental difference from their societies. They are not figures naively pursuing unusual or marginal lives; they are conspicuously conscious of their marginalization. And if this consciousness is presented as in part

responsible for the emotional and psychological difficulties they share with many present-day Hungarian lesbians, it is also presented as causal of their critical perspectives.

Problematic though they may be in terms of historical accuracy, the political effects of such assertions of conscious lesbian identity are powerful. By representing well-known artistic and literary figures as lesbian, *Előhívott Önarcképek*'s vision of lesbianness counters culturally-dominant images of lesbians as absent or isolated from, and harmful to, society. And by creating a unified image of what "lesbian identity" has been, the book constructs a more specifically defined, if wide-ranging, image of what "lesbians" are for its readers. In this way the book not only provides present-day individuals with models for positive engagement with both their communities and society as a whole; it offers them a stable foundation for both self-conception and action. Most importantly, the sense of a shared past the book invokes does more than simply build bonds between present-day lesbians; by presenting an image of a community united across time and space by similar qualities and experiences, it reinforces perceptions of connection between past and present lesbians. It thus fundamentally transforms the ways in which lesbian community is imagined.

Yet along with these effects on present-day lesbian identity and community, *Előhívott Önarcképek*'s representations have a corollary consequence for Hungarian sexual politics. This is because the book's isomorphism of both lesbian identity and lesbian experience revolves around a very specific notion of "lesbian." By representing the writers in the volume as women expressing clear and stable preferences for same-sex involvements, the book's editors depict them as having securely-defined sexual identities. By further emphasizing these women's consciousness that their different desires and interests not only bring them into repeated conflicts with the people around them but also create in them awareness of generalized societal oppression, the book constructs them as lesbians for whom these characteristics are central aspects of both their identities and their politics. The result is that even the early exemplars of the book appear to share a complex understanding of their social, cultural, and political situation that is only later expressed explicitly by late-20th-century writers such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich. The image of lesbian identity that *Előhívott Önarcképek* constructs is therefore very particular: emerging from and conscious of a primary context of oppression, and specifically politicized in order to resist that oppression. The history and identity framed by the book thus inescapably link lesbian identity and sexual politics.

This specifically-inflected imagining of lesbian identity and community is, unsurprisingly, conducive to the development of an explicitly political lesbian and gay movement. By encouraging identification with historical figures who are depicted as politically or socially engaged, the collection promotes a politically-expressive lesbianism. In doing so, however, this vision potentially implies certain boundaries for present-day lesbian identity and community. Such a vision of history may not resonate well with less well-educated, less cosmopolitan lesbians, many of whom are both more suspicious of political activism, and less likely to see themselves as connected to global networks of lesbian community than are activists. Indeed, the project's definitions may actually function to alienate such women, by suggesting that they if are not willing to be politically-engaged lesbians, they cannot be part of either lesbian history, or the community that history binds together—and thus that they cannot be "proper" lesbians at all.

Lesbian Pilgrims—Performing Place in History

3rd Labrisz Pilgrimage

> Szatina Pilgrimage, or Why Should I Make a Pilgrimage to Lesbian Szatina? Among the invisible threads of the lesbian past some lead to the little village in Baranya [county], where 20 houses stand, many deserted, perhaps fifty people live, and there are lovely hills, garlanded with plants. Here and in the surrounding area the novel Kecskerúzs took place – one part of both the writing and the tale. And here took place the amateur experiment to make a "lesbian village" utopia in the fierce '90s of the last century.[6]

This happened on the Galgóczi pilgrimage:

> On May 11, 2002 the association [i.e., Labrisz] traveled to Ménfőcsanak, near Győr, to visit the memorial room of Galgóczi Erzsébet. By previous agreement the wife of the writer's brother received us. She spoke in detail—but unfortunately, not about everything!—about Galgóczi Erzsébet's life, achievements as a writer, family, and about her personal memories of her. We spent a long time in the memorial room, which was in the local castle, which was G.E.'s workroom and bedroom not so very long ago. In the afternoon we rested in the castle park, and talked. Thirteen people took part in the pilgrimage, and we would have been happy to see still more new faces. Visit this place if it's at all possible.[7]

[6] Description from 2004 Hungarian Gay and Lesbian Festival program.

[7] Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, Newsletter, vol. II, 6 June 2002.

At the same time that they have pursued this literary making of history, however, the women of Labrisz have worked to create lesbian history in very different ways as well.

Gordon Agáta's novel *Kecskerúzs* occupies a special place in the Hungarian lesbian world. Published in 1997, it is considered by many lesbians the first work of Hungarian literature to deal explicitly with lesbian themes. The novel tells the story of a young Hungarian lesbian and her lover. In the early 1990's, after living secretly for many years amongst the environs of family and school, the two move to the rural village of Szatina with the dream of living openly together as lesbians. When another lesbian couple joins them, their dream expands to an attempt to form a larger, openly lesbian community. Their idealism, however, is met with suspicion and distrust by the villagers, who can find no place for their relationship in the rigidly conventional social structure of the countryside. Before long, the combined pressure of local animosity and romantic conflicts destroys the women's relationships and friendships, and drives the protagonist into a psychiatric institution (Gordon 1997). A graphic depiction of the difficulties lesbians face in attempting to live within the constraints of Hungary's heteronormative culture, *Kecskerúzs* stands as the only present-day text in the Hungarian lesbian canon.[8] The village of Szatina thus represents a particularly significant site in Hungary's lesbian symbology: one which evokes both a specific literary-historical moment and core ideals of lesbian identity and community.

Every year since 2002, small groups of lesbians have made the short journey to the site of the novel in order to commemorate this brief moment in lesbian history. All of the trips to Szatina have followed a similar pattern: the women, mostly members of Labrisz, meet early in the morning at Budapest's Southern train station, and travel to the nearest stop, roughly half an hour by foot from Szatina itself. After walking to the town, the group tours around the village, visits nearby farms, and meets with some of the remaining lesbians who settled there around the time *Kecskerúzs* was written.[9]

[8] In 2006 another volume by Gordon, containing two short novels, *Ezüstboxer* and *Nevelési kisregény* was published by Budapest's Alexandra Press. I thank Judit Takács for bringing this publication to my attention.

[9] Like the publication of *Előhívott Önarcképek*, these trips have been more than isolated events. In 2004, for example, the visit to Szatina itself, which took place as part of that summer's Gay and Lesbian Festival, was accompanied by a photo exhibition of the village, which spread word of the project to many who did not participate in the pilgrimage. In 2005, members of Labrisz even made their own documentary film of the pilgrimage.

Lesbian activists have undertaken other pilgrimages as well. Galgóczi Erzsébet (1930–1989) was a highly-recognized writer of Hungary's state-socialist period. She was also politically inclined. A minor dissident figure, her opposition to the country's regime increased, and became increasingly controversial, towards the end of her life. Galgóczi has come to be seen as a figure of central importance to present-day lesbians because of her 1980 novel *Törvényen belül* [literally: "Within the law"]. Set in the tumultuous period of mid-1950s Hungary, the novel traces the story of a journalist doomed by her refusal to compromise either in speaking the truth or in her rejection of traditional constraints on gender and sexual identity. Assertive, politically outspoken, and a lover of women, she blends in her person gender, sexual, and political transgression. Unable to adapt to her society in any of these areas, she finally commits suicide by openly walking across the guarded Hungarian border. In interviews, discussions, and in published texts, members of Labrisz have argued that the book is semi-autobiographical, claiming Galgóczi as an exemplar of the difficulties faced by lesbians in Hungary's past, as well as the first Hungarian writer to deal with lesbian themes.

Galgóczi's study in the town of Ménfőcsanak, in the northwestern corner of Hungary, has been maintained in its original condition, including the writer's original writing-table. In May of 2002, a group of Labrisz members traveled there. On their return, some of them gave a slide presentation at one of the group's official meetings, describing the journey and their experiences in detail. Deeply moved by the trip, the participants spoke of it as a unique opportunity to visit the home and workspace of a writer at the core of the Hungarian lesbian canon.

Pilgrimages and their Consequences

Both organizers of and participants in these events consistently refer to them as "pilgrimages" (*zarándoklatok*), as in the texts quoted above. In an anthropological sense, they are also formally similar to other pilgrimages in that they are ritualized and repetitive journeys, made in order to commemorate significant historical sites and figures. Research on religious pilgrimages and their effects has focused on how they bring individuals into intimate contact with sacred figures and spaces, strengthening religious belief through tangible practices enacted in concrete spaces (Turner 1969; Morinis 1992), how their shared experience of contact with the sacred creates solidarity between pilgrims (Turner and Turner 1978), and how they incorporate those who make them into the organized structures of religious and other communities and institutions

(Herz [1913] 1983; Morinis 1992). Because they bring pilgrims into contact with sacred figures and sites of the past, however, pilgrimages also draw them into intimate connection with that past. For pilgrims, the process of pilgrimage constructs the sense that not only does their religion as a system of belief extends continuously back into the past, but that an actual community of believers does so as well—a community of which the act of pilgrimage makes them feel integral parts. The past they evoke thus becomes the collective history of their participants (Dubisch and Winkelman 2005).

As pilgrimages, then, the Labrisz journeys to Ménfőcsanak and Szatina can also be seen as history-making projects. Like the Labrisz book, by identifying figures and events of the past as lesbian, they create a past which present-day lesbians can identify as theirs. That this history is meant to be understood by Hungarian lesbians as "our history" is confirmed by references in Labrisz publications to *Törvényen belül* and *Kecskerúzs* as "our novels" (Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület 2001, 32). Like the book project, then, these pilgrimages create history, and so also build identity and community both in the present and trans-temporally. Yet precisely because they are "pilgrimages," which visit concrete sites in particular ways, they construct a lesbian history in other ways quite different from that created by *Előhívott Önarcképek*.

Critically, the spatial nature of the connections to the past which pilgrimages create allows them to be used for specific political purposes. In his vastly influential analysis of how national communities are imagined, Benedict Anderson addresses the relationship between the rooting of pilgrimages in space and their political meanings (Anderson 1983). Anderson notes that just as earlier religious pilgrimages brought pilgrims from many different places together, linking them in vast sacred geographies, the educational and administrative journeys required by modern states brought people from distant areas together and made them feel part of a larger community. While the communities thus imagined were distinctly "national" in character, it was the ritualized nature of these secular pilgrimages that, like other pilgrimages, gave them their power to constitute both people's experience of community, and their sense of identity within that community. This creation of community, however, was temporal as well as spatial—with crucial consequences. Highly-choreographed rituals such as secular pilgrimages, Anderson argues, were used to legitimate national communities through the assertion of their continuity with the past and its community, an assertion confirmed by the vision of history their association with symbolically-significant sites made manifest. In this way, imagined national communities of the

present produced cultural legitimacy by grounding themselves in the imagined national communities of the past. Pilgrimages are thus central to the creation of imagined national communities, and the identities that make them meaningful. Their participants gain from them the sense of a specifically-located past and past community to which they are intimately linked, and a sense of present community especially coherent because it is rooted in both time and space. Moreover, because of this historical association of such sites and territories with specific social groups, the grounding of historical narratives in concrete spaces gives rise not to an *abstract* connection to the past, but to the perception of a specifically *genealogical* connection to that past—a particularly intimate relationship of imagined kinship, ancestry, and descent between past and present communities (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Malkki 1992; Verdery 1999). Thus, because they are grounded at once in both space and time by rituals such as pilgrimages, national histories are more than merely histories per se; they are genealogical explanations for the Nation's existence, which justify both that existence and the privileged participation in it of certain people and groups.

The Szatina and the Galgóczi pilgrimages construct exactly these sorts of concretely grounded relationships to the past. The women who took part in the Galgóczi pilgrimage were able to experience the rural environment of the village-born writer—the scene of Galgóczi's own life and writing, as if it were their own. As the Hungarian historian Rév István has put it, this sort of intimate contact with the symbolic representatives of the past operates to "annihilate time," fusing past and present so that they seem to be one (Rév 1995). To visit the site—and symbolic scene—of Galgóczi's life and writing *is,* experientially, to visit that life, writing, and time itself. Through the concreteness of site and experience, the connection to the past visited becomes so close that it becomes not merely connection, but identity. This annihilation of time is visible in the way the Labrisz newsletter, quoted above, particularly emphasizes the fact that the room the pilgrims visited had been Galgóczi's workroom and sleeping room "not so long ago."[10] The visit thus allows its participants to imagine themselves present in that "not-so-long-ago" past, sharing Galgóczi's everyday labors, and even her slumber.

In similar ways, the women who performed the pilgrimage to Szatina went to considerable effort in order to insert themselves imaginatively into the past. In part this occurred simply through their physical presence in the space defined as central to that past. Yet they also did so

[10] Labrisz Leszbikus Egyesület, Newsletter, vol. IV, 5 May 2004.

through the specific activities in which they engaged during their visit. In 2004, for example, the Szatina pilgrims held a "nomadic nest-building/house setting-up contest."[11] In this event the women actually created their own small, imaginary dwellings ("nomadic" because they were only the temporary constructions of visitors). They thus enacted their own inhabitance of this site of their past—and their imagined participation in that past's Utopian project.

As do the dominant national-historical myths of Hungary, these pilgrimages and the histories they create take as their foundational sites and symbolic centers—the imagined roots of their pasts and past communities—the rural villages and countryside within whose welcoming and inclusive space one can be one's true self. Villages such as Szatina and Ménfőcsanak—are the very places that in dominant national narratives appear as the originating sites of national culture and authenticity. The sites used to ground the production of alternative, lesbian history thus mirror in key ways those used to ground dominant national histories. As a result, the historical narratives of lesbian history produced by these pilgrimages do more than link their participants to a general "lesbian past." In their rooting of their lesbian past in these specific kinds of spaces, they weld the lesbian history they create, and its inhabitants, to the underlying structure of dominant national-historical narratives.

These two pilgrimages, however, do not insert lesbians into the legitimizing framework of national-historical narratives solely on the basis of space. They also do so through their uses of time. Paralleling the use by national-historical narratives of heroic figures as legitimating ancestors, the pilgrimages structure their genealogical relationships to the past through the representation of central figures intimately involved in key cultural-historical moments and events. Here it is significant that the writings at the center of both these pilgrimages depict sexually and politically oppositional figures. Like Galgóczi herself the protagonist of *Törvényen belül* is a political dissident, struggling to come to terms with the culturally and politically-charged moments surrounding the revolution of 1956. At the end of the novel she is shot trying to escape, after getting into trouble both because she tries to "speak the truth to power" and because of her "dissident" sexual identity. Similarly, the characters in the novel *Kecskerúzs* are disillusioned and disaffected, embittered by their experiences of trying to set up a life as lesbians and by the economic, social, and cultural upheavals of the "difficult" 1990s. For many lesbians

[11] Description from 2004 Hungarian Gay and Lesbian Festival program.

they seem to embody images of both resistance to heteronormative culture, and the personal consequences of that resistance. These particular characterizations tie the histories created here, and the trans-temporal lesbian communities they imagine, directly to certain moments which are also pivotal to historical narratives hegemonic in post-socialist Hungary. Critical aspects of dominant Hungarian narratives of post-socialism, for example, center on the repositioning of the story of the 1956 Uprising as both proof of Hungarian national resistance to Soviet domination, and of Hungarian rejection of state-socialism itself. Cultural narratives of the experience of 1956, and the post-1956 reactions of alienation and resistance are at the center of some of the most powerful politically and culturally legitimating claims of post-1989 Hungarian life (Király 1995; Tökés 1996). One of the other core narratives of the post-socialist period in Hungary has been the narrative of the experience of the upheavals of the "difficult" 1990s. Tales of attempts to negotiate the myriad troubles of these years therefore intimately reflect the everyday experiences, and the stories told of them, of many Hungarians.[12] Thus, by constructing their insertion into history through pilgrimages, which connect them not merely to a lesbian past, but also to a past that is centered on pivotal national-historical places, moments, and experiences, the women of *Labrisz* effectively map their history onto the dominant national-historical narratives of post-socialist Hungary.

History and Cultural Citizenship

It is because of their construction of histories with specific genealogical implications, in fact, that these projects have what may be their most important consequences for the position of lesbians in Hungarian society. In this reading, the story of both history and history-making projects is a story about "belonging." By creating lesbian histories the women of Labrisz are proposing new historical narratives which do not merely write lesbians into "History" per se, or reinforce their senses of identity and community, they are creating histories which, by revealing their presence in the past, assert the legitimacy of lesbians in present-day national society. Notably, the inclusion that such projects assert operates on a *cultural* level—positing that lesbians share with other, "heteronormatively proper" Hungarians the presence in and experience of national places and moments. It is precisely their ability to assert inclusion on

[12] It should, perhaps, be noted that this emphasis on the connection between lesbianness and cultural/political resistance, so similar to the picture of lesbian political awareness presented in *Előhívott Önarcképek*, may well imply similar consequences for the ability of these histories to shape the borders of lesbian community.

this level—into the nation as a historically-established, cultural community—that makes history-making projects such as those examined here so potentially productive of change. For the belonging they assert is not merely legal or political, but *cultural* belonging. Through these histories, Hungarian lesbians can see themselves (and, perhaps, can be seen by others) as sharing with other Hungarians, in deeply personal ways, the experience of moments central to national-historical narratives, and the understanding of associated social and moral dilemmas as fundamental to their identities. These are cultural phenomena, deeply rooted and, in their historicity, powerfully justifying of those who in the present claim to share in their confirming practices. The sense of citizenship that they speak to is much more than legal or political citizenship: it is the sense of an intimate, "cultural citizenship," in which membership and belonging are defined in ways at once more diffuse, and more profound.

Conclusion: Histories and the Ambiguity of Belonging

When considered together, however, the two kinds of lesbian history-making described here give a rather contradictory impression about exactly where the activists who produce them actually see Hungarian lesbians to belong. Both create "lesbian histories," and both evoke intimate connections which support claims to cultural citizenship. But *Előhívott Önarcképek* and the pilgrimages propose crucially different genealogies, each informing very different visions of the connections of community of which Hungarian lesbians are part. As we have seen, the pilgrimages suggest a lesbian history specifically connected to national-historical meanings—rooted in the specificities of Hungarian time and space. In contrast, through its transcendence of both space and time, *Előhívott Önarcképek* suggests a network of connections of identity and community—a genealogy—that establishes a vision of connection fundamentally *inter*national in character, making Hungarian lesbians equal members of a lesbian community global in scope.

This coexistence of different lesbian histories might seem to result in a blurred message—a clash of historical narratives—about exactly which kind of past Hungarian lesbians really want to belong to—and therefore about which present-day community they see themselves to belong to as well. In this sense, in attempting to legitimate the presence of Hungarian lesbians in both Hungarian society and an imagined "universal lesbian community," these history-making projects may actually make it more difficult for them to stably reside in either. Yet it may be that

the ambiguity of these constructions of identity and community has a deeper significance. For the contradictions these different histories produce for Hungarian lesbians, between national and transnational identifications, connections, and community, also seem to mirror with remarkable precision some of the central tensions of post-socialist Hungary as a whole: the contradictions of a country and people caught between renewed attachment to national meanings on the one hand, and increasingly transnational connections on the other. And it may well be, in fact, more than anything else, this complex and constantly shifting *mélange* of identities and connections that makes it clear that Hungarian lesbians are actually what they are, through these projects, claiming to be. Facing the same dilemmas of identity and community which confront most Hungarians, and responding to them in very similar patterns of ambiguity and contradiction, Hungarian lesbians reveal themselves as equal members of their society—as people who truly belong.

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Homosexual Representations in Estonian Printed Media During the Late 1980s and Early 1990s

Heidi Kurvinen

Introduction

During the 1980s the Soviet Union started to collapse leading to a major transition in Estonian society (cf. Alenius 2000; Lauristin 1997). Estonians struggled for their independence as the structures of the socialist system fell apart. At the same time the concepts of man and woman gained new meanings. Instead of the socialist equality rhetoric, the development towards more traditional gender roles—which had already began during the last years of Soviet rule—strengthened (Lauristin and Vihalemm 2002, 17–24; Narusk 2000, 50–51). In this new gender structure, the ideal woman must be a mother of at least three children and a man should be the breadwinner of his family (cf. Hansson and Laidmäe 2000; Narusk 2000). However, besides these traditional values there was also some space for new kinds of thinking, as, for example, homosexuality started to get attention in the public discourse (cf. Veispak 1991; Nõgel 1991).

Soviet troops had first occupied Estonia in 1940 and after the Second World War the country became part of the "Soviet family." This meant that the socialist value system began to assert itself also in Estonia (Alenius 2000), which could also be seen in the way homosexuality was judged. In Estonia, both male and female homosexuality had been decriminalised between the two World Wars but male homosexuality was re-criminalised after the Soviet occupation. The Soviet penal code was ratified and an atmosphere of intolerance surrounded male homosexuality. Female homosexuality was not mentioned in the law, but it was not accepted in Estonian society (Kotter 2003). What is more, homosexuality, on the whole, was regarded as a phenomenon that was a decadent product of the capitalist West and of which Soviet society was free (Veispak 1991).

During the first half of the 1960s, there was a more liberal period in Soviet history in terms of politics as well as social existence. The sexual sphere opened for discussion and that also affected the lives of homosexuals. According to Teet Veispak (1991) many Estonian homosexuals later thought of the 60s as golden years compared to the other decades

of the Soviet period. However, after the period of thaw the atmosphere in Soviet society worsened once again and also the number of trials, both of political dissidents and homosexuals, was growing.[1]

In the years of perestroika and glasnost repression towards homosexuality finally eased in Soviet society.[2] For example, in Russia the first gay and lesbian organisation was established in 1989 and the first gay newspaper began publishing in 1990 (Kon 2002; Miller 1995). The liberation of Soviet society was also seen in Estonia. The penal code—that prohibited homosexual relations between men—was still in force, but after 1989 homosexuality became a topic in the media (Veispak 1991; Nõgel 1991). The slow liberalisation of Estonian society could also be seen in research focusing on Estonian students' attitudes towards homosexuality in 1990: half of the interviewed students thought that homosexuality was a disease or an abnormal form of sexuality but the other half had rather more positive views about homosexuality.[3]

In this article, I will analyse how homosexuality was discussed in the printed media right after the new openness policy had started to break the taboos in Soviet society. I will pay attention to a few specific events[4] and analyse how printed media presented homosexuality around the time of these events. At the same time, I will try to give an overall picture about the discourses on homosexuality that were produced by journalists at the time. I am particularly interested in how a theme that had been hidden for so long was depicted and what kind of influence the transitional process had on the representations of homosexuality.

I will concentrate on five different magazines and newspapers: the *Edasi/Postimees* (Forward/Postman) and the *Noorte Hääl/Päevaleht* (Voice of the Youth/Daily),[5] which were leading daily papers in Estonia by their

[1] In his article Veispak has quoted statistics about criminal cases convicted for pederasty. According to those statistics which can be found in the Archives of the Ministry of Justice of the Estonian Republic, there were no criminal cases during the years 1963–1966. In the year 1967 however, there were 17 cases and until the year 1989 there was at least one criminal case every year (see Veispak 1991, 112–113).

[2] Perestroika can be translated as reform. Glasnost is normally translated as openness.

[3] The research material was based on the responses of 180 students at the two largest higher educational establishments in Tallinn, the capital of Estonia (see Nõgel 1991, 117–121).

[4] The events are a conference which dealt with sexual minorities and was held in Tallinn in May 1990, the establishment of Eesti Lesbiliit (Estonian Lesbian Union) on the 13th of October 1990, the dissolution of those paragraphs which denied male homosexual behaviour in the penal code on 1st of June 1992 and the establishment of Eesti Gayliit (Estonian Gay League) in 1992.

[5] *Postimees* (Postman) was published under the name *Edasi* (Forward) until the end of 1990. A newspaper which is nowadays known as *Eesti Päevaleht* (Estonian Daily) was

circulation, the *Nõukogude Naine/Eesti Naine*[6] *(Soviet Woman/Estonian Woman),* which was the only Estonian women's magazine until the early nineties, the only young people's magazine the *Noorus* (Youth), and the *Eesti Ekspress* (Estonian Express),[7] which was one of the new weekly magazines which started to be published in Estonia during the early years of 1990s. In addition to these magazines and newspapers I will refer to articles the active members of *Eesti Lesbiliit* (Estonian Lesbian Union) had selectively collected between 1990 and 1995 and placed in a booklet to celebrate the union's fifth anniversary. The article collection consists of the most extensive articles written about lesbianism in Estonian printed media and therefore it can be seen as an important complement to the systematic trawl of the above mentioned magazines and newspapers.[8]

The article is based on a historical approach which, in this particular case, means qualitative analysis of the writings in the frame of their historical context as well as discourse analysis through which I try to identify different discourses on homosexuality.

The theoretical background of this paper is based on Michel Foucault's thesis as well as post-modern queer theory. According to Foucault, a historical core of homosexuality does not exist. In contrast, homosexuality as a concept and identity is produced by historical forces during all periods (Foucault 1980, 1999; Pulkkinen 1998). Like in Foucault's thinking, in queer theory, homosexuality is understood as a historically constructed and maintained discourse (Juvonen 2002).

Homosexuality Emerging as a "Trendy Topic"

According to Estonian historian Teet Veispak, the appearance of homosexuality in Estonian media during the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s was, in most cases, restricted to presenting opinions *pro et contra* (Veispak 1991, 113–114). In other words, those writings did not produce a diverse picture of homosexuality, but rather projected accepting or rejecting slants. The present investigation supports Veispak's thesis in part. The articles, which were published in different magazines and newspapers, show a "black-and-white dualism." However, reading the articles where positive assertions towards homosexuality are prevailing one cannot miss the interpretation that it was somehow fashion-

published until 1990 under the name *Noorte Hääl* (Voice of the Youth) and through years 1990–1995 under the name *Päevaleht* (Daily).

6 *Eesti Naine* (Estonian Woman) was published as *Nõukogude Naine* (Soviet Woman) until the end of 1988.

7 *Eesti Ekspress* (Estonian Express) was first published in January 1989.

8 The information was obtained from Lilian Kotter on 3 August 2006.

able to write about homosexuality, while in the end journalists did not really know what to think about homosexuals.

Although there was some confusion concerning the acceptability of homosexuality, the articles which were published in the beginning of the 1990s indicate that homosexuality seemed to have become a trendy topic in some magazines. One of the weekly magazines in which homosexuality was discussed in many different ways was *Eesti Ekspress*. The first articles published during the years from 1990 to 1992 where enlightening as far as they dealt with, for instance, the first lesbian and gay organisations that were established in Estonia in 1990 and 1992[9] and tried to picture what it meant to be homosexual.[10] However, little by little the writings became more extreme in nature: presenting homosexuality in itself was no longer enough so there had to be something more, something that would fulfil the increasing thirst for sensationalism. As early as 1993 readers could find stories about an Estonian man who had been a homosexual prostitute in New York as well as an interview with one of the first Estonians who was undergoing sex reassignment surgery.[11] In addition to *Eesti Ekspress*, the trendy topic began to be mentioned also in other papers like *Liivimaa Kroonika*, *Õhtuleht* and *Nelli Teataja*.[12]

When asking how it is possible that homosexuality, which was still a taboo in the early years of the 1980s, received so much attention[13] in the above mentioned magazines only a few years later we must search for the explanation model in the Estonian society in general.

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[9] See for example "Ma ei tea midagi rõvedamat kui mehe ejakulatsioon" (I Do Not Know Anything More Immodest Than the Ejaculation of a Man), *Eesti Ekspress*, 8 March 1991; Bohumil Visák, "Eesti Gayliit loodud" (Estonian Gay League Established), *Eesti Ekspress*, 6 March 1992.

[10] See for example Teet Veispak, "Ma usun et varsti toimub coming out" (I Believe That it is Going to Happen a Coming Out Soon), *Eesti Ekspress*, 6 April 1990.

[11] Liis Pajupuu, "Tahan vahetada sugu" (I want to change sex), *Eesti Ekspress*, 7 May 1993; Kärt Karpa, "Homoprostituudi pihtimus. Eesti noormees, kes müüs New Yorgi minjonäridele kalli raha eest oma keha, naasis koju tühjade kätega" (Confession of a Homosexual. Young Estonian man, Who Sold His Body for Money for New York's Millionaires, Came Back With Empty Hands), *Eesti Ekspress*, 20 August 1993.

[12] See for example Taavi Põld, "Minu naine oli lesbi ..." (My Wife was a Lesbian ...), *Nelli Teataja*, 17 July 1992; Margit, "Lesbi? Lihtsalt naine, kes armastab naist" (Lesbian? Just a Woman who Loves a Woman), *Õhtuleht*, 5 March 1993.

[13] During the 1980s, homosexuality was discussed mainly in the context of AIDS. The peak of such representations was reached in 1989 when 11 articles about AIDS and homosexuality were published. In the same year, there was only one article which didn't frame the discussion about homosexuality in the context of AIDS. In 1990, a clear change took place in the public atmosphere. In this year 7 articles dealing solely with homosexuality and 5 articles briefly mentioning homosexuality were published. All of these articles were supportive towards homosexuality. In 1992 the number of articles which dealt with or briefly mentioned homosexuality was 11 and it was 16 already in 1993.

Teet Veispak (1991, 108–109) stated that Estonians were quite liberal towards homosexuality in the period between the two World Wars. As many researchers have pointed out (cf. Järviste and Mälksoo 2001), the years of perestroika saw Estonians turning back to the values of the Interbellum. It can be argued that the liberal views towards homosexuality of the 1920s and 1930s affected the values and attitudes of post-soviet Estonians, too: namely, the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union was on the horizon, was also the time when the first Estonian republic became a nostalgic (and mobilizing) reference point in the minds of Estonians (Kivimaa 2000; Järviste and Mälksoo 2001; Kurvinen 2006). However, one must not forget that in Estonian society, where the connection between Church and people had weakened considerably during the Soviet period, rising spirituality gained a secular form[14] laying fertile grounds for liberal attitudes. The situation, however, was different in other post-socialist countries such as Poland where the influence of the Catholic Church had remained strong.

Although homosexuality was a trendy topic in some magazines, one can not miss the fact that in many newspapers and magazines it was still a hidden theme during the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. It was something that could be written about only if some kind of special event was taking place but otherwise there was no sign of it. For example, *Postimees* and *Päevaleht* only briefly mentioned a conference on sexual minorities held in Tallinn in May 1990. In addition, the information given to the public was very formal.[15] Apart from this, homosexuality was mentioned only on rare occasions if at all. The establishment of *Eesti Lesbiliit* (Estonian Lesbian Union) in 1990 and *Eesti Gayliit* (Estonian Gay League) in 1992 did not get any attention in the papers although journalists were invited to the organisational meeting of *Eesti Gayliit*.[16] There was no coverage when the paragraph that prohibited male homosexual behaviour was repealed in 1992, decriminalising homosexuality, yet other facets of the legislative process received a lot of space in both newspapers.[17]

[14] See for example the text "Usuelu" from *Estonica*, which is an Internet Encyclopaedia made by Eesti Instituut. <http://www.estonica.org/est/lugu.html?kateg=5&menyy_id=115&alam=20&tekst_id=116> (5 December 2006).

[15] Kalle Müller, "Varjatud vähemuse kaitsel" (Protecting a minority), *Edasi*, 29 May 1990; Annika Lusmägi, "Milleks meile see konverents? Suhtuminen homoseksualismi 20. sajandi Euroopas muutub" (Why Do We Have This Conference? Attitudes Towards Homosexuality Change in 20th century Europe), *Päevaleht*, 30 May 1990.

[16] The information about the press conference is from the article: Bohumil Visák, "Eesti Gayliit loodud" (Estonian Gay League established), *Eesti Ekspress*, 6 March 1992.

[17] See for example all the issues of *Postimees* and *Päevaleht* in May 1992.

While wondering why the most widely read newspapers did not pay any attention to homosexuality, we must understand that newspaper column space was at a premium at the time. Papers, at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s, normally appeared in editions of between four and sixteen pages. The events of Estonia regaining independence put additional pressure on column space. However, if editorial boards of those papers had regarded sexual minorities and their status in society to be an important theme, they would have been able to include more writings about it.

Representations of Homosexuality—From a Medical Discourse to a Sexual Discourse

When analysing the articles published in newspapers and magazines during the last years of the 1980s and first years of the 1990s, two discourses can be distinguished: a medicalised discourse, which was prevalent from 1987 to 1989 and then faded, and a sexualised discourse, which emerged from 1990 onward. I will now briefly analyse these discourses.

Medical Discourse

In Soviet-Estonia, homosexuality became a part of the public agenda first with the discussion concerning AIDS.[18] Articles produced typically very conservative tones and AIDS was connected to "risk groups" such as homosexuals and prostitutes—instead of risk behaviour.[19] Although medical candidate Jaan Märtin pointed out in 1987 that AIDS could also spread in heterosexual relationships, the presupposition, also in his article, was that prostitutes and homosexuals were clearly identified "risk groups."[20] For example, *Nõukogude Naine* published an article written by Elmar Rõigas in 1988 stating that "from the very beginning the disease has killed mostly perverse males, homosexuals."[21] These articles were written by medical doctors who reproduced the prevalent discourse of Estonian medical circles. It was not an uncommon thing in Soviet societies: in Russian medical circles AIDS was presented as being connected to homosexuals (Kon 2002, 305). In the Western world where the fear of AIDS was at its peak during the 1980s this was also the case (Miller 1995, 450–451).

[18] The first case of AIDS in Estonia was identified as late as in 1988. See Liiu Kotter, "AIDS dr E. Rõigase moodi" (About AIDS in dr. E. Rõigas' style), *Edasi*, 21 March 1989.

[19] For example, the women's magazine *Nõukogude Naine/Eesti Naine* published articles where this kind of positioning can be seen.

[20] Jaan Märtin, "Haigus, mille nimi on AIDS" (Disease, Which Name is AIDS), *Nõukogude Naine*, 9, 1987.

[21] Elmar Rõigas, "AIDS ja naised" (AIDS and Women), *Nõukogude Naine*, 3, 1988.

The medical discourse featured most prominently in the Estonian printed media when doctor Elmar Rõigas published the first book discussing AIDS in Estonia in 1988.[22] After the launch of the book, a lively debate started around his points of view. In these discussions, in 1989, Rõigas strongly defended his views in *Noorte Hääl*.[23] He described homosexuals as "pyromaniacs" who had started the "fire of AIDS."[24] Moreover he alleged that homosexuals were sex-maniacs and accused them of seducing innocent heterosexuals and spreading the disease among them.[25]

Although Rõigas was allowed to present his views extensively in *Noorte Hääl*, the debate around his book was also a turning point for writings concerning AIDS. In this public debate, opinions which criticised Rõigas' remarks also began to arise. The first person who started this critique was Liiu Kotter, who was later known as Lilian Kotter, one of the active members of *Eesti Lesbiliit*.[26] In her writings, which were published in the newspapers *Edasi* and *Noorte Hääl*,[27] she made it clear that the opinions of Rõigas were homophobic. Kotter, for example, wrote that Rõigas was making anti-homosexual "agit-prop" (i.e. propaganda designed to agitate) in his book[28] and that he was trying to make AIDS seem like a cane which would castigate homosexuality.[29]

Even though one journalist agreed with Kotter's criticism, there was also a response which rejected her ideas.[30] The opposing article was by a doctor named Jüri Teras who made the point that Liiu Kotter was just making propaganda on behalf of homosexuals and that Rõigas' opinions about AIDS were trustworthy.

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[22] The information is from the newspaper *Edasi* in which there was a lively debate around the quality of the book. See for example: Jüri Teras, "AIDS'ist ka L. Kotteri moodi" (About AIDS also in L. Kotter's style), *Edasi*, 9 June 1989.

[23] Elmar Rõigas, "Homoseksualismist, AIDS-ist ja iibest" (About Homosexuality, AIDS and Growth), *Noorte Hääl*, 6–8 July 1989.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Lilian Kotter was one of those few active women who started the Estonian Lesbian Union in 1990. Interview with Lilian Kotter on 3 August 2006, conducted by the author.

[27] Liiu Kotter, "AIDS dr E. Rõigase moodi" (About AIDS in dr. E. Rõigas' style), *Edasi*, 21 March 1989; Liiu Kotter, "Meie kolm" (Us three), *Edasi*, 29 June 1989; Liiu Kotter, "Meie sedasi. Homoseksualismist ja antihomoseksualismist Eestis" (Our Way. About Homosexuality and Anti-homosexuality in Estonia), *Noorte Hääl*, 11 July 1989.

[28] Liiu Kotter, "AIDS dr E. Rõigase moodi" (About AIDS in dr. E. Rõigas' style), *Edasi*, 21 March 1989.

[29] Liiu Kotter, "Meie sedasi. Homoseksualismist ja antihomoseksualismist Eestis" (Our Way. About Homosexuality and Anti-homosexuality in Estonia), *Noorte Hääl*, 11 July 1989.

[30] Teras Jüri, "AIDS'ist ka L. Kotteri moodi" (About AIDS also in L. Kotter's Style), *Edasi,* 9 June 1989; Mart Ummelas, "Parast, et haigeks jäid!" (It is the Best That You Get Sick!), *Edasi*, 29 June 1989.

Although the medical discourse continued to be dismissive toward homosexuality, more acceptant voices spoke up in the public discussion. A *Noorte Hääl* editorial comment introducing an article about homosexuality by Elmar Rõigas made it clear that the paper tried to adopt a neutral stance in this debate.[31] However, after three articles by Elmar Rõigas and one by Liiu Kotter were published, a piece by Kaur Hanson, journalist of *Noorte Hääl*[32] summed up the discussion. This article presented tolerant views toward homosexuality and quoted three letters to the editor in the same vein. The message of the article was clear: the opinions of Rõigas should not be taken seriously because homosexuals are people just as much as heterosexuals are.

Apart from the AIDS context, medical positions can also be seen in the columns of letters to the editor. In the youth magazine, *Noorus*, for example, there was an active debate around homosexuality, especially in 1989. The magazine itself did not take a clear position but its willingness to publish articles about homosexuality[33] can be interpreted as a sign of openness towards sexual minorities. However, the magazine also published letters from its readers as well as responses to these from specialists, and some of these writings had a clearly negative tone towards homosexuals. By publishing these *Noorus* maintained the discourse which presented homosexuality as a deviant phenomenon. For example, psychiatrist Anti Liiv in his reply to two young girls who were frightened that they "will also become victims of same-sex love,"[34] wrote that lesbianism was a psychological problem that could be solved and he suggested that the girls should turn to a psychiatrist or a psychologist in order to get rid of homosexual behaviour. The medicalisation of lesbianism became even clearer when Liiv ended his comment by saying that "there are possibilities to get rid of it. You are just in the beginning of going astray." Three years later Liiv still used the same kind of arguments in an article published in *Eesti Ekspress* but he seemed to have had a more positive attitude towards lesbianism than before: "naturally, because of the future of our nation, we do not want to glorify or propagate lesbianism. But we are able to accept it."[35]

[31] Rein Spitz, "Preword," *Noorte Hääl*, 6 July 1989.

[32] Kaur Hanson, "Kas teie pooldate veel inkvisitsiooni?" (Do You Still Speak up for the Inquisition), *Noorte Hääl*, 5 August 1989.

[33] See for example Udo Parikas, "Loomuvastane?" (Unnatural?), *Noorus*, 9, 1989.

[34] Anti Liiv, "Ma teile kirjutan. Maie ja Kati (15-a.)" (I Write to You. Maie and Kati (15-years)), *Noorus*, 8, 1989.

[35] Anti Liiv, "Lesbid?" (Lesbians?), *Eesti Ekspress*, 27 November 1992.

From the 1990s, the medical discourse gradually lost importance. For example, AIDS was no longer solely connected to homosexuals but was discussed more diversely in the printed media.[36] A distinct sign of this was an AIDS campaign which got a lot of coverage in *Eesti Naine* magazine. In this campaign, AIDS was presented as a threat to both homo- and heterosexuals: "Whether you are young or old, homosexual or not, HIV affects your way of thinking about life, love and sexuality. Risk of infection does not depend on who you are, but on what you do."[37]

Sexualized Discourse

Since the years of perestroika the gender regime based on "natural" gender roles, common in Baltic countries at that time, was prevalent in the Estonian media, too (Hansson and Laidmäe 2000; Novikova 2001, 1998). Media representations made it seem obvious that women and men have their own roles determined by their biological sex.[38]

A clear indicator of this kind of "biological determinism" was the national demographic policy[39] of the last years of the 1980s used as a tool to disapprove both male and female homosexuality. These arguments could be read in Dr. Elmar Rõigas' writings, in which he appealed to the future of the Estonian nation while emphasising that homosexuals posed a demographic threat to the country. Rõigas wrote, for instance, that "we must keep in mind that every 'family' consisting of a male couple robs two normal families of their heads of family and of the fathers of children never born."[40] Psychiatrist Anti Liiv used similar rhetoric against lesbi-

[36] See for example: Eesti Assosiatsioon "Anti-AIDS," "1. detsember – rahvusvaheline AIDS-i vastu võitlemise pave" (1st of December—An International Day Against AIDS), *Pühapäevaleht*, 28 November 1992; Peeter Linnap, "AIDS kuulsate haigus" (AIDS, the Disease of Celebrities), *Eesti Ekspress*, 26 February 1993; Sulev Teinemaa, "AIDS ilma pisarateta" (AIDS Without Tears), *Eesti Ekspress*, 15 October 1993.

[37] Advertisement for AIDS campaign, *Eesti Naine* 4, 1993.

[38] See for example Tõnu Ots, "Sündinud meheks või naiseks. Vestlusi sooerinevustest" (Born to be a Man or a Woman. Discussion About Gender Differences), *Nõukogude Naine*, 4, 1987; Mare Ots, "Mis on muutunud naise elus" (What Has Changed in a Woman's Life), *Nõukogude Naine*, 6, 1988; Aimi Paalandi, "Naine jääb naiseks" (A Woman Remains a Woman), *Eesti Naine*, 2, 1990.

[39] During the 1980s, Estonians were worried that the number of native Estonians was not enough and they were becoming a minority in their own land. That is why there was an active demographic campaign which hoped that women would give birth to at least three children (see for example Narusk 2000, 53).

[40] Elmar Rõigas, "Homoseksualismist, AIDS-ist ja iibest" (About Homosexuality, AIDS and Growth), *Noorte Hääl*, 8 July 1989.

anism whilst he was of the opinion that every Estonian woman should give birth to at least two or three children.[41]

Heterosexuality remained the norm of sexual behaviour also in those magazines depicting homosexuality more tolerantly. In articles dealing with safe sex or sexual relationships[42] sexuality was always about a man and a woman, and sex between same sex partners was hardly mentioned at all. The only exception was in *Noorus* which published a series of articles that dealt with sex. In one of them a journalist asked his interviewees if they had had homosexual experiences.[43] Surprisingly, both of the two young men had had sex with another man. However, in both cases it was said to be an experiment and they did not identify themselves as either homosexual or bisexual.

This "biological" discourse was also reinforced by references to the dichotomy of homosexuality and heterosexuality. This could be seen in articles of *Eesti Ekspress* published in the early 1990s, where homosexuals were presented as a new, trendy group of people trying to organise themselves in the middle of heteronormative society.[44] In other papers like *Liivimaa Kroonika, Õhtuleht* and *Nelli Teataja* the homosexual-heterosexual dichotomy was even clearer: Heterosexuality was constantly presented as a normal way of behaviour while homosexuality was seen as acceptable but somehow abnormal. Homosexuality was something that heterosexual journalists were looking at from the outside, referring to homosexuality as the "abnormal other":

> It [a gay bar in Tallinn] is one of those many old town cellar bars, many rooms and dark recesses. Although it's the middle of the week, the bar is full of people. A person with a nasal voice asks if I can offer light. No-no! I follow my friend quickly to the other room. God knows, what a person with that kind of voice would look like![45]

Heteronormative attitudes were reproduced by stereotyping, for example, by emphasising that lesbians did not look like ordinary women. According to psychiatrist Anti Liiv "that kind of girls may be more mas-

[41] Anti Liiv, "Ma teile kirjutan. Anti Liivi kommentaar kahe teismelise tüdruku kirja" (I Write to You. Anti Liiv's Comments on a Letter Written by Two Teenager Girls), *Noorus*, 8/1989.

[42] See for example Seija Välimäki, "Turvaline sex" (Safe-sex), *Noorus*, 6–9, 1990.

[43] Alexander, "Tüdrukud pipardavad. Alexander vestleb noormeestega" (Girls Are Peppery. Alexander Discusses With Young Men), *Noorus*, 6, 1994.

[44] See for example Teet Veispak, "Ma usun et varsti toimub coming out" (I Believe That a Coming Out is Going to Happen Soon), *Eesti Ekspress*, 6 April 1990.

[45] Piret Saar, "Võimalus olla armastatud" (Opportunity to be Loved), *Õhtuleht*, 3 February 1994.

culine in their behaviour . . . and their way of dressing inevitably changes from a sporty style to a more masculine."[46] Similarly constructed stereotypes could also be detected in articles portraying male homosexuals by highlighting their femininity.[47] Even though it can be argued that these stereotypes prevailed in the Western world for decades, in the Estonian context they served to emphasise the otherness of homosexuality in a society where "natural" gender roles were seen as the right models for being men and women.

The years of perestroika and glasnost brought a sexual liberation to the Soviet Union in the sense that sexually explicit material permeated society. However, these changes were driven mainly by male desire (Shreeves 1992, 130–131). In public heteronormative discourse female sexuality was subordinated to male lust, and homosexuality was still seen as unnatural (Liljeström 1995, 384). This development could also be seen in Soviet-Estonia in the form of increasing visibility of pornographic material and prostitution (Kaskla 2003, 307).

This over-sexualisation had effects on Estonian printed media as well. For example, almost all of the articles about lesbianism were illustrated by two naked or half-naked women kissing, hugging, lying in bed and so on.[48] This is odd because in most of these articles the main point was not lesbian sex or sexuality at all. The clearest example of this practise is an article published in the tabloid magazine *Liivimaa Kroonika* in February 1993[49] reporting on the daily life of a young lesbian couple in a very matter-of-fact way: while one interviewee criticised the media's way of emphasising sexuality in their pictures when writing about homosexuality, the illustration of the article was clearly over-sexualised, even pornographic—despite the critical comment in the text.

The use of sexual images in Estonian printed media can be explained in terms of the prevailing gender regime in the Estonian society at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. As Milla Mägi, former

[46] Anti Liiv, "Ma teile kirjutan. Anti Liivi kommentaar kahe teismelise tüdruku kirja" (I Write to You. Anti Liiv's Comments on a Letter Written by Two Teenager Girls), *Noorus*, 8, 1989.

[47] See for example Bohumil Visák, "Eesti Gayliit loodud" (Estonian Gay League Established), *Eesti Ekspress*, 6 March 1992; Bohumil Visák, "Suudlus city's" (Kiss in the City), *Eesti Ekspress*, 10 April 1992; Piret Saar, "Võimalus olla armastatud" (Opportunity to be Loved), *Õhtuleht*, 3 Febryary 1994.

[48] See for example Anti Liiv, "Lesbid?" (Lesbians?), *Eesti Ekspress*, 27 November 1992; Tiina Kuuler, "Lesbimiss loodab mehele minna" (Miss Lesbian Estonia Hopes to Marry a Man), *Liivimaa Kroonika*, 7 January 1993; Pressman, "Ma ei taha kunagi midagi reklaamida" (I Do Not Ever Want to Advertise Anything), *Eesti Aeg*, 13 January 1993.

[49] Jaanus Meinart, "Tiia on tavaline tüdruk" (Tiia Is An Ordinary Girl), *Liivimaa Kroonika*, 25 February 1993.

journalist of *Eesti Naine* magazine, emphasised: there was a strong chauvinistic atmosphere in Estonian media during those years.[50] There was also a strong commercialisation process going on witnessed by the appearance of advertisements and the competition that took place in the media (Paju 2004, 26–28). This has also affected the representations of homosexuality by encouraging the magazines and newspapers to use over-sexualised images. Though male homosexuality is generally given more media space than female homosexuality (Kuorikoski 2004, 13), in Estonia it was lesbianism that became a trendy item as it was another context where the female body could be used to sell papers to the straight male audience.

Therefore it is hardly surprising that there was only one picture of two kissing men,[51] among the examined sources: as male homosexuality was punishable until June 1992, it can be assumed that that had an influence on how male homosexuality was illustrated in the media. However, for example, in the *Noorus* magazine there were some homoerotic pictures in the middle of the 1990s when models were photographed in a way that the reader could sense sexual tension between same sex figures.[52]

Conclusion

The social transition that started in the last years of the 1980s has been widely studied in Estonia but sexual minorities and their status in society have not been dealt with widely. In this article, I have tried to show that it is also possible to study the transitional process from a specific angle and that the process—which is often described as a positive progress—can not be seen in a straightforward way.

The brief analysis of the homosexual discourses in Estonian media conducted here has shown that during the early years of transition homosexuality turned from a disease to a somewhat acceptable form of sexual identity. However, the development did not take place in all the media products simultaneously, but it was a theme that divided newspapers and magazines. Among the biggest newspapers homosexuality did not get much attention after medicalised views became less dominant in the late 1980s. In the tabloid papers, on the other hand, homosexuality—lesbianism, in particular—became a "trendy" topic that received quite a lot of attention since 1990.

[50] Interview of Milla Mägi in Tallinn, 10 January 2006, conducted by the author (see also Kurvinen 2006, 55).

[51] Bohumil Visák, "Suudlus city's" (Kiss in the City), *Eesti Ekspress*, 10 April 1992.

[52] Kätlin Kaldma, "In show," *Noorus*, 4–6, 1995.

However, the growing number of writings about homosexuality did not signify increasing social acceptance in attitudes towards sexual minorities. Although homosexuality received a lot of attention in the early 1990s, the writings included elements complying with heteronormativity. The right of self-expression of homosexual interviewees was clearly distorted by over-sexualised illustrations. In the case of lesbian representations, the female body was subordinated to a straight male gaze, which detracted from the right to love and feel closeness with same-sex partners.

In the years of perestroika, homosexuality was still affected by the socialist past and its way of seeing homosexuality as a taboo. In the early years of the 1990s, on the other hand, the representation of homosexuality was influenced by the commercialisation of society as well as the revival of a traditional "natural" gender regime which became prevalent again in post-soviet Estonia. In Estonian printed media, the representation of homosexuality moved from medicalisation to sexualisation, and was seen through the lens of the heterosexual norm.

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"Gays and Transvestites Occupied the House." A Snapshot of LGBT Representations in the Bulgarian Media

Monika Pisankaneva

Introduction

"Gays and Transvestites Occupied the House" is the title of a recently published article in one of the national dailies *Standard* Newspaper,[1] which comments on the cohabitants in the third issue of the "Big Brother" reality show that started in mid-September 2006. Although social and legal changes in Bulgaria in the last few years have led to an increased number of neutral media texts related to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT), openly homophobic and transphobic articles like the above are still to be found in some mainstream media.

This article aims to present a snapshot of LGBT representations in the Bulgarian print media within one randomly selected month. The content is based on critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) of texts published in Bulgarian press and on-line media in September 2006 that relate to LGBT. It also includes findings from four in-depth interviews of gay and lesbian activists from Bulgarian LGBT organizations, who have invested a lot of effort to modify media discourse on LGBT issues in the last three years, with the purpose to initiate positive changes in social attitudes towards LGBT people. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, discourse is a potent element of social life, which is dialectically interconnected with other elements, and can influence social change. Based on this theoretical claim, this article focuses on the Bulgarian media discourse on LGBT identities with the purpose to outline existing assumptions that affect social attitudes towards LGBT people.

Press monitoring conducted by the Bulgarian Gay Organization Gemini in 2005 discovered that:[2]

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> Compared to previous periods (when the total number of articles for the year was approximately 300–400), in 2005 the number of publications on LGBT topics exceeds 1000.
> Ten national newspapers were monitored, reviewing over a 1000 articles. It was discovered that the majority of the publications are neutral (presenting LGBT topics in facts by using politically correct language, without commenting), some are very negative (directly or indirectly portraying LGBT people in a less favourable light, sometimes directly encouraging hatred and discrimination towards them), and a few positive (where LGBT people or communities are presented as good examples or when the journalist comments on the topic in a supportive way). As well as this, contacts with the media were developed and viable working contacts were strengthened with key players in the mass media, including national television channels. Though it was not feasible to monitor television programmes, certain tendencies in attitudes toward LGBT issues were observed: one of the national television channels proved to be very open to social issues and presented the stories neutrally, to some extent positively; while another one was biased and provided negative coverage of any social issues related to LGBT or Roma issues. Barring a few exceptions, it is worth noticing that LGBT issues were not covered by mass media as scandalous or sensationalist news. In the last year it was noticeable that LGBT issues got "serious" coverage in the daily headlines" (Gemini 2005).

I am taking the conclusions of the annual press monitoring report of BGO Gemini for 2005 as a starting point in analyzing the publications concerning LGBT issues in September 2006. The research hypothesis is that the prevailing media attitude to LGBT demonstrated in the articles is neutral or positive, and the mass media have overcome the tendency to treat homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality as scandalous news or entertainment.

Findings

The media sample included 23 articles, published in five national dailies (*Monitor*, *Standard*, *24 Hours*, *Trud* and *Dnevnik*) and one weekly newspaper (*Capital*) in September 2006. The majority of these articles appeared in commentary sections, followed by news highlights, and reports including excerpts of interviews.

There were 5 LGBT related topics covered in these media product during the examined period: the legal action against Volen Siderov MP[3] started by Bulgarian LGBT organizations to limit his hate speech; the

minishing legal, social, cultural and economic discrimination and victimisation of LGBT people. It maintains good relations with Bulgarian and international organisations, Bulgarian governmental agencies and media.

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publicly announced informal gay wedding ceremony of the pop star Azis; Bulgarian semi-finalist in the international "Mr. Gay" competition; participation of Bulgarian sportsmen in the Gay Outgames in Montreal 2006; and the participation of two gender-ambiguous people (one being a cross-dresser and the other a former transvestite) in the "Big Brother 3" Show.

Each of these topics carried different weight in the print media. The court case of Volen Siderov and the semi-finalist in the international "Mr. Gay" competition were only briefly mentioned in news highlights columns of the examined newspapers. There were full length articles dedicated to the other three topics, and extensive comments from readers in the on-line forums of *Monitor*, *Dnevnik* and Capital.bg/Blog. The topic which drew the greatest public attention was the participation of transvestites in the Big Brother 3 reality show. More than half of all LGBT-related texts in the monitored period were dedicated to this topic. *Standard* Newspaper dedicated the largest space (altogether three articles) to the "Big Brother 3" reality show. The articles published in it by Lora Simeonova and Martin Karbovski were openly homo- and transphobic:

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"In 'Big Brother 3' the abnormality is presented to us as a norm," concludes the author of the article, Martin Karbovski.

Standard Newspaper was the only one which took an openly homophobic and transphobic position while commenting on the participants in the "Big Brother 3" reality show, the other researched media aimed to remain neutral. However, the seemingly neutral articles led to the conclusion that the "Big Brother 3" show aims to maintain its audience by exposing weird persons who transgress social views of normality, and evoke shock and repulsion among the viewers. All newspapers agreed

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that the "Big Brother 3" show was seeking to expose "scandalous themes," such as homosexuality, transsexuality, extra-marital pregnancy, religious fanaticism, etc. For example, *Capital* weekly defined the mixture of personalities which took part in the show as "a mixture that is explosive and promises to evoke many debates" and also pointed out that the plot "moves on the edge of good taste."[6] It is difficult to call such a position neutral: Although there was no harassing language, the expectation that the audience would react explosively to the personalities involved in the show brought stereotypes into play, shared by the audience, and obviously by the author of the article as well.

The topic that ranked second in terms of space dedicated to it was the "gay marriage" of the Bulgarian pop-folk singer Azis, who attracted many fans by making videos and live performances, in which he dressed as a woman, but wore a beard at the same time, gave birth on stage, and married himself. His personal life is one of the favourite topics of the entertainment columns of print media, and he is a frequent guest of Bulgarian TV entertainment shows. His broadly announced informal gay marriage was widely covered by all kinds of media. Besides topping the headlines of entertainment sections in the print media, he and his partner were invited to talk about their forthcoming wedding in some of the most widely watched talk shows and TV tabloids.[7]

The coverage of Azis' "gay marriage" unfortunately contributed to perpetuating common stereotypes about gay men as women in male bodies, instead of challenging them. The confession made by Azis in front of about 2 million viewers of the Slavi Talk Show on September 10, 2006, that he is a "woman inside," and "the wife in the family," and that his partner is not gay, but heterosexual, who saw his inner soul (that is a woman's soul), cemented the popular view that only the more feminine-looking of the two male partners was gay, while the other was "normal" and was only temporarily in this kind of relationship. There are several different stereotypes about gay couples in Bulgaria. The most prevalent one is that the gay couple imitates the male-female role division typical for heterosexual couples: one of the partners must play the female role. Another stereotype holds that the more masculine of the two partners is not gay and can equally well form relationships with women. Only the feminine-looking gay is 100% gay, and would never be able to have a "normal" relationship with a woman.

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Print media cited Azis' words in articles congratulating the happy couple, and wishing them luck. An article in *Capital weekly* commented on the fact that Azis' popularity was difficult to understand in a society characterized by prevailing intolerance towards homosexuals:

> His (Azis') popularity continues to be mysterious—in informal settings the Bulgarians are intolerant towards minorities and towards showing of different sexual orientation. Nevertheless, when a man from Roma origin puts on a dress and heavy make-up, everybody suddenly begins to recognize his beautiful voice, his peculiarity, and most of all, his ability to entertain—in the same way in which the king's buffoon must entertain noble snobs.[8]

The third topic, the participation of Bulgarian sportsmen in the Montreal Outgames 2006 was covered by a long article in *Novinar* Newspaper,[9] drawing attention to the main issues that concern gay sport: lack of state support to gay sport people who represent Bulgaria at international tournaments, and consistent fear of coming out of most sportsmen, which makes gay sport rather invisible. The article focused on the participation of Stanislav Tanchev, the leader of Gay Sports Club "Tangra" being the only one of the twelve club members that took part in Montreal Outgames to give an interview to the mass media.

The discourse analysis of print media in September 2006 outlines several key problems related to the media representation of LGBT people in general. First of all, we cannot talk of representations of all identities that comprise the compound LGBT. Although some articles included the words "lesbians" and "bisexuals" in conjunction with gays and transsexuals, the focus was on male homosexuality and on transvestism. Lesbians and bisexuals were not discussed in any of the articles. Second, male homosexuality and transsexuality were discussed predominantly in entertainment sections, which reflect on curious, scandalous or shocking themes. Political news, such as the court case of Volen Siderov, appear in front-page news, but the content of the news item itself (i.e. legal action to limit the homophobic and racist hate speech of Volen Siderov Bulgarian MP, member of the nationalist "Ataka" Party) presented a public scandal.

In the examined period, there was not a single article which reflected on LGBT issues in conjunction with a non-scandalous or non-entertaining piece of news. For example, there were no comments on how the new

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Activists' Views

Gay and lesbian leaders of LGBT human rights organizations are among the few people in the country who have invested time and efforts to modify the media discourse on homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality in order to influence existing public stereotypes of LGBT. Their opinions are important because the strategy chosen by LGBT organizations to increase the social visibility of LGBT people in the mass media is one of the factors which forms the media discourse, and consequently—can produce social change. Mass media have built a steady relationship with some organization-affiliated resource people, who are called upon to discuss hot issues, or represent the "LGBT movement." Desislava Petrova and Aksinia Gencheva from BGO Gemini are the most often called-upon media resource people for LGBT issues in general, and not only about specific lesbian issues.

None of the activists who were interviewed were completely satisfied with the current media representations of LGBT people in Bulgaria. Petrova and Gencheva expressed most optimistic opinions about their current relationship with the mass media. They supported the overall conclusion stated in the annual media monitoring report of Gemini for 2005: that homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality are no longer covered in the mass media as scandalous or sensationalist news. Still, they mentioned, that there should be more space dedicated to LGBT issues in the mass media, and the media should consult with LGBT activists on all current political issues related to employment, social and healthcare, and education.

The other activists who were interviewed, Pavlin Stoichev, chair of the Managing Board of LGBT Idea,[10] former chairperson of Gemini in the period 2004–2005, and Martin Tsvetkov, director of Queer Bulgaria,[11] expressed much more critical views of the media representations of LGBT

[10] LGBT Idea is a newly-founded LGBT membership association that is still in the process of legal registration. It was founded in May 2006.

[11] Queer Bulgaria is an LGBT not-for-profit organization legally registered as a foundation for public benefit in 2004. More information can be found at <www.queer-bulgaria.com>.

people in the last few years. According to both of them, mass media have not yet developed a neutral attitude towards LGBT issues, and serve to maintain a stigmatizing discourse, which perpetuates public stereotyping of LGBT people as a social abnormality.

Stoichev was especially concerned about the continued feminization of gay identities in the mass media. Gay men are often jokingly referred to as people with "soft wrists" which implies a feminine feature in the Bulgarian context. This nick name ("the soft wrists") expresses a socially degrading attitude, because in the present-day Bulgarian context of rigid gender stereotyping these kind of references devaluate the maleness of gay subjects. He also underlined that almost none of the mainstream media, with the exception of *Dnevnik* Newspaper, are interested to engage in in-depth analysis of issues concerning the social lives of LGBT people. He explains this with the nature of Bulgarian media, which are seeking to respond to the "average" audience, its tastes and attitudes to life, and not to change them. Similarly, Tsvetkov points out that there is no space for a serious discussion on LGBT social issues, and when they are exposed in the media, the focus is on the public perception of LGBT as scandalous, shocking, or ridiculous.

When talking about the possible strategy to achieve objective representation of LGBT people in the mass media, the focus of the representatives of BGO Gemini was on building a permanent relationship with the national media, and constantly "feeding" them with information about LGBT-related events. Stoichev from LGBT Idea expressed an opinion that a greater number of different people representing the LGBT organizations should appear in the mass media, when the organizations are invited to comment on a current issue. In his view LGBT organizations' media strategy has not been effective so far, because the organizations did not succeed in attracting a number of successful people with diverse professional backgrounds as their front-persons. LGBT organizations have appeared with a very limited number of faces in the mass media, which contributed to their low success in counterbalancing the existing heterosexist as well as sexist discourse reflecting rigid gender role stereotypes.

None of the interviewed activists thought that the creation of specialized media shows directed primarily to LGBT audience would solve the problems of representation. They would favour it if LGBT-managed media were more oriented to the broader public. There used to be a radio show produced by BGO Gemini running on Radio Net (in Sofia) for one and a half years. It stopped because the radio station closed down. Stojchev, who was the host of that show for several months, commented that

the hopes of Gemini had been for this show to fill in the gap of missing faces of ordinary LGBT people with different backgrounds and professions, who would help to mainstream the LGBT issues. Unfortunately, this goal was not achieved, probably because the show was hosted by a less popular radio station with a limited audience.

Conclusion

The press monitoring of BGO Gemini in 2005 draws a picture of an open-minded, predominantly neutral or positive mass media discourse on LGBT issues, which provides space for a serious discussion of LGBT identities, and promotes social tolerance. This view was proved not to be valid for the month of September 2006, in which the LGBT-related publications in national dailies (and one weekly newspaper) were mostly in the entertainment sections, focusing on curious or shocking news, scandals, and some of them even stereotyping LGBT as a social anomaly. The examination of print media products in September 2006 shows that LGBT media representations still suffer from a number of deficiencies, which contribute to perpetuation of rigid stereotypes about LGBT, instead of dissolving them.

The media discourse on LGBT is still male-centred, and excludes lesbians and bisexual people altogether. It is also entertainment-bound, and focuses on curious or scandalous news, while ignoring ordinary LGBT people altogether when some serious social issues related to education, health-care and employment policies are discussed. Another deficiency of the media discourse on LGBT is the lack of a great diversity of personalities to present. Although the main LGBT organizations have developed working relationships with the mass media, they have not managed to attract a large number of people with diverse backgrounds to help promoting LGBT rights in the mass media. LGBT organizations remain a rather low-impact factor when media discourse on LGBT is being formed. The "opinion-makers" about LGBT issues in the mass media are more likely to be pop-folk stars or night-life revellers or just randomly selected people, participating in reality shows, and not the activists, who aim to promote a non-discriminative attitude towards LGBT people.

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This article aims to present a snapshot of LGBT representations in the Bulgarian print media within one randomly selected month. The content is based on critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995) of texts published in Bulgarian press and on-line media in September 2006 that relate to LGBT. It also includes findings from four in-depth interviews of gay and lesbian activists from Bulgarian LGBT organizations, who have invested a lot of effort to modify media discourse on LGBT issues in the last three years, with the purpose to initiate positive changes in social attitudes towards LGBT people. According to Norman Fairclough (1995), one of the founders of critical discourse analysis, discourse is a potent element of social life, which is dialectically interconnected with other elements, and can influence social change. Based on this theoretical claim, this article focuses on the Bulgarian media discourse on LGBT identities with the purpose to outline existing assumptions that affect social attitudes towards LGBT people.

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Findings

The media sample included 23 articles, published in five national dailies (*Monitor*, *Standard*, *24 Hours*, *Trud* and *Dnevnik*) and one weekly newspaper (*Capital*) in September 2006. The majority of these articles appeared in commentary sections, followed by news highlights, and reports including excerpts of interviews.

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Activists' Views

Gay and lesbian leaders of LGBT human rights organizations are among the few people in the country who have invested time and efforts to modify the media discourse on homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality in order to influence existing public stereotypes of LGBT. Their opinions are important because the strategy chosen by LGBT organizations to increase the social visibility of LGBT people in the mass media is one of the factors which forms the media discourse, and consequently—can produce social change. Mass media have built a steady relationship with some organization-affiliated resource people, who are called upon to discuss hot issues, or represent the "LGBT movement." Desislava Petrova and Aksinia Gencheva from BGO Gemini are the most often called-upon media resource people for LGBT issues in general, and not only about specific lesbian issues.

None of the activists who were interviewed were completely satisfied with the current media representations of LGBT people in Bulgaria. Petrova and Gencheva expressed most optimistic opinions about their current relationship with the mass media. They supported the overall conclusion stated in the annual media monitoring report of Gemini for 2005: that homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality are no longer covered in the mass media as scandalous or sensationalist news. Still, they mentioned, that there should be more space dedicated to LGBT issues in the mass media, and the media should consult with LGBT activists on all current political issues related to employment, social and healthcare, and education.

The other activists who were interviewed, Pavlin Stoichev, chair of the Managing Board of LGBT Idea,[10] former chairperson of Gemini in the period 2004–2005, and Martin Tsvetkov, director of Queer Bulgaria,[11] expressed much more critical views of the media representations of LGBT

[10] LGBT Idea is a newly-founded LGBT membership association that is still in the process of legal registration. It was founded in May 2006.

[11] Queer Bulgaria is an LGBT not-for-profit organization legally registered as a foundation for public benefit in 2004. More information can be found at <www.queer-bulgaria.com>.

people in the last few years. According to both of them, mass media have not yet developed a neutral attitude towards LGBT issues, and serve to maintain a stigmatizing discourse, which perpetuates public stereotyping of LGBT people as a social abnormality.

Stoichev was especially concerned about the continued feminization of gay identities in the mass media. Gay men are often jokingly referred to as people with "soft wrists" which implies a feminine feature in the Bulgarian context. This nick name ("the soft wrists") expresses a socially degrading attitude, because in the present-day Bulgarian context of rigid gender stereotyping these kind of references devaluate the maleness of gay subjects. He also underlined that almost none of the mainstream media, with the exception of *Dnevnik* Newspaper, are interested to engage in in-depth analysis of issues concerning the social lives of LGBT people. He explains this with the nature of Bulgarian media, which are seeking to respond to the "average" audience, its tastes and attitudes to life, and not to change them. Similarly, Tsvetkov points out that there is no space for a serious discussion on LGBT social issues, and when they are exposed in the media, the focus is on the public perception of LGBT as scandalous, shocking, or ridiculous.

When talking about the possible strategy to achieve objective representation of LGBT people in the mass media, the focus of the representatives of BGO Gemini was on building a permanent relationship with the national media, and constantly "feeding" them with information about LGBT-related events. Stoichev from LGBT Idea expressed an opinion that a greater number of different people representing the LGBT organizations should appear in the mass media, when the organizations are invited to comment on a current issue. In his view LGBT organizations' media strategy has not been effective so far, because the organizations did not succeed in attracting a number of successful people with diverse professional backgrounds as their front-persons. LGBT organizations have appeared with a very limited number of faces in the mass media, which contributed to their low success in counterbalancing the existing heterosexist as well as sexist discourse reflecting rigid gender role stereotypes.

None of the interviewed activists thought that the creation of specialized media shows directed primarily to LGBT audience would solve the problems of representation. They would favour it if LGBT-managed media were more oriented to the broader public. There used to be a radio show produced by BGO Gemini running on Radio Net (in Sofia) for one and a half years. It stopped because the radio station closed down. Stojchev, who was the host of that show for several months, commented that

the hopes of Gemini had been for this show to fill in the gap of missing faces of ordinary LGBT people with different backgrounds and professions, who would help to mainstream the LGBT issues. Unfortunately, this goal was not achieved, probably because the show was hosted by a less popular radio station with a limited audience.

Conclusion

The press monitoring of BGO Gemini in 2005 draws a picture of an open-minded, predominantly neutral or positive mass media discourse on LGBT issues, which provides space for a serious discussion of LGBT identities, and promotes social tolerance. This view was proved not to be valid for the month of September 2006, in which the LGBT-related publications in national dailies (and one weekly newspaper) were mostly in the entertainment sections, focusing on curious or shocking news, scandals, and some of them even stereotyping LGBT as a social anomaly. The examination of print media products in September 2006 shows that LGBT media representations still suffer from a number of deficiencies, which contribute to perpetuation of rigid stereotypes about LGBT, instead of dissolving them.

The media discourse on LGBT is still male-centred, and excludes lesbians and bisexual people altogether. It is also entertainment-bound, and focuses on curious or scandalous news, while ignoring ordinary LGBT people altogether when some serious social issues related to education, health-care and employment policies are discussed. Another deficiency of the media discourse on LGBT is the lack of a great diversity of personalities to present. Although the main LGBT organizations have developed working relationships with the mass media, they have not managed to attract a large number of people with diverse backgrounds to help promoting LGBT rights in the mass media. LGBT organizations remain a rather low-impact factor when media discourse on LGBT is being formed. The "opinion-makers" about LGBT issues in the mass media are more likely to be pop-folk stars or night-life revellers or just randomly selected people, participating in reality shows, and not the activists, who aim to promote a non-discriminative attitude towards LGBT people.

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Fear and Hate

Sexuality, Masculinity and Homophobia: The Latvian Case

Aivita Putniņa

Introduction

Events following Riga Pride 2005 surprised and shocked Latvian society.[1] Until then Latvian society was thought to have a calm "Nordic" mentality permissive of social diversity. The last big protest actions had happened in the late 1980s during the "singing revolution" that was a peaceful event.[2] Pride 2005 mobilized hundreds of people: watching, shouting and trying to attack and stop the demonstration. Left and right wing radicals stood shoulder to shoulder having found a common enemy. Latvian media picked up on the theme provoking intensive public debates, and society was divided by the issue of homosexuality. Homophobic arguments were used in Parliament and in the general election campaign in the summer of 2006.[3] The next Riga Pride of 2006 was banned and a series of educational events called "Friendship Days" were held instead.[4] Howev-

[1] The text has been prepared with support of the international project "Homophobia and discrimination of gays and lesbians in enlarged Europe," Vytautus Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania.

The First Pride March was staged 23 July 2005. The Church, politicians, high government officials and radical non-governmental organisations protested against the Pride. Riga city council banned the Pride but the Administrative court overruled this decision. Thousands of protesters gathered to prevent the demonstration. Despite police protection the demonstration had to change its route and demonstrators had to be evacuated. Eight demonstrators were detained. Later the debate continued in the media continuing to provoke hatred against sexual minorities.

[2] The relatively peaceful ending of the Soviet regime in the Baltic states began in 1989 and was named the "singing revolution" referring both to the peaceful nature of the revolution and the actual role of singing in the process of change. The major event starting the revolution was the action "Baltic Way" commemorating the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact leading to the occupation of the Baltic States. Inhabitants of the Baltic States held their hands creating a single chain passing through the three countries.

[3] The Latvian First Party used the protection of the family as one of their key slogans. They saw sexual minorities threatening family values. The party worked out suggestions for banning homosexual propaganda in schools and the media during the pre-election period in the summer of 2006, but these propositions were not accepted by the majority in Parliament.

[4] The LGBT organisation Mozaīka organised the "Friendship Days" events around Pride 2006 believing that the information campaign would benefit both the LGBT community

er, representatives of the "no-pride movement" attacked the participants of the educational events throwing human excrement and splashing holy water.[5] The police did not intervene.

This paper attempts to explain the hostile and violent reaction of Latvian society, from an anthropological perspective, remote from the actual events. There are several levels of analysis. Firstly, we can critically describe the social construction of homophobia linking it with masculinity and sexuality. Patriarchy and heteronormativity, operating at this level, can help to understand the process of social construction of homophobia. Secondly, we can ask the question of how this social construction is taken for granted by looking at how principles of social order become self evident, lived and enacted. At this level we look at categories of thought and their interrelatedness creating an "objective" social world.

Bourdieu (2001) in his last book *Masculine domination* declares his interest in the naturalisation process of socially constructed gender categories. In this rather theoretical work he outlines the principles of symbolic masculine domination locating its sources in the naturalised, institutionalised and embodied principles of social order.[6] In this context homophobia can be interpreted as a form of symbolic domination

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and society at large. The events were organised in collaboration with several local and foreign NGOs and included a series of seminars on discrimination, sexuality, and art as well as communication events. See <http://www.mozaika.lv/index.php?lng=lv&part=10&us=1001048068> (29 November 2006).

5 The NoPride Association is a non-governmental organisation with the goal "to maintain traditional family values and emphasize their importance in society of Latvia. We think that traditional family, which is a union between a man and a woman, is the basic value of each society, because it ensures the existence of the country and its long term development." An elaborated English web page of the organisation can be found <http://www.nopride.lv/en/> (29 November 2006).
An English description of the events can be found at <http://ukgaynews.org.uk/Archive/2006july/2201.htm> (29 November 2006).

6 Feminism and mascunility studies have also dealt with the naturalisation of gender roles, however, from a different perspective than Bourdieu does it. Bourdieu's work stems from the post-structuralist tradition in anthropology dealing with the internalisation of the classification systems in a more broad conceptual and cross-cultural level, while sociologists start from the critique of the naturalisation of masculinity and femininity in Western society (e.g. Kimmel 1994; Kaufman and Brod 1994; Butler 1990). The homophobic reaction of Latvian society is thus embedded in the categories of the world and the position of truth. Looking from the post-structuralist positions (Leach 1976; Douglas [1966] 2002; Turner 1967) homosexuality both blurs and marks the borders between male and female categories and as a border-zone is invested with ambiguity, danger and repulsion, and is tabooed. Therefore the reaction of Latvian society was an impulsive and genuine enactment of their basic categories of thinking, and the use of human excrement (another border zone of the human body) was not that surprising. Due to the ethnographic scope of the article I do not engage in a broader debate on these issues, and refer to Bourdieu to illustrate my theoretical perspective.

that is inscribed in instituted divisions and internalised in bodily perceptions like feelings of shame. According to Bourdieu from the perspective of possible social transformation of the existing symbolic domination, analysis of homosexuality "can lead to a *politics* (or a *utopia*) *of sexuality* aimed at differentiating the sexual relation from the power relation" (Bourdieu 2001, 120), as it permits the deconstruction of sexuality and family, revealing the principles they are built upon.

Another interest I share with Bourdieu's short outline on homosexuality is social change. According to Bourdieu the change in the order of symbolic domination can be brought about in two ways. First, the meaning of categories imposed by symbolic domination can be inverted: thus stigma can be turned into an emblem, an object of pride. Of course, the ultimate problem of such a transformation is that the dominated construct themselves within the categories of the dominant. These categories are constructed to make the dominated invisible and stigmatized. When the dominated articulate them, they simultaneously reaffirm the act of their symbolic domination. Second, the internalised categories (producing gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals along with other categories) can be changed themselves. The category of LGBT dissolves, for example, when we consider partnerships in terms of mutual love and recognition of equal relationships between the partners. Looking from this perspective, the sex of each partner does not play an important role. Bourdieu sees the strength of the gay and lesbian movement in "visible invisibility," the ability to combine both strategies for change: on the one hand, by using the means of non-discrimination and the rights of "the" homosexuals (making "the" homosexuals a category) and, on the other hand, their rights to be full citizens (blurring the same category).

Moreover, the Latvian case provides yet a further ground for analysis. Despite the similarities of the patriarchal order, other factors like the history and perceptions of sexuality, traditions of public and private divisions, the skills of public discussion as well as the expression of agency in the Soviet period and afterwards are different in the "old" and the "new" Europe.[7] I argue that the main difference between both "Europes" lies in the relationship of the dominant discourse towards the dominated. State-socialism with its hegemonic tradition of truth established a different relationship between the dominant and dominated discourses. So, not only the categories of division but also their interrelation determined the outcome of how homosexuality was perceived, lived and institutionalized.

[7] I see agency as the ability to produce and reproduce practice and interaction. I discuss the issue in Putniņa (1999, 23–24).

I propose to outline the Latvian Pride March events through the perspective of symbolic domination. I briefly sketch out the articulation and categorisation of homosexuality in the public space trying to find the cause of what moved Latvian society to violent reaction. I take the sexuality aspect of the public debate as an example, and explore its construction and naturalization in more detail. Both the traditions of the articulation of sexuality and its contents are important considering the ways sexuality is embodied and expressed. The perceptions of family roles naturalised by biologically determined sexual roles (using the chain: biology-sexuality-family based on the same system of classification of male-female difference) have also played a considerable part in debating homosexuality, since family seems to be "a polite language" in which to articulate sexuality.[8] Finally, hegemonic traditions of truth along with discoursive trends on religion, science, medicine and legal issues provide space and form for the homosexuality debate.

For this analysis I draw on my notes regarding a number of public debates staged by the Latvian Association of Anthropologists, the Ministry of Social Integration and "Mozaīka," an organisation for LGBT people and their friends. I have taken two texts from the intensive debate to examine closely: a session of the internet forum of "Diena," the largest Latvian daily newspaper on 1 August 2005 (including 56 comments) and the parliamentary debate of 15 June 2006 on the amendment of the Employment Law prohibiting discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation.[9] Additionally I used the results of a survey on Latvian social attitudes towards homosexuals[10] (Makarovs 2006) as well as my own research findings (see Putnina 2006) on youth sex education in Latvia conducted at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006.

[8] A distinction between the different schemes of perception ought to be made. Most of the texts analysed do not use critical approaches to biology, sexuality and family, established in theories of gender and the critique of sex roles. "Gender" is a new category in Latvian language use and has not been appropriated by the general public. "Gender equality" is translated as "sex equality," and as Caune et al. (2005) demonstrate is also conceptualised as sex equality. I see gender as a system of classification that produces male-female difference along the fields of biology, sexuality, family and others; family being considered a more "polite" and "appropriate" language than that of physiology or sexual behaviour to express the same male-female differences in bodily, sexual and family practices.

[9] See the full text of the debate in Latvian at <http://www.saeima.lv/steno/2002_8/st_060615/st1506.htm> (29 November 2006).

[10] This representative survey of the Latvian population was carried out in the spring and summer of 2006 (N = 1060).

Homosexuality and the Public Space

According to the findings of a social attitude survey (Makarovs 2006) the majority of the Latvian population has negative attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexuals. 26% of respondents condemned both homosexuals and their lifestyle, 37% condemned the homosexual lifestyle but did not despise homosexual people, while only 25% condemned neither homosexual people nor their lifestyle. Even though social scientific arguments have become part of a discoursive line in the debate on homosexuality, the significance of these figures in itself is subject to interpretation, since homosexuality is a relational category and gradations of attitude can be linked both to the meaning of and the relation with that category the respondent has established in the context of the "correct" Latvian social rhetoric on homosexuality.

The formulation of this "correct" rhetoric arose gradually. A few major cases can be mentioned prior to the summer of 2005 when the homosexuality debate appeared in the Latvian media. The first case was a scandal in 1999, followed by court proceedings alleging paedophilia in 2000.[11] This scandal tied homosexuality to paedophilia and provoked enormous public interest. Another case concerned the Latvian right-wing nationalist Aivars Garda who organized an essay competition and published a book "Homosexuality—shame and disaster for humanity."[12] Since the Latvian head of the Catholic Church and several MPs contributed articles to this book, the media paid great attention. Meanwhile the bill on the registration of same-sex partnerships put forward by the Latvian Human Rights Office in 1999 was rejected without much public discussion (see Waitt 2005, 168).

However, homosexuality only became a really hot issue in Latvia in the summer of 2005, when the first Pride March was staged. Since then homosexuality has been increasingly exploited in politics, leading to an amendment of the Constitution's clause on marriage defining it specifi-

[11] The scandal started when two persons were arrested in August 1999 for organising a paedophile network. With the involvement of the media the network was alleged to include persons well known in society. When the scandal developed further several high ranking governmental officials and public figures were named and accused of being homosexuals and paedophiles in February 2000. A Parliamentary Commission was organised to investigate the case but it ended with the initiator of the scandal being tried for slander. See the descriptions in Latvian at <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=9444>, <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=1274725> and <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=15494644> (29 November 2006).

[12] Aivars Garda is a politician representing a small Latvian party, the head of the right wing organisation Latvian National Front and a publisher.
See the description of the event in Latvian at <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=2731214> (29 November 2006).

cally as a "union between a man and a woman,"[13] and the rejection of suggestions to include the prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in the Employment Law. However, a bill seeking to prohibit "popularizing homosexuality" in schools and media was thrown out in the summer of 2006. All these events preceded the general election in the autumn of 2006. Given that only 3% of respondents admitted that politicians might influence their views on homosexuality (Makarovs 2006), the extreme public reaction against the Pride March can scarcely be explained by the effects of political agitation alone.

As politicians tend to play on existing social and moral attitudes, at most exacerbate, rather than establishing them, we can assume that latent heteronormativity deeply embedded in Latvian society was activated by the public manifestations of gay and lesbian interest groups. They provoked the explicit formulation of the attitude towards homosexuality which reached further than the previously visible ultra-nationalist propaganda and expert comments on the subject. Gays and lesbians in the process of organising themselves inevitable became a "minority," while mobilizing the "majority." This gave rise to the homophobic movement that tried to reassert heteronormative values as if those had been lost under the pressure of homosexuals.

Gordon Waitt (2005), one of the few researchers of homosexuality in Latvia, discusses heteronormative construction of Latvian citizenship finding its expression in political media statements and spaces in Riga. He also concludes that despite the de-criminalisation of homosexuality,[14] the overall political setting discriminates social minorities by using ethnic, sexed and gendered nationalism to sustain the unstable political, economic and social systems characteristic of post-soviet nations.

The Naturalness of Sexual Acts

The repertoire used in discussing homosexuality does not only accommodate homosexuality within the public discourse but also reveals the experience of people articulating these discourses as well as defining the borders and the rules of "normal" sexuality, citizenship and family.

A public seminar on tolerance against the sexual minorities organised by the Secretariat for Societal Integration 21 April 2006 in Riga

[13] See the description of the event in Latvian at <http://www.delfi.lv/archive/article.php?id=13050254> (29 November 2006).

[14] Homosexuality was decriminalised on 5 February 1992 when the Supreme Council of the Republic of Latvia passed the law On Changes and Amendments of the Latvian Criminal Code (cf. Lavrikovs 1999).

brought together the representatives of the Church, sexual minorities and experts. One of the debates in this seminar offers an example of the link between heteronormativity and embodied experience. The Catholic Cardinal linked female sexuality to the function of procreation arguing that female sexuality is located inside a woman's body for procreative reasons. An LGBT community representative and a psychologist asked the cardinal whether he knew where the clitoris is located and why God placed the source of female pleasure on the outside of the body. In the same discussion the Cardinal was accidentally addressed as a "heterosexual male" which did not provoke any reaction.

Gay sexuality takes a central part in public discussions of homosexuality. The details of a gay homosexual act are imagined as an inversion of "normal" sexual behaviour. As most of the participants of the analysed Internet debate over homosexuality have, probably, never had any homosexual experience, they construct its image from personal heterosexual experience. When we translate the perceived "perversity" of homosexual practice into the language of "normal" sexual behaviour, we can see the traditional male-female model of sexuality with men dominating and women subjecting. There are several reasons for taking such sexuality for granted, ranging from the traditional roles in the family to the whole cosmology of the world being constructed on male-female difference (Bourdieu 2001).

The homosexual act has become the emblem of the *no-pride movement* in Latvia which stresses the "unnaturalness" of gay sexuality by drawing attention to the "indecent" position of men in the sexual act. The paradox of the movement lies in its rather explicit sexual argumentation, while simultaneously claiming morality. In fact this morality is built upon the sexual act: www.nopride.lv has become a portal where one can find freely available erotic photos and a full footage of a Belarusian TV news reportage containing the explicit homosexual act of a Latvian diplomat filmed with a hidden camera.

Following Foucault and Bourdieu, sexuality and its explicit description in its "inverse" form play a crucial role in the definition of social order. This allowed Jānis Šmits, MP of the Latvian First party and a priest, to describe a sexual act in the Latvian Parliament:[15]

> I apologise. I will quote the text of that book [Conversation Dictionary, printed at the beginning of the 20th century] what is this thing [homosexuality] and what it does. So:

[15] The Latvian First Party is a right wing party based on Christian values. Creating an alliance with a liberal party, "Latvijas Ceļš" it managed to get 8.58% of the vote in the last Parliamentary elections in the autumn of 2006.

> "Pederasty is the satisfaction of the sexual urge, inserting the male sexual organ into the anus of another man." Therefore this action [is subject] to thorough condemnation. Secondly, it is done by alcoholics and degenerates. This is in our Conversation Dictionary. This means that our Conversation Dictionary is "against" it.[16]

Later in the debate Andrejs Naglis, an MP of the same party, asserted twice that the very word combination of "sexual orientation" should be excluded from the law because its use is unacceptable to a Christian.

Articulation of Sexuality

The experience of sexuality in the Soviet period has influenced its public perception nowadays. Looking at the historical particularities of the articulation of sexuality in the Soviet era, Rotkirch (2002) gives an account of the attitude towards sexuality in the autobiographies of three generations of Soviet citizens. She outlines a gradual change of articulation of sexuality through the generation of silenced sexuality (1940–1950s), the change in sexual behaviour making sex life more variable (1960–1970s) and the appearance of sexuality in public speech (1980–1990s). Rotkirch remarks that the formulation of the public discourse on sexuality in Russia got under way in the late 1990s. However, the homosexuality debate reached Latvia without a history of public discussions on sexuality, and became anchored in the silenced sexual practice rather than in a critical discourse on it.

Latvian research on sex education confirms that sexuality is silenced in families, and formal sex education in schools is inadequate (Krecele 2006; Putniņa 2004, 2006). Public articulation of sexuality, according to the findings of a homosexuality attitude survey (Makarovs 2006), is largely unacceptable: more than half of the respondents (54%) supported the claim that they did not like any public expressions of intimacy (hugging and kissing in public), 66% admitted that they found two women kissing repulsive, while 78% found two men kissing repulsive.

The long tradition of silencing sexuality in the public space has had its impact on perceived "natural" sexual roles. Looking at the experience of sexuality of the young Latvian generation one can see a strict gender division determining both the perceived sex roles and sexual behaviour (Putniņa 2006). Masculine sexuality is constructed as a short-term presentation of sexual potency and the satisfaction of sexual needs. Partner

[16] Parliament Debates on Employment Law amendments, 9th Meeting of the Spring Session of the 8th Parliament of the Republic of Latvia (Latvijas Republikas 8. Saeimas pavasara sesijas devītā sēde), stenography 15 June 2006. <http://www.saeima.lv/steno/2002_8/st_060615/st1506.htm> (29 November 2006).

choice and the sustainability of a relationship are not important. For example, Kārlis, a 16 year old boy from a rural area, described occasional sex as a natural component of youth entertainment. Knowledge on sexuality is gained through these occasional encounters. Sexual behaviour is gendered:

> Those [sexual acts] took place in houses, staircases, cars, basements, toilets, parks, everywhere. . . . Men don't give a damn where to f*** her. Women are more picky. But a man doesn't give a damn. Actually a few agree to somewhere else—more often at home. That is linked to alcoholic drinks. That is drunk, and people become indifferent. A drunken lady does not command her c*** [laughs] (Genādijs).

Later gender asymmetry is sustained by financial means and providing for the family. It can be argued that the naturalisation of gender roles is linked to the position of authority in the family. This authority is grounded in gendered properties: for example, one of the informants, Genādijs believes that breadwinning gives a man the right to live a more relaxed sexual life while women are deemed to be devoted to their husbands in exchange for material security.

Feminine sexuality is constructed differently putting the responsibility for the consequences onto women. If boyish sexuality demands a quick subjection of his sex partner then young women are expected to demonstrate a stable moral position and the ability to form long-term relationships.

> Interviewer: Is it right for two young people to have sexual relations straight away on their first date?
> Vita, 16 year old girl: That is bad. I don't know how to say it—it is rude.
> Interviewer: What is rude?
> Vita: That boys can later talk badly about that girl.
> Interviewer: So, is that bad only for a girl? And a boy can do it?
> Vita: It is different for guys. They can boast about it.
> Interviewer: And girls cannot boast about it?
> Vita: No there is nothing to boast about when you sleep with a stranger.

Kaspars, a 17 year old boy, tells of the consequences of breaching the gendered models of sexuality: he takes his responsibility in his relationship and receives social condemnation for buying condoms or a pregnancy test. Sexuality, therefore, is not linked to the sex per se but to the right model of sexuality. Society does not criticize the masculine model of sexuality when men perform it. Young men having sex without condoms are not condemned and they are freed from the consequences of their sexual acts even if it leads to the pregnancy of their partner. The natural-

ness of this behaviour is supported by theories about instincts and physiology of sexes where the female instincts are imagined to be stronger and directed towards maternity and stability. Naturalness objectifies the gendered experience of sexuality, making other orders unnatural and to some extent unimaginable. Reciting abnormality thus delineates and confirms sexual normality.

Shame and Sexuality

Shame is an important component of sexuality allowing control of sexual behaviour both publicly and personally. Bourdieu (2001) points to the significance of shame in the construction of sexuality, seeing it as an internalized relation of symbolic domination.

Latvian Internet comments suggest that their authors experience bodily repulsion towards shameful expressions of sexuality. Shame is linked both to the "dishonourable" kind of sexual activity and its public demonstration. Texts often evoke the shared feelings of bodily repulsion towards homosexuality:

> It took a rather short period of time to make a revolution in my consciousness. I was completely indifferent [towards homosexuals] until the [Pride] march. Now I have only negative emotions and that is irreversible (rinķī apkārt, 01.08.2005 08:16:43).

The image of homosexuality in Internet comments—just like in the parliamentary debates on the amendments on the Employment Law—is consistently contradictory. On the one hand, homosexuality is associated with shame and such shameful sexual practice as anal and oral sex. On the other hand, despite its shamefulness, homosexuality is considered attractive and seductive especially for those who are not capable of dealing with and controlling their sexual behaviour:

> They often attract immature youth to their orientation—this is the main reason society objects to homosexuality. Not all 18 year olds can be viewed as having a mature mind. Let homosexuals fall in love, create relationships and have sex with equal partners but let's not allow them to search for young people (Zīle, 01.08.2005 11:34:09).

The control of sexuality is enacted by means that are paradoxical at first sight. Homophobic speakers—and not homosexual interest group members—publicly read a document called "Gay manifesto":[17] it was read several times in Parliament, cited by the head of the Catholic Church in

[17] Originating in a satiric text by Michael Swift and first published in *Gay Community News*, 15–21 February 1987, the text came to be used by right wing Christians in the USA.

public meetings, and it was quoted in almost every Internet debate concerning homosexuality. It was cited frequently in order to combat "homosexual ideology" and thereby express the need to have control over sexuality.

Homosexuality allows mobilizing and sharing moral concerns through the common sharing of shame which, according to Foucault ([1978] 1990), allows a moral community to be sustained. Looking at the discoursive aspects of voicing the moral community reference to the "principle of democracy"—democracy being a new principle and usually evoked by the supporters of civil society and state officials—is persistent:

> Sexual orientation is a choice and if somebody has chosen something abnormal or crazy (for example, eating shit), then I have the right in a democratic society to express my condemnation and repulsion to such activities (haris, 01.08.2005 06:02:58).

The majority argument justifying the discrimination of homosexuals was used in the Parliamentary debate on the amendment of the Employment Law as well, coining new ways of articulating democracy.

The Tradition of Thinking

Finally, the quality of the dialogue on sexuality is influenced by the tradition of the discoursive practice. As I mentioned earlier, silencing sexuality and putting it in the realm of practice did not allow the development of a critical discourse on sexuality. Silenced expression of sexuality is preferred over its discussion aloud.

Another difference between "old" Europe and Latvia lies in the position of "truth." The Soviet legacy has contributed to the hegemonic perception of truth. If the relationship between the dominant and dominated discourses allows the articulation of the subjected discourses, then a hegemonic relationship requires the articulation of one hegemonic discourse. A dominant discourse accepts other positions but the hegemonic discourse denies them on the grounds that there is only one "truth." The similarity between the dominant and the hegemonic discourses lies in the need for dominated and subjected discourses.

The relationship of hegemony contributes to the great fixation on words which once spelled out become truth. Sensitivity to voicing social reality is obvious in the efforts to amend laws and the belief that the written word simultaneously becomes a social reality.

The text of the manifesto and its context can be found at <http://rainbowallianceopenfaith.homestead.com/GayAgendaSwiftText.html> (11 November 2006).

The hegemonic position one allocates to one's own views forces a perception of other discourses to comply:

> For me, too, homosexuals were indifferent until the pride march—let these people do as they wish. After the march (actually shortly before it) I felt that my rights and views as a heterosexual female are violated. . . . I feel that I should participate in the anti-pride movement next summer because there are no other ways I can show that I feel oppressed and discriminated (Arī man, 01.08.2005 08:37:22).

There are several sources of discourses used in speaking of homosexuality. Medical discourse on disease is used to ground the "abnormality" and "normality" of homosexuality alongside normality and abnormality of homophobia. Reference to science, religious texts and legal rights has the same dual use and cannot be taken as sources of an ultimate authority insofar as other interpretations are not given the right to existence.

All these discoursive fields can be used in constructing homosexuality as a category. On the one hand, hegemonic discourse needs to make homosexuality visible (since it is the only criterion of classification) to be able to control it. On the other hand, it needs to stay invisible to keep the social moral pure. The controversy is partly resolved by allocating homosexuality different semi-public and public fields:

> If the husband beats his wife at home and she accepts it—this is a matter for their family. If he starts beating his wife in Riga city centre—it becomes a social matter and society expresses its opinion by putting that man into jail. Society has spoken on the gay demonstration, and it is accepted that in democracies the minority submits to the will of the majority (Kurmītis, 01.08.2005 09:54:18).

However, the ambiguity of "invisible visibility" cannot be completely resolved within the existing categories of sexuality, but it can be diminished by the elimination of the hegemonic relationship between the discourses and a critical reflection on the established categories.

Conclusion

The homophobic reaction of Latvian society is embedded both in the position of truth and the perceptions and practice of male-female difference. I explored only one aspect of this difference looking at the sexual construction and use of the sexed body but this difference is important in many more fields of everyday life. Homosexuality happened to challenge the basic premises of the social order which had been taken for granted and been invisible. Latvians missed the opportunity to debate sexuality in the 1960s. Debates around homosexuality emerged in the

virtual absence of a critical discoursive tradition dealing with sexuality and gender. However, the good thing about the categories is that they are learnt and changing.

As Bourdieu (2001) suggested, the strength of the LGBT community stems from its ability to combine visibility and invisibility strategies in promoting their interests. Using the strategies directed at the "visibilisation" of the community, however, will meet resistance while the hegemonic perception of truth dominates. Combining visibility and invisibility strategies has its weakness as well. The gendered perceptions of sexuality create the LGBT community as a category, while giving rise not only to LGBT politics but also to the use of the body and "objective" bodily perceptions of LGBT people.

Reflexivity and verbal articulation of sexuality help to establish the idea that sexuality is primarily an individual entity. The ultimate end of the individualisation effort would lead to the dissolution of homo- and heterosexuality as the crucial aspects of one's sexuality when the stress is put on the quality of relationships, and not on positions of authority.

As gender equality, egalitarian family roles and fatherhood issues are starting to be articulated and campaigned for, Latvian society may after all be on its way towards a more liberal categorization of sexuality through greater awareness of sexuality and a greater flexibility to move between the different discourses.

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Analogies of Pre-War Anti-Semitism and Present-Day Homophobia in Poland

Gregory E. Czarnecki

Introduction

Polish people often pride themselves with a long history of tolerance towards Jews. Poland in fact invited Jews to immigrate to the country in past centuries at times when the rest of Europe persecuted them.[1] By the early twentieth century the situation had changed. Anti-Semitism, which arguably reached its apex in 1930's, had become Poland's defining form of social exclusion (Tokarska-Bakir 2004). In this chapter I propose and illustrate that the mechanism and structure of anti-Semitism, based in the rise of nationalism, are currently being employed through the use of homophobia and heterosexism with the queer community as its target.

The similarities between homophobic and anti-Semitic discourse are organised in three broad categories here. Firstly, I look at the label of homosexuals and Jewish people as mentally or physically ill. Members of the stigmatized group are seen by those who exclude them as suffering from sickness that is either inherent to their nature or as a result of their habits and actions. Sexuality takes on particular salience in this manner as concepts such as sexual "respectability" and propriety gained weight during the rise of nationalism. Therefore, a particular stress is put on the "deviant" sexuality and sexual practices that are attributed to Jews and queers (whether or not they are true).

Secondly, victims of homophobia and anti-Semitism are treated as a threat to the nation. The supposed "illness" and "perverse sexuality" are not viewed as something self-contained or as a matter of concern to only the Jewish or homosexual community. Both communities are accused of deliberately attempting to fatally alter or destroy the nation and its institutions such as the government, family or the Church.

The final category of hate discourse is not necessarily confined to the exchange of words. Rather, the explicit and physical reactions to both communities are explored as a form of actualized discourse. Whether

[1] While the Crusades took place in Europe during the 13th Century, Jews fled to Poland due to its relative tolerance. This lead to a situation where by the 16th Century eighty percent of the world's Jews lived in Poland (see Weiner 2006).

violent or not, the treatment of both Jews and queers in the past and as well as today is often explained away or excused by those in the religious and sexual majority. Though the messages from the majority community might often be contradictory (for example, the pressure from the majority to alternately conceal and disclose Jews and queers), together they contribute to an atmosphere of discrimination and hostility.

In this analysis I frame my study on the comparison primarily of pre-World War II anti-Semitism to current homophobia. To carry out my comparison, I analysed selected discussions and comments made by public figures on the topic of homosexuality and the movement for gay rights which occurred in the recent decades, concentrating on the years after 2000. These are then looked at in the light of anti-Semitic discourse which reached its apex in the first half of the 20th Century in Poland and throughout Europe. The material referred to here however is not a comprehensive overview of the public debate on the issue.

This is not to suggest that homophobia did not exist in the early 1900's nor that anti-Semitism has disappeared and been replaced by homophobia in Poland today. Homophobia, as noted below, was present during the rise of nationalism together with anti-Semitism. Similarly, Poland is far from free of anti-Semitism today and Jews living in Poland are still faced with its consequences.[2] However, the recent rise in queer visibility, contrasted to the low number of Jews in Poland,[3] has meant a rise in overt homophobia exposing its very stark and harrowing similarities to past (and present) anti-Semitism.

Nationalism's Role

Nationalism, according to George L. Mosse, "is perhaps the most powerful and effective ideology of modern times" (Mosse 1985, 9). In his ground breaking book *Nationalism and Sexuality*, Mosse studies the in-depth relationship between *nationalism* and *respectability*. His work focuses primarily on sexuality and concludes that the concept of respectability developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries remain with us today. This force shaped the most important norms of society including "ideals of manliness . . . and their effect on the place

[2] A European Parliament resolution on the rise of racism and homophobia of 15 June 2006, which mentions Poland as a country with troubling occurrences of anti-Semitism, points to the current forms of anti-Semitism. See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/019-8898-165-06-24-902-20060608IPR08828-14-06-2006-2006-false/default_en.htm> (19 June 2006).

[3] This phenomenon is often labelled "anti-Semitism without Jews," considering the official number of Jews being somewhere between five and ten thousand (see Cała 2006).

of women; and insiders who accept the norms, as compared to the outsiders, those considered abnormal or diseased" (Mosse 1985, 1). These norms also defined social and civic responsibility. Once responsibility is defined, those who failed to behave in such a way risk blame for often unrelated conflicts and problems. Those who stood apart from the norm were condemned. Homosexuals were at the forefront of this exclusion as they embodied the threat against sexual respectability.

Mosse also considers racism to have played a decisive role in this alliance between nationalism and respectability. Bourgeois respectability was supported by racism that he calls a "heightened nationalism" (Mosse 1985, 133). The links between racism and sexuality are direct and immediate according to Mosse. Racism brought to a climax nationalism's tendencies towards complete domination and leaves little ability to negotiate the boundaries of inclusion in the nation. Zygmunt Bauman similarly writes "racism manifests the conviction that a certain category of human beings cannot be incorporated into the national order, whatever the efforts" (Bauman 1989, 65).

Matti Bunzl, in his book *Symptoms of Modernity,* applies Mosse's analysis of nationalism in his study of anti-Semitism and homophobia in twentieth century Austria. Bunzl shows that Jews and queers became linked through a "normalising process that imagined modern collectives as ethnically homogeneous and inherently masculinist entities" (Bunzl 1999, 13). Both Jews and queers emerged in their modern form during this period of nationalism in the late nineteenth century. Jews were reconstructed using the relatively new concept of race, a concept in which racial differences were "no longer perceived as chance variations but as immutable; fixed in place" (Mosse 1985, 133). At the same time, calling upon Michel Foucault's work, Bunzl maps a similar transformation of the constructed "homosexual" identity as being "predicated on the emergence of sexuality as an irreducible and constitutive aspect of self" (Bunzl 1999, 13). With these two groups newly identified, they were used as social signifiers to "demarcate the symbolic space of the nation" (Bunzl 1999, 14). By defining the "in group" it became clear who was part of the "out group."

Poland, like Austria and Germany, was similarly involved in a nation-building process at turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The historical trajectories of Jews and queers that were influenced by the alliance of bourgeois respectability and nationalism spread across Europe and cut across all classes (Mosse 1985, 2). Therefore, the examples of past anti-Semitism below come not only from Poland but also from various European countries such as Germany.

Stigmatising Jews and Queers as Ill

Both the Jewish and queer communities have been labelled as inherently abnormal in anti-Semitic and homophobic discourse. Sander Gilman harkens back to the Middle Ages of Europe when already Jews were marked as a symbolic "leper" and confined to prevent the transmission of diseases they may carry. Medical surveys in the late 1700's continued to report that Jews in Eastern Europe were more diseased than others and were responsible for spreading specific diseases as syphilis and conjunctivitis (Gilman 1985, 151). Such sentiments encouraged a sense of paranoia amongst populations that fear epidemics of disease. Furthermore, these sentiments promoted an atmosphere that led to the confinement of Jews in urban ghettos.

The queer community, more specifically gay men, have similarly been the target of blame for disease and epidemic. This analogy of illness is particularly acute when one considers the prevalent association between gay men and the AIDS epidemic. To some degree, the concern of gay men being ill has served to justify ostracizing the community from society under the reasoning that promoting homosexuality would be akin to promoting the spread of disease. In a talk show aired on the main public television station in Poland, March 2006, Joanna Najfeld, described as a Catholic activist affiliated with the website www.tolerancja.net, took part in discussion regarding the accusation that a queer organisation had distributed flyers on HIV prevention in high schools. Najfeld was quoted as saying "Why should the group most at risk of HIV be teaching others about prevention? That's like criminals teaching about the criminal code."[4] This comment went without critique from the host of the show. Due to such generalised opinions and based upon what many claim to be sound medical science, men who participate in homosexual activities have also been banned from donating blood in Poland, for instance.[5]

Beyond physical diseases attributed to the queer community and Jews, mental illness has also been used to discredit both groups. As the 19th century came to an end, the medical profession of Europe was not averse to using racist and homophobic discourse in their diagnosis of illness. Mosse refers to doctors who claimed that homosexuality was a symptom

[4] Mikołaj Lizut, "Gdzie postawi granic tolerancji w szkole?" (Where should the boundaries of tolerance be in school?), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/kraj/1,34308,3242946.html> (29 March 2006).

[5] The exclusion of homosexuals from donating blood is not unique to Poland however, as it occurs in various countries across Europe. Efforts to change the policy in Poland have not been successful. See *Homoseksualiści – grupą ryzyka!* (Homosexuals—High risk Group!), <http://www.innastrona.pl/news_pokaz.phtml?nID=1819> (30 October 2003).

of modernization and that mental illness was common amongst homosexuals and parents of homosexuals. In the same vein, Jews were to harbour the specific disease of nervousness. Various other illnesses were linked to each other as Mosse notes that "the outsider must be totally diseased" (Mosse 1985, 136).

It is not rare that in Poland homosexuality itself is perceived as a mental sickness that can and should be cured despite the fact that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from its list of illnesses in 1992.[6] Gay pride marches are regularly assaulted by opponents who scream "Get treatment!" However, this sentiment is also found in teachings of the Catholic Church and its hierarchy as well as by certain sectors of the medical and psychiatric community. Katarzyna Bojarska, a Polish sexologist, notes that amongst the psychiatric profession it is not rare to find implicit and explicit homophobia. Even if therapists do not consider homosexuality a disease, "they often assume the superiority of heterosexuality and advocate for queers to change."[7]

This therapeutic voice of homophobia is a basis for various support groups who work to heal homosexuals of their homosexuality. Odwaga (Courage) is one such organisation that operates under the Catholic teachings of "love the sinner, hate the sin" and seek to assist queers in becoming heterosexual. Their main goal is to "help those with homosexual tendencies to sustain purity and denounce the homosexual lifestyle."[8] Similar mission statements can be found with Pomocy2002 (Assistance2002), and Pascha. The League of Polish Families (LPR),[9] a coalition party in the current Polish government, has been reported to be in touch with Odwaga, considering that their mission is similar to the outlooks of LPR members.[10] Front-bench Member of Parliament from LPR and former Member of the European Parliament, Wojciech Wierzejski, has also been said to have suggested establishing "re-education camps" for homosexuals as a way of treating them,[11] a harrowing comment considering

[6] See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_psychology> (10 July 2006).

[7] Katarzyna Bojarska, interviewed on 27 April 2006.

[8] See <http://www.odwaga.oaza.org.pl/homepage.html> (13 July 2006).

[9] The League of Polish Families is a Catholic-Nationalist right-wing party with approximately 8% support. Despite its relatively low support, it is in the ruling coalition and has members in key positions such as the Ministry of Education. See Jan Repa, "Polish Nationalism Resurgent," *BBC News*, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4754079.stm> (9 May 2006).

[10] Paweł P. Reszka, "Ja cię, synu, naprawię" (I'll fix you, son), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/df/1,34467,3407056.html?as=9&ias=10> (16 June 2006).

[11] Aleksandra Krzyżaniak-Gumowska, "O szwedzkim ustawodawstwie i warszawskim konflikcie o Paradą Równości" (On Swedish law and the Warsaw conflict over the

the implications of employing the notion of "camps" when referring to homosexuals in the context of post-World War II Poland.

In a curious form of logic, the advocacy of Jewish emancipation was said to be a manifestation of their mental illness and the "disease of equality." It seemed ridiculous to some in the late 1700's that Jews would aspire towards equality in society (Gilman 1985, 152). The desire for political equality was seen as a sign of insanity in Jews and was also treated as such by the French in the Third Republic (Gilman 1985, 153). Polish nationalists of the late 1930's were similarly ready to expose supposedly Jewish organisations such as the Esperantists. In their fight against anti-Semitism, members of these organisations espoused "the 'progressive', 'tolerant', 'democratic' and 'peaceful' collaboration of all nations" for which they were blamed by nationalists for poisoning the youth (Landua-Czajka 1989, 197). By classifying these terms as insane and coming from the insane, it was less likely that opponents had to argue on the merits of the debate.

Many politicians in modern-day Poland seem to capitalise on similar notions of madness in their dismissal of movements towards equality. This can be heard amongst those who claim that traditional and moral Poland is being held hostage by a homosexual minority that controls European politics. In a sign that even the current government considers claims for "equality" as slightly unreasonable, the Ministry of Education made an attempt to change the title of a Council of Europe (CoE) programme called All Different—All Equal to All Different—All in Solidarity in early 2006. The change was explained by the Minister as an attempt to avoid confusing the programme with the Warsaw Equality Parade organised by the gay community as the term *equality* is used in both the CoE programme and the Parade name.[12] Members of the same party (Law and Justice, *Prawo i Sprawedliwość*—PiS)[13] that attempted to alter the CoE programme title had banned the Equality Parade in Warsaw. In banning the parade, the message seemed to be that the party was not keen on having what they considered deviants walk the streets. Their reference to the marches as a reason to change the programme name makes it clear that they would not support a notion of "equality" that is advocated by the queer community.

Equality Parade), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2005, <http://miasta.gazeta.pl/warszawa/1,34889,2740386.html> (31 May 2005).

[12] See "There is No Room for Equality in Poland," <http://alldifferent-allequal.info/node/28> (10 Febuary 2006).

[13] PiS is the ruling conservative right-wing party.

Threat to the Nation

One might be able to be convinced that merely being "sick", "mentally ill" or "deviant" does not pose a threat to the nation per se. However, those characterised as such, namely the Jews and homosexuals, were and are not often looked upon as innocent beings plagued with these misfortunes. Instead, Jews and queers are frequently labelled as enemies of the state and active threats to the nation.

The 1930's were rife with the common stereotype of the Jews as a "state within a state," implicitly treasonous to the nation and against Christianity. In reading Marcel Proust, Jonathan Freedman notes how both Jews and "sodomites" were perceived as having the ability of being communities within communities who "comprise a powerful, destabilising force which can counter the dominant culture" (Freedman 2001, 525). One right-wing publication boasted "[we] cannot allow the parasitic Jew to destroy the organism of the state from inside" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 179). Propaganda such as this was common and often made by those who were proud to be antisemites in their zeal to defend Poland from this internal enemy. Adam Ostolski comments that the term "homosexual lobby" is euphemistically used currently in Poland to label what is a common stereotype: all that is wrong can be blamed on a *conspiracy* of the "Jews, Masons, feminists or homosexuals" (Tomasik 2004, 72). Both the "Jewish conspiracy" and the "homosexual lobby" are made up of a "cosmopolitanism," associated with modernism and decadence (Gilman 1985, 153–154).

The concept of an international homosexual lobby is a concept that is readily used in public discourse to discredit movements that attempt to deal with homophobia. A conservative, but by no means radical, weekly magazine *Ozon* recently dedicated an issue with the cover featuring a young heterosexual couple proudly proclaiming "We are homophobes."[14] This is a strikingly similar sentiment to Landua-Czajka's quote from a radical right-wing nationalistic publication above in which they proudly proclaim to be antisemites. *Ozon's* lead article entitled "The Pink International in Action" warns readers that "The gay lobby has reached its goal. European Socialists and Liberals are forcing us by law to accept homosexual partnerships" (Michalik 2006). Readers are reminded in the article that this small minority is collaborating with international forces to make Poland do exactly what it does not want to do, simultaneously working from within and getting support from outside.

Similarly, queer organisations are blamed for attempting to disrupt and destabilise the government. When LPR party leader Roman Gi-

[14] See <http://www.ozon.pl/a_tygodnikozon_2_14_1100_2006_4_1.html> (14 January 2006).

ertych was appointed Minister of Education in mid-2006, thousands of people, mostly students, took to the streets in protest across all regions of Poland. As a pretext to monitor and control queer organisations and in a strategic attempt to discredit the public protests, Giertych defended himself by claiming that it is the "left wing and homosexual organisations that are behind the attacks!"[15] Fellow LPR member Wierzejski similarly commented that activists from homosexual organisations "carry out unfounded attacks on the Polish government and its Ministers practically everyday."[16] It is clear that with these proclamations the politicians are harking back to the paranoia of the enemy within, frequently used against Jews.[17]

The concept of *nation* in Poland has a specifically communal hue that therefore supports the subordination of one's individuality and difference to the commonalities of the larger whole. As Tomasz Kitliński writes, "Communism and post-communism are linked through a chauvinism in which not the individual but rather the nation is the subject. The nation must reproduce and therefore heterosexuality and Polonization is required" (Kitliński 2004, 275). Anything that stands out significantly is therefore seen as an internal threat. As described by Mosse, the "abnormality" simply does not fit in the concept of the nation that those from LPR seek to promote—for neither the homosexual nor the Jew.

Yet another concern for those who seek to defend Poland against internal threats is the sanctity of the traditional Polish family. A heavy importance is placed on the family as the cornerstone of Polish society, and as a symbol of the nation. Any behaviour that is seen as anti-family can also be paramount to treason, or a deliberate attempt to destroy the nation. The sanctity of the family is discussed by many Polish academics, chief among them is Magdalena Środa, professor of philosophy and former Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men. Środa herself was deeply criticized and faced dismissal from her post when she commented on domestic abuse at an international conference.

[15] See "Szukają przeciwników Romana Giertycha" (They're looking for Roman Giertych's Opponants), *Rzeczpospolita*, <http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/gazeta/wydanie_060601/kraj/kraj_a_3.html> (1 June 2006).

[16] Joanna Jałowiec, "Przeciwnik Giertycha to gej. A gej to pedofil" (Opponents of Giertych are Gay. And Gays are Paedophiles), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <http://serwisy.gazeta.pl/kraj/1,34308,3347500.html> (15 May 2006).

[17] It is worth noting that Roman Giertych is not unaware of these links to anti-Semitism. He is the grandson of Jędrzej Giertych who was active during the 1930's in the Camp of Greater Poland Party (*Obóz Wielkiej Polski*), known for its anti-Semitism and nationalism, advocating economic boycotts against Jews for example. See <http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C4%99drzej_Giertych> (2 July 2006).

She stated that although the Catholic Church is not directly responsible for supporting domestic abuse, there is still a partial link between them. The responses to her comments by politicians and the media were stern, claiming her suggestion that the Church was implicated at all in such a matter was absurd. She was not terribly surprised by the reaction, saying, "In Poland, the family and not the individual is seen as the centre of value. That's why we often defend the family as an inherent good at the expense of defending women."[18] In this situation, it mattered less if women really were abused at home and how to tackle this issue. What mattered is that another symbol, the Catholic Church, was attacked and the family structure that is supported by the Church was threatened.

The need to protect family from homosexuals is a defining feature of Polish homophobia. Very few debates on issues concerning the gay community transpire without a mention by opponent of gay rights how these rights would negatively affect the family or children of Poland. This was evident in 1995 in debates during the drafting of the Polish Constitution on Article 32 that prohibits discrimination. The original version of Article 32 paragraph 2 included sexual orientation as one of the grounds upon which one could not be discriminated. This version was effectively blocked by protests from the Catholic Church, right-wing parties and the then-President Lech Wałsęa, who defended his decision by saying that the inclusion of such verbiage "would open up the door for a threat to the family and moral upbringing of children" (Leszkowicz 2004, 104).

The mental illness that was ascribed to Jews and queers outlined above was often associated with what the majority perceived was an exhibited sexual deviance. Sexual practices were not considered a private matter in which one engaged in the privacy of one's own home. Rather they were an issue of crucial public importance as their sexuality also endangered the healthy family life and children of the Polish nation. Jews were said to manifest their mental illness by engaging in marriage and sexual practices that violate basic human sexual taboos, chief among them was incest. Gilman explains that accusing Jews of such deviance "was a result both of the level of late nineteenth century science and of the desire for categories with which to define the explicit nature of the Other" (Gilman 1985, 157).

Blaming Jews for the demise of the family however was not as straightforward since Jewish family life was often greatly admired by even antisemites. Mosse suggests that the racism of early nineteenth century

[18] See "Pechowa Środa" (Unlucky Środa), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, <http://szukaj.gazeta.pl/archiwum/0,51943.html>, (10 December 2004).

Europe blamed Jews for keeping their own family in tact "yet [their culture] was directed against the family life of others" (Mosse 1985, 142). The Jews for example were said to have an uncontrollable sexual drive that prompted them to prey on gentile women and were said to "convey women to houses of ill repute" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 183).

Furthermore Jews were believed to serve as a bad example for children and the rest of society. Landua-Czajka quotes a newspaper from 1930's Poland that laments "A young woman, showing parts of her naked body in the street, hair cut short, rouged face, dancing the Charleston." The paper claims this debased woman was "a victim of Jewish influences" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 183). Jewish influences on culture were not the only threat to Polish children. Polish myths such as Jews kidnapping Polish children in order to get their blood needed for religious ceremonies served to demonize Jews. The power and danger of such a stereotype was most vividly enacted in a pogrom in the city of Kielce. In early July 1946, a rumour (later confirmed to be false) had started amongst citizens of Kielce that Jews had kidnapped a young Christian boy to attempt a ritual slaying. Word spread rapidly and by 4 July 1946 over forty Jews were killed in the pogrom (Szaynok 2006).

Antisemites believed that the behaviours of Jews could be explained by the fact that Jews followed their own moral code based on the Torah. This ethic was said to be based on a superiority over non-Jews and in fact encouraged them to "harm and injure the 'goy' [non-Jew] by any means they see fit" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 177). Their attempts to destroy Christian civilisation included promotion of pornography, divorce, abortion and they were even accused of inventing birth control to destroy the Aryan race (Ostolski 2005b, 7). Homosexuals currently fill this role but rather than following an ethic of the Torah, they are said to support what Pope John Paul II coined a "civilisation of death" that permeates their actions and those of the immoral West.[19]

Much like how incest was intentionally used to demonize Jews for partaking in one of the most taboo of sexual acts, (coupled with their proclivity towards preying on Polish children for religious purposes), paedophilia is used to demonize the gay community. Accusations of paedophilia are used most commonly with gay males who are seen as particularly dangerous for children. With no scientific evidence of a connection between paedophilia and homosexuality, those who officially make this connection are capitalising on an irrational yet strongly held fear amongst the general population.

[19] See "Zatrzymajmy dewiację" (Stop Deviance), *Nasz Dziennik*, <http://www.naszdziennik.pl/index.php?typ=my&dat=20060104&id=my11.txt> (4 January 2006).

A recent court case brought against politicians from the ruling PiS party Przemysław Alexandrowicz and Jacek Tomczak accused the politicians of utilising hate speech by likening homosexuals to, amongst other things, paedophiles. During the court case involving the PiS politicians, fellow members of the party such as Norbert Napieraj concluded that "many homosexual activists are also involved in promoting other sexualities such as paedophilia."[20] These accusations are rarely disregarded by the mainstream. The ramifications of such prevalent speech in political discourse was evidenced recently when LPR Parliamentarian Wierzejski requested that the national public prosecutor instruct regional prosecutors to investigate links between homosexual organisations and paedophilia and other criminal activities nation-wide. Prosecutors are meant to establish how these organisation are funded and if they have any links to paedophilic activities regardless of the fact that no such incident has been reported.[21]

Another method to counter the Jewish threat from within and keep children safe in 1930's Poland was the exclusion of Jews from various professions including the teaching profession (Ostolski 2005a, 16–17; Landua-Czajka 1989, 174). Although discrimination based on sexual orientation at the workplace is now explicitly banned by European Union law and implemented in domestic labour code, Representative Andrzej Fedorowicz from LPR proposed an amendment to Parliament in 2003 to ban those who openly admit to their homosexuality from becoming teachers.[22] Although it did not make it to vote, the proposed amendment underscores the fact that these sentiments are still common amongst party members.

Reactions to Jewish and Queer Activity

It is impossible to claim that there was or is a unified and coherent position towards Jews or queers in Poland. Even amongst right-wing political discourse there are often various and contradictory stances that espouse anti-Semitism and homophobia. These divergent opinions ensure

[20] Michał Kopiński, "Działacz PiS: Homoseksualiści promują pedofilię" (PiS Members: Homosexuals promote paedophilia), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2006, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,53600,3401129.html> (7 June 2006).

[21] See "Wierzejski kazał prokuratorom szukać pedofilów" (Wierzejski Orders Prosecutors to Find Paedophiles), <http://www.homoseksualizm.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=115&Itemid=42> (4 December 2006).

[22] See "Karta moralności" (Morality Law), Polish Teacher's Union, <http://www.znp.edu.pl/new_arch/artykul.php?id=81&rok=2003&PHPSESSID=91d5d39c574ca553204568386e8e9780> (21 August 2003).

that both the queer and Jewish communities will find it hard to "behave properly" without encouraging criticism and discrimination from the general Polish population.[23]

For Jews of pre-War Poland, the conspiracy theories mentioned above were meant to bring attention to all the undercover Jews out there that people "could not see" but should fear. According to the theory, Jews were an "omnipresent foe (an internal as well as an external one), an enemy with almost unlimited possibilities of action" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 173). The danger included their invisibility. In *Poznaj Żyda* (*Talmud i dusza żydowska*) (Recognise the Jew—The Talmud and the Jewish Spirit) published in 1936, the anonymous author instructs readers about Jews in order to fight them more effectively. Books such as these were widely distributed and remain available to this day. The presence of this literature coupled with the lists of those who people suspected were Jews (also available now on-line) gave a clear sign that if you were hiding, there was a good chance you would be discovered sooner or later.

At the same time there was a movement among the Polish intelligentsia during the inter-war era that advocated for Jewish assimilation. This "progressive attitude" towards Jews assumed it ideal if a person's being Jewish became irrelevant. To mention whether one was Jewish would become offensive in certain social circles (Irwin-Zarecka 1989, 285). This "kinder" approach towards Jews was also present in Church doctrine. Although rabid antisemites could be found amongst the hierarchy, the official stance included respect for the person, no matter their immoral or unhealthy behaviour. This most often translated into a call for the conversion of Jews, if not forced emigration (Ostolski 2005a, 4). Certainly, the distinction between right-wing rhetoric that sought to expose the hidden Jew as opposed to the "progressive outlook" is clear. However both discourses served to encourage many Jews to be "Jewish at home, Polish in the street."

Queers in Poland, like in most places, have long learned their lesson that it is best to keep one's sexuality a secret. Though the signals from society are clear that homosexuals who are overt about their identity are for the most part not welcome in the public sphere, there still are contradictory messages that serve to ensure that keeping undercover is often not sufficient to living in a safe space.

Apart from the glaring number of homosexuals who chose to stay in the closet rather than reveal their identity, the reaction from society

[23] The concept of stigmatisation described by the seminal works of Ervin Goffman are used here. Most specifically his theory that the stigmatised individual must act as if his burden is not significant so that those of the majority can pretend as if there was no issue of discrimination, leading to a "phantom acceptance" (see Goffman 1963, 121).

when doing the opposite simply reaffirms the message that they are not accepted (Graff 2006). This is most vividly documented both in the public and media reaction to social awareness campaigns and equality parades organised by queer organisations. In 2003, the Campaign Against Homophobia launched a photo exhibit and billboard campaign that featured 30 pairs of lesbians and gay men holding hands entitled Let Them See Us. The title itself harks back to the reality that queers were not willing to be invisible any more. The dominant reaction from the media, as essayist and Gender Studies lecturer Agnieszka Graff summarizes it, was: "How dare they *impose* themselves on us, how dare they make themselves so *conspicuous*" (Graff 2006, 11).

Taking to the streets is another form of public display that was an issue for Jews in years past and is currently a legal challenge for queers in Poland. Ostolski mentions how even the mere sight of a Jew in a Warsaw park was enough to offend the public in one case of 1939 (Ostolski 2005b, 16). Presently, parades of equality are often seen as unnecessarily provocative by even those who do not consider themselves to be particularly homophobic and claim not to "mind" homosexuals as long as they are invisible to them. In recent years however, marches that have been organised by queer organisations in Warsaw, Krakow and Poznań have been met with violence and often banned by government officials. Reasons for banning such events almost always include, to some extent, protecting public morality and respecting Christian values (Gruszczyńska 2004, 144).

When violence befalls either Jews or queers who chose to be visible in the face of such attitudes, a common response to both groups often involves blaming the victim. Jews were accused of bringing anti-Semitism on themselves. Landau-Czajka quotes a nationalist newspaper from 1931 in which the essayist writes that anti-Jewish movement is an outcome of "the Jewish nation itself, in its clear refusal to be assimilated" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 179). Other nationalists of the time disagreed that employing force was a solution to the Jewish question, yet disturbing public order "did indicate a basically sound defensive reaction by the Polish nation" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 188). At the same time, the Catholic Church was known to abstain from taking a strong stance against anti-Jewish violence. According to Ostolski, when requested to denounce the pogroms and killings of Jews after the Second World War in Poland, many bishops refused, using the excuse that the Church denounces all forms of violence therefore has no need to specially denounce the violence against Jews (Ostolski 2005b, 16).

Although the violence that has met the queer community during equality parades and marches in recent years has in no way reached the lev-

els of the pogroms that the Jewish community suffered, opponents of the marches have become more physically aggressive in their protests using eggs, bottles, rocks and other objects to hurl at participants.[24] Ania Gruszczyska describes the events in which the mayor of Krakow, in his begrudging approval of the 2004 March for Tolerance, also gave tacit approval to the violent reaction since the homosexuals were after all "forcing acceptance from society" (Gruszczyńska 2004, 145). Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek of Krakow also defended the citizens of his city by saying that the general society also has its rights and "if you irritate someone you shouldn't be surprised that the fault lies on both sides" (Ostolski 2005a, 5).

As it was for Jews, it is often not enough that Polish queers simply stay out of the public eye and out of the streets. The Communist Party took advantage of the leverage *outing* has by carrying out the "Hiacynth" operation in the mid-1980's.[25] Under various ruses, the Party officials entered schools, universities, and places of work to find homosexuals. The victims were forced to admit in writing to their "deviance" under the threat that otherwise their orientation would be exposed to their family and co-workers (Tomasik 2006).

A throw back to this Communist-era strategy was a suggestion in 2003 by members of the centre-right party Civil Platform (Platforma Obywatelska—PO) that candidates for European Parliament disclose their sexual orientation. This, they explained, would ward off any later attempts at blackmail. Being aware of the social circumstances and what the public's reaction would be to such a declaration of one's homosexual orientation by a candidate makes it clear that they had other intentions, capitalising on the stigmatization that exists in Poland (Leszkowicz 2004, 102).

Discrimination of Jews in the past and of queers today can be readily documented and observed. However, the prevalence of denial and the commonly held position that there is or was no problem (or that not only are Jews and gays equal, but sometimes *more* equal and have *more* rights) contribute to the difficulties in counteracting the discriminations. Even with glaring examples such as different legal status for Jews in the 1930's, the media at that time explained that Jews should have a separate legal system to adapt to their mentality. They argued that laws for Jews should be "neither better nor worse, but different" (Landua-Czajka 1989, 179). And, according to the majority of articles in the right-wing Polish

[24] Adam Easton, "Clashes Erupt at Poland Gay March," *BBC News*, 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4956604.stm> (28 April 2006).

[25] *Outing* refers to the public disclosure of an individual's sexuality.

press during 2004, Poland is not and never was anti-Semitic (Kowalski and Tulli 2003, 490).

The "separate but equal" status of queers in Poland offers a very similar comparison, with many people explaining that this situation does in fact reflect equality. Debates around same-sex partnership are filled with examples of opponents claiming that there is no real discrimination involved.[26] In her first international visit, the newly appointed Foreign Minister was quick to state that in Poland homosexuals are not restricted in any way, and that the legal system is "open" to them, just like any minority.[27] Her statement was made despite evidence of the failure to provide full legal protection to queer people.[28]

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can observe that the anti-Semitism of years past has not yet been eradicated completely from Poland. However, its mechanisms have been used to stigmatise and discriminate against queers as queer visibility becomes more prevalent in Poland. The rise in nationalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries served to construct the modern identities of both Jews and queers. The process involved an inherent exclusion of both social groups as they embodied the characteristics that were eschewed by those who delineated the boundaries of the nation.

The chapter offered a partial summary of the similarities between the two forms of oppression. The forms that these two discriminations take have been divided into three parts here. First we could observe the framing of both Jews and queers as ill. The implications of this categorisation means among other things, calls for physical exclusion from society, attempts at conversion or therapy and a refusal to work towards social equality for Jews and queers.

The threat to the nation that Jews and queers pose was then examined. A clear and direct connection can be seen between the theories of a "Jewish conspiracy" and a "homosexual lobby," both of which are thought of as intentionally aimed at destroy the nation, state and fam-

[26] See "Dziesęći mitów prawnych gejów i lesbijek" (Ten Legal Myths of Gays and Lesbians), *Rzeczpospolita*, <http://arch.rzeczpospolita.pl/szukaj/archiwum.pl> (31 December 2004).

[27] See "Poland to Maintain Current Foreign Policy," <http://polandpress.eu/> (17 May 2006).

[28] The Campaign Against Homophobia maintains a website which refers to the various legal issues queer people face in Poland today, such as problems related to the lack of any form of registered same-sex partnership. See <http://www.mojeprawa.info>.

ily. The vital role that family plays in the Polish nation-building process means that the categorisation of Jews and queers as a destructive force and particularly harmful for children is an extremely powerful tool. This results in prohibition of Jews and queers from certain professions, overt hate speech by public officials, limits in legal protections and even violent attacks such as pogroms.

An additional hurdle that Jews and queers had to overcome and still face is the reactions to their presence and visibility in society. On one hand they are expected to remain hidden while on the other efforts are taken to disclose them. When they become victims of attacks, a common reaction is to blame them for antagonising. Despite the evidence of inequality, a further challenge is the denial of discrimination by the majority.

The historical continuum of nationalism's tendency to exclude that which is not desired has used Jews in the past as its primary recipients for discrimination. Presently queers are serving as tangible targets for similar purposes in Poland. This then is the basis for a set of common lived experiences for Jewish and queer people in Poland.

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Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in Croatia: How the Stigma Shapes Lives

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Introduction

Research projects on stigma and homosexuality in Croatia have dealt with the attitudes of the majority towards homosexuals. Scholars have not investigated the effects of stigma, faced by homosexuals and bisexuals, from the insider's perspective. Our research, adopting that perspective and focusing on the dynamics and mechanisms of stigma and related processes, is based on the experiences of homosexuals and bisexuals. It offers an inside view of the stigmatised position and stigma management of the LGB population in Croatia. It is the first *victimisation research* on lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Croatia.

Croatian lesbians, gays and bisexuals have faced and experienced many transformations of their social status in the last four years. From 2002 homosexuality has gained media attention and has become visible through the LGB organizations' advocacy for LGB human rights, LGB public manifestations such as Zagreb Pride and Queer Zagreb, and public, political and media discussions about the nature and origins of homosexuality and the extent of rights homosexuals should be ascribed to. Two opposing sides were established through these debates. The right-wing conservatives were defending heterosexual "family values" and attacking homosexuals as the major threat to traditional family values. On the other hand, the left-wing social democrats and liberals were defending LGB human rights. However, these debates were most often reduced to the issue of defending or attacking the "normality" of homosexuals, and failed to address the diversity of sexual and gender minorities, their specific human rights, and their need of protection as vulnerable and discriminated minorities.

The changes in visibility of the LGB community were accompanied with legal recognition of sexual minorities' human rights and protection against discrimination. Since 2003 ten laws have been adopted which include anti-discrimination clauses on sexual orientation.[1] These laws

[1] Electronic Media Act (NN 122/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/1729.htm>, Gender Equality Act (NN 116/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/1584.htm>,

do not recognize any specific sexual identity or particular need of the LGB population; they only point at characteristics (race, ethnicity, religion etc.) of socially vulnerable groups among which sexual orientation is mentioned as well. Croatian law does not recognize discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity and gender expression in its legislature. Nevertheless, the legal protections of women's and men's rights are regulated by using the term sex.

In 2003 same-sex relationships were formally recognised in the Same-Sex Partnership Act. It grants only 2 out of 27 rights enjoyed by married heterosexual partners: the right to inheritance of half of the joint assets accrued by the couple and the duty of care for the partner. The law does not afford same-sex unions with the benefits of the national social, pension or health care system. Therefore the value of this law is symbolic rather than practical.

Bearing in mind the fact that public discussions have not shown any awareness of the vulnerability sexual minorities face and the need for their legal protection, we should trace the reasons for the adoption of this legislation somewhere else. Bagić and Kesić (2006) suggested that there are two important reasons for this: the political will of the Croatian government to harmonize its laws with European Union legislation, and the efforts of LGBT activists. Their continuous lobbying and advocacy were also supported by Croatian feminist and peace organizations.[2]

However, most of this legislation still functions at the declarative level. According to the Annual Report on the Status of Human Rights of Sexual and Gender Minorities in Croatia 2005 (Juras and Grđan 2006) the Same-Sex Partnership Act has been applied only once since its introduction in 2003:[3] in 2005 a gay couple, who wanted to move to Canada,

Labour Act (NN 137/04) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2004/2415.htm>, Law on Croatian Radio Television (NN 25/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/0362.htm>, Law on Government Officials (NN 92/05) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2005/1831.htm>, Law on Scholarship and Higher Education (NN 123/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/1742.htm>, Media Act (NN 59/04) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2004/1324.htm>, Penal Act Modifications and Supplements (NN 111/03, NN 105/04, NN 71/06) http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2006/1706.htm>, <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2004/2026.htm>, <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/1496.htm>, Same–Sex Partnership Act (NN 116/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/1584.htm> and Schoolbook Standard (NN 63/03) <http://www.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeno/2003/0749.htm> (12 September 2006).

[2] Since 2002 Lesbian Group Kontra (Zagreb), Lesbian Organization LORI (Rijeka) and Iskorak—Organisation Centre for the Rights of Sexual and Gender Minorities (Zagreb) have been advocating and lobbying for LGBT human rights together with Woman's Room (Zagreb), Croatian Women's Network (national network of women's organizations) and Peace Studies Institute (Zagreb).

[3] The report was compiled by the Team for Legal Changes of Iskorak and Kontra, which is the common body of Iskorak and Lesbian group Kontra.

registered in order to regulate their property rights and immigration papers. Also in 2005, the first ever judgement was passed by a Croatian court in respect of a homosexual victim: the accused, who had threatened a homosexual person, was convicted and given a suspended sentence of one year imprisonment. Team for Legal Changes also reported that regional police officers seriously violated human rights of sexual minorities. Police officers refused to protect victims from violence, failed to recognize the homophobic character of violence and rejected cooperation with LGBT activists. Additionally, according to the Team, victims were afraid of stigmatization which prevented them from reporting homophobic violence. Furthermore, as the Report suggests, lesbians, gays and bisexuals are not aware of their rights, or of ways to exercise these rights. Therefore most cases have not been reported to the police (Juras and Grđan 2006).

There are several reasons for the poor functioning of the anti-discrimination legislation, including the opportunistic stance of the Croatian government with a view to join the European Union rather than a policy to advance human rights of sexual minorities; the lack of knowledge and awareness of existing anti-discrimination legislation; the absence of realistic social representation of LGB people in the media and in public discourse. However, the most salient reason is probably the fear and mistrust of lesbians, gays and bisexuals towards police, the court system and society as a whole as they fear that they could be repeatedly violated and stigmatized.

Public opinion surveys show that there is a strong division in views about homosexuality. For example, according to a public opinion poll conducted by the Puls Agency in 2002,[4] 47% of respondents would make friends with homosexual persons, while 50% would not. 41% of them believed that the rights of homosexual persons are endangered. About 39% of respondents would also grant the right of same-sex marriage (Palašek, Bagić, and Ćepić 2002). Similarly, according to the findings of the Hendal Agency in 2005 66% of persons, who are in charge of making business decisions in 202 Croatian companies, replied "no," when asked whether they would hire a homosexual person who is out (Hendal Agency 2005). Based on these findings it is rather questionable to which extent the existing laws can protect sexual minorities. Obviously there is a clear discrepancy between the theory of legislation and the practice of the everyday life experiences of lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Croatia. On the one hand, their rights are formally recognized and protected,

[4] A representative sample of 600 persons was surveyed.

on the other, there is an evident public unease about homosexuality and there are strong homophobic attitudes towards homosexuals. With this discrepancy in mind, we wanted to explore the "true meaning" of LGB everyday life experiences and focus on the ways lesbians, gays and bisexuals handle their sexual minority identities within the heteronormative Croatian society.

Theoretical Considerations of Stigma

Since theories of stigma discuss the experiences of undervalued social minority groups and social interaction patterns used by their members, we decided to take these theories as a frame of reference for our study on LGB people's everyday life experiences. The following sections will provide a short overview of influential social psychological and sociological models of stigma, ranging from Erving Goffman's classic discussions on stigma (1963) to contemporary models of stigma proposed by Link and Phelan (2001) and Major and O'Brien (2005).

Goffman (1963, 13) defined stigma as "an attribute that is really discrediting," but he also emphasized that stigma is inherent in interactions between the stigmatized and the stigmatizing persons. The shift of focus from the attributes of the stigmatized persons to the context in which these interactions take place is also evident in Major and O'Brien's (2005, 395) proposal that stigma "does not reside in the person but in a social context," and that "it is relationship- and context-specific." Link and Phelan (2001, 367) redefined and extended this concept by pointing out that stigma includes processes like labelling, negative stereotyping, exclusion, and discrimination. Accordingly power relations and disparity are essential for the comprehension of the nature and reproduction of stigma, stigmatized individuals and communities.

It can be seen that the definition of stigma has become broader through time. Instead of pointing to the devaluated characteristics of persons or a social group, stigma is now referred to as a process that encompasses the value system and its mechanisms of control, together with the dynamics between the stigmatized and those who stigmatize. In this way stigma and stigmatization became synonyms.

The key question which is of interest here is how stigmatized persons live their everyday lives and which mechanisms they employ to cope with their stigma. Stigmatized people are aware of their stigmatized status in society. Crocker and her colleagues (Crocker 1999; Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998) argue that members of stigmatized groups develop collective representations, i.e. shared beliefs that include their understanding

of the reasons why their group occupies the specific position in the social hierarchy, awareness that the others stereotype and do not respect their group, and recognition that they could become victims of discrimination. Discrimination is also addressed in the work of Major and O'Brien (2005, 396) who suggest that the mechanisms of stigmatization include discrimination and negative treatment, emphasizing its negative effects on the social status, psychological well-being and physical health of the stigmatized people.

Given all the negative consequences of stigmatization, the question is how stigmatized people manage to live with their stigma. This greatly depends upon the type of stigmatized attribute that the individual carries; some are visible and evident, while some are not easily identifiable. People whose stigma is not evident on the spot can conceal the information about their stigma and try to pass "as normal" (cf. Goffman 1963). Goffman referred to people whose stigma is obvious or known as "discredited persons," while naming those whose stigma is not known or evident "discreditable persons." Visibility is an element of the information control which influences the choice of behaviour strategy stigmatized persons can employ. Less visible stigmas enable stigmatized persons to "pass as normal" or to create enough space for negotiation about revealing their stigmatized identity. Greater visibility, on the other hand, carries a threat of being rejected and hurt, while at the same time it offers the stigmatized person better chances to be fully accepted as a human being.

Besides visibility, Goffman discussed other strategies of information control, including different ways in which persons can reveal or hide their stigmatized identity: a person can voluntarily disclose her/his stigmatized status "thereby radically transforming his situation from that of an individual with information to manage to that of an individual with uneasy social situations to manage, from that of a discreditable person to that of a discredited one" (Goffman 1963, 123). During numerous social contacts, stigmatized persons have to decide how to manage information about their stigmatized attribute: to tell or not to tell, to lie or not to lie, and "to whom, how and where" (Goffman 1963, 57).

Although stigmatized people have to face various difficulties in life that others do not, it would be incorrect to portray them as passive and helpless: they can confront stigmatization constructively by actively redefining the meaning of their experiences as members of a stigmatized community (Oyserman and Swim 2001). In this way they can achieve positive outcomes, rather than just avoiding the negative ones. According to Oyserman and Swim (2001) the best way to study stigma is to take

an insider's perspective and to examine the experiences of stigmatized people from their point of view. In this context the insider's perspective can help researchers to better understand the ways stigmatized people construct their identity and the strategies they use to cope with stigma.

These concepts of stigma and methods of stigma management were applied to a range of stigmatized groups. In this paper we would like to examine to what extent these concepts can be applied to sexual minorities; to what extent lesbians, gays and bisexual persons in Croatia are stigmatized and how they manage stigma in their everyday lives. In order to examine the nature and consequences of stigmatization of homosexual and bisexual people and their stigma management we gathered information about their self-perception of visibility as homosexuals or bisexuals, the strategies of managing information about their sexual orientation, and about violence that LGB people face because of their sexual orientation.

The Research

The survey of the LGB population was conducted in three Croatian cities: Zagreb, Rijeka and Osijek at the end of 2005. We managed to reach the participants using the chain referral method which is used for researching sensitive issues and "hard to reach" populations (Penrod et al. 2003). The procedure is based upon defining the size and features of the desired sample, the selection of location where the research will be conducted, and the choice of the *locators*. These are members of the studied population who can trace other participants through serial referral, in order to expand the research area outside one's own social network. Respondents, after being asked for informed consent, completed the anonymous questionnaire individually.

A total of 202 participants took part in the research, 101 of these were men (50%) and 98 were women (48.5%). The sample also included one (female-to-male) transsexual person and two gender-unidentified persons. 55.1% of female respondents identified themselves as lesbians, and 43.9% as bisexual. 81.2% of male respondents identified themselves as gay, and 16.8% as bisexual. Average age of respondents was 30 (median: 28), ranging from 15 to 60 years of age. 92.6% of respondents were from Zagreb or other larger cities (mostly Rijeka and Osijek), while only 7.4% came from small towns or villages. 56.4% of respondents had completed secondary school, 39.1% had gained a 2-year HND (higher professional degree) or a university degree, while 4.5% had only completed elementary education. Due to the specific methodology of collecting data, people who are not

out as homosexuals or bisexuals and whose social networks are closed and isolated were less likely to be included in the sample. Some of the LGB people contacted refused to participate in the research because they were afraid of disclosing their personal life. For these reasons the results can only be generalized with caution to the LGB population of the regions where the research was carried out.

Instruments that were used for the purpose of this article included the following: *Self-perceived visibility*,[5] measured with the Likert type question "How likely do you think it is that people who do not know you recognize your sexual orientation?";[6] *Disclosure of sexual orientation scale* (Pikić and Jugović 2006) consisting of five questions which attempt to measure respondents' awareness of the knowledge their family members (mother, father, siblings), friends, co-workers or peers have of their sexual orientation;[7] *Concealment of sexual orientation scale* (Pikić and Jugović 2006), a Likert type scale consisting of statements assessing the prevalence of correction of appearance and behaviour in accordance with heteronormativity, concealment of sexual orientation, avoiding topics related to one's own homo- or bisexuality, or homo- and bisexuality in general, and topics relating to the Croatian LGBT community and movement in order to avoid potential unease, discrimination or violence in social interactions;[8] *Incidents of violence scale* (Pikić and Jugović 2006) containing 19 items measuring the frequency of violent incidents that persons could have experienced due to their sexual orientation:[9] these incidents of violence were divided into four categories: economic, psychological, physical and sexual violence. Participants were also asked whether they had heard of any LGBT person, whom they did not know personally, but about whom they knew that they had experienced physical violence in Croatia due to their sexual orientation.[10]

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[5] Self-perceived visibility is one's own perception of the probability that one's sexual orientation could be recognized by other people.

[6] Participants' answers ranged on the scale from 1 (not likely at all) to 5 = (very likely).

[7] Responses, related to the parents' knowledge of their child's sexual orientation, range on a scale from 1 (I am sure (s)he does not know) to 4 (I am sure (s)he does know). Responses, related to other categories of people, range on a scale from 1 (I am sure that no one knows) to 6 (I am sure all of them know). All questions offer the answer "not applicable" as well.

[8] The scale range from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Cronbach alpha coefficient for the whole scale is $\alpha = .90$.

[9] The scale range from 0 (never) to 1 (once), 2 (twice) and 3 (three times or more).

[10] Available answers were: 1 = "No," 2 = "Yes, I heard about one case" and 3 = "Yes, I heard about several cases."

Coming Out and Stigma Management

Corrigan and Mathews argue that "the mark that signals the stigma of homosexuality is not readily transparent" (2003, 237). On the other hand, if a person does not have the appearance that society expects from his/her gender, it is more likely for them to be perceived as homo- or bisexual. Our findings show that the majority of LGB people surveyed (52.7%) believe that it is very unlikely or even impossible for their sexual orientation to be recognized, 26.9% cannot estimate, while 20.4% were of the opinion that their sexual orientation is likely or even very likely to be recognized.

If our respondents have realistic perceptions of their visibility as homosexuals or bisexuals in public, and given that a majority of them consider themselves unrecognisable as such, we can presume that they are not by default—in Goffman's terms—discredited persons. They can choose how to manage information about their sexual orientation: they can decide whether to engage in or avoid discussions about their emotional or sexual life, to what extent they would like to participate in activities of the LGB community, or show affection toward their same-sex partners in public. According to our results lesbians, gays and bisexual persons are open about their sexual orientation to various extents depending on the different categories of people they interact with. For example, personal friends are much more likely to be aware of the relevant sexual orientation than any colleagues at school or at work (see table 1).

Table 1

	Mean	Standard deviation	%						r
			1	2	3	4	5	6	
Siblings	3.77	2.005	19.8	15.0	13.2	9.6	5.4	37.1	.168*
Friends	4.56	1.264	1.5	4.5	10.0	39.3	10.0	34.8	.173*
Co-workers/ Peers	3.37	1.525	13.6	17.2	19.7	30.8	5.1	13.6	.265**

Note: Do your siblings/friends/co-workers/peers know about your sexual orientation? (1 = I am sure that no one knows, 5 = I am sure that all of them know) and correlation of those questions with visibility of sexual orientation (r). Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) is marked with * when significant at $p < 0.05$ and with ** when significant at $p < 0.01$.

These results are not surprising since people choose their friends, but cannot choose peers and co-workers at the workplace. In addition, they might not have come out at the workplace, because they fear that disclosure could contribute to discrimination at work or even losing a job.

Mothers were more familiar with the sexual orientation of the respondents than the fathers (see table 2). This could be explained by mothers' greater involvement in interaction with children compared to fathers', and mothers being more often available to children (Lamb et al. 1988, quoted in Maccoby 1999) which is in line with traditional gender roles of women as child bearers and men as breadwinners. Additionally, fathers are persistent in expecting feminine behaviour from their daughters and masculine behaviour from their sons, while mothers tend to treat their male and female children equally (Jacklin, DiPietro, and Maccoby 1984). Besides that, women seem to have less homophobic attitudes than men (Parmač 2005; Herek 1987). Given all that, children are more open to their mothers, as they expect more understanding and support from them.

Table 2

	Mean	Standard deviation	1	2	3	4	r
Mother	2.78	1.146	17.7%	25.4%	17.7%	39.2%	.133
Father	2.26	1.143	33.7%	27.6%	17.2%	21.5%	.080

Note: Do your parents know about your sexual orientation? (1 = I am sure s/he does not know, 4 = I am sure s/he knows) and correlation of those questions with visibility of sexual orientation (r).

A part of the homosexual and bisexual population builds closer relationships with their friends than with their immediate family members. Friends can provide support in everyday life situations and especially in those which are difficult for LGB people. Lesbians, gays and bisexuals who experienced violence, more often sought help from their friends, rather than from their family (Pikić and Jugović 2006). Additionally, in our sample, there were only 6% of those whose friends were unfamiliar with their sexual orientation as opposed to 43.2% and 61.3% of mothers and fathers respectively who were not familiar with their child's sexual orientation.

Despite the fact that a majority of respondents believed that their sexual orientation could not be recognized, their behaviour still might be discerned. In order to prevent such disclosure and to avoid uneasiness, discrimination or violence, lesbians, gays and bisexuals have employed diverse strategies of concealment. The strategy most frequently used was avoidance of talking about one's own emotional or sexual life. 37.2% of respondents have used this often or always (see table 3). Some other strategies such as keeping quiet about attitudes, thoughts and feelings about homosexuality/bisexuality in general or about the LGBT commu-

nity in Croatia have been used by less than 15% percent of respondents. Since homosexuality is no longer a *taboo* in Croatia, public support for LGB rights can give confidence to LGB people to express their attitudes more freely, despite the fact that the public discussion about homosexuality is conducted in *pro* and *contra* terms.

Table 3

	Mean	Standard deviation	%					r
			1	2	3	4	5	
I try to make my appearance conform with what society would expect from my gender.	2.30	1.305	37.3	22.9	20.9	10.0	9.0	–.140*
I behave in the way it is expected from my gender.	2.34	1.240	32.3	27.4	20.4	13.4	6.5	–.084
I keep my sexual orientation secret.	2.96	1.180	11.9	25.4	28.4	23.9	10.4	–.221**
I avoid speaking about my emotional or sexual life.	2.94	1.292	16.1	24.1	22.6	23.6	13.6	–.159*
I give a wrong impression about my love life (e.g. I present my boyfriend/girlfriend as a friend).	2.00	1.312	54.0	16.8	11.4	10.9	6.9	–.187**
I keep quiet about my attitudes, thoughts and feelings about homosexuality/bisexuality in general.	2.11	1.147	38.6	29.7	16.8	11.4	3.5	–.189**
I keep quiet about my attitudes, thoughts and feelings about LGBT movement, community and persons in Croatia.	2.06	1.151	42.1	26.2	18.8	8.9	4.0	–.097

Note: Strategies used to avoid unease, discrimination and/or violence (1 = Never, 5 = Always) together with their correlation with visibility of sexual orientation (r). Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) is marked with * when significant at $p < 0.05$ and with ** when significant at $p < 0.01$.

Lesbians, gays and bisexuals do not have many social settings in Croatia where they can socialise. Outside Zagreb, Rijeka and Osijek there is no LGB infrastructure. In Zagreb there are two organizations and several informal groups offering discussions, sport activities and choir singing. LGB people can also socialise at places like libraries, night clubs and saunas and in events such as the Zagreb Pride, the Queer Zagreb Festival and occasional exhibitions.

Regular or temporary social settings, created by the LGBT initiatives and organizations, provide lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Zagreb with more opportunity to connect with other LGB people compared to other regions in Croatia. There are only a few activities in Rijeka and Osijek, such as Zagreb's Queer Festival occasional exhibition tours to Osijek and Rijeka. In Rijeka there is also a lesbian organization with its reach-out activities to the lesbian community. In all other parts of Croatia everyday life of LGB people is limited to virtual communication through web forums, chat rooms on web-portals and web-sites, and socialising within small, informal groups.

Our findings indicated that only 0.5% of the respondents have refrained from visiting LGBT places (gay clubs, LGBT organizations and groups) in Croatia in order to avoid unease, discrimination or violence. For the same reasons, 20.9% avoided public LGBT manifestations in Croatia (e.g. Queer Zagreb or Zagreb Pride), while 43.8% did not kiss or hold hands with their same-sex partner in public (see table 4).

Table 4

	LGBT places	LGBT manifestations	Kissing/holding hands in public
Yes.	71.8%	33.3%	24.4%
No, I do not, in order to avoid unease, discrimination and/or violence.	0.5%	20.9%	43.8%
No, I do not, but for some other reason.	27.7%	45.8%	31.8%

Note: Do you visit LGBT places/attend public GLBT manifestations/ hold hands and kiss in public?

It is clear that LGB people feel more secure inside the clubs and organizations than in public places or at manifestations where there is a greater possibility of stigmatization. Furthermore, people who live outside Zagreb do not have much opportunity to visit these places or participate in manifestations. This is why 27.7% of respondents do not visit LGBT places, while 45.8% do not attend LGBT manifestations for other reasons than fear of unease, discrimination or violence.

Why do lesbians, gays and bisexual persons engage in some behaviour that could reveal their sexual orientation, while at the same time they avoid others? According to Major and O'Brien's (2005) stigma is relationship- and context-specific, therefore LGB people make different decisions regarding disclosure of their sexual orientation according to the

type of social setting or the specific person they are interacting with. They probably regard sharing information about their sexual orientation with their friends as more important than sharing it with their co-workers. Lesbians, gays and bisexuals can also hypothesise that discussing homosexuality in general would not reveal their sexual orientation as, for instance, talking about one's own sexual or emotional life would. They can additionally consider kissing with the same-sex partner in the streets as more risky than going out to a gay club. All of these points out that LGB people choose how to manage a given situation according to their appraisals of the situations or persons.

In order to understand how the concealment and disclosure depend on the perceived visibility of stigma, we examined the correlations between perceived visibility of stigma and measures of concealment and disclosure of one's sexual orientation. We hypothesized that, paraphrasing Goffman, people who think that their sexual orientation is less visible can control the information about their sexual orientation to a greater extent than those who believe that their sexual orientation is more visible. Our findings supported this hypothesis; lesser visibility tended to be correlated with more use of concealment strategies (see table 3). People with a lower degree of visibility tended to be less open to brothers or sisters, friends and co-workers (see table 1). On the other hand, there was no correlation between self-perceived visibility and openness to parents (see table 2). The fact, that parents do not recognize their child's homosexuality could be partly attributed to the point that until recently homosexuality was a taboo, so it was less likely for them to be informed about it or to be in touch with an openly homosexual or bisexual person. Where they did recognize or assume that their child might be homosexual or bisexual, they had problems accepting that fact. Unlike friends and siblings who were more likely to talk about homosexuality, parents tried to avoid discussing it or asking their child about it. Generational gap and economic dependence of children could be additional reasons why children do not reveal their sexual orientation to their parents.

It seems that homosexual and bisexual people with a lesser self-perceived visibility can "pass" as heterosexuals in more social settings compared with people who assume that their sexual orientation is more recognisable. While Goffman claims that people whose stigma is visible do not have a possibility of choosing whether to conceal the information about it or not, it is still debatable whether visibility can be chosen. Do LGB persons have control over the visibility of their sexual orientation in public? We argued before that they are not passive in the process of choosing the strategies of concealment and disclosure; on the contrary,

they actively choose to what extent they will be visible. Choosing to be visible becomes one's strategy of information control, in this case, of disclosure.

Homophobic Violence

Garnets, Herek, and Levy (1990) argue that the gay community is victimised by every single attack on a homosexual or bisexual person. Such violence creates a climate of fear because of which lesbians, gays and bisexual persons feel the urge to hide their sexual orientation. According to our findings 93% of respondents knew about at least one or more people, not known to them, who had experienced physical violence in Croatia due to their homo- or bisexuality. Given that the awareness of the existence of violence against lesbians, gays and bisexuals is common to almost all the respondents, it is not surprising that a considerable part of them hides their sexual orientation or avoids showing affection in public.

Since some models of stigma suggest that negative treatment and discrimination can be experienced due to one's stigmatized status (Major and O'Brien 2005; Link and Phelan 2001; Crocker, Major, and Steele 1998), we examined whether and to which extent lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Croatia experience violence because of their sexual orientation. According to our categorisation of violence, we divided the sample into three subgroups: the persons who did not experience violence, persons who experienced verbal violence, and persons who experienced assaults and deprivation of liberty.[11] In the period between 2002 and 2005 one third of respondents had experienced assaults and deprivation of liberty, 18.3% had experienced verbal violence, while 48.7% of respondents had not experienced any ill treatment because of their sexual orientation.[12]

> A man began to follow me at the gay cruising area. He continued following me even after I left that place, and then he approached me and started to insult me. I felt terrible, scared and ashamed. A bus came and I got on, while he stayed there (Male respondent aged 39).

> After the Gay Pride I did not participate in, a young man stopped me in the street and

[11] Verbal violence includes all verbal incidents: threats, insults, blackmail and unwanted sexual suggestions. Assaults and deprivation of liberty include various physical and sexual assaults, stalking, destruction of property, being thrown out of one's home, being deprived of physical safety and control of movement.

[12] For a more detailed overview of findings about different forms of violence experienced by LGB persons see Pikić and Jugović (2006).

> asked me if I had participated in the Gay parade. I said I hadn't, but he said that I looked as if I had. I told him that that was his problem, and after that he punched me in the head. I fell and lost consciousness for a moment. A friend helped me to get up and we left. I felt bad and humiliated. I kept looking behind my back on the street for days, fearing a repeat attack or meeting that person again (Male respondent aged 29).

Following experiences of sexual orientation related violence, LGB persons may start associating their homosexual or bisexual identity with feelings of fear and lack of safety (Garnets, Herek, and Levy 1990). Homophobic violence leaves traces not only in the feelings and beliefs but also in the behaviour of the victims. According to our results, those who have already experienced violence employ different concealment strategies: respondents who had experienced verbal violence hid their sexual orientation to the least extent, and they rarely avoided talking about their emotional life compared with persons who had not experienced violence, and who had experienced severe physical violence (see table 5).

Accordingly, three groups of respondents can be distinguished. The first group includes those who have experienced verbal violence as well as being characterised by not hiding their sexual orientation and openly expressing their views on homosexuality and the LGBT movement. In this case it appears that these characteristics may have contributed to their having experienced verbal violence and vice versa. Those who are cautious and have not experienced violence belong to a second group. They most probably avoid violence by the simple act of hiding their sexual orientation. The third group includes those who hide their sexual orientation, and have experienced severe physical violence. We cannot know to what extent they had been open about homosexuality before they experienced violence. However it is likely that they hide their sexual orientation because they have experienced violence and/or fear to experience it again.

Table 5

	Never experienced violence (N = 96)		Experienced verbal violence (N = 36)		Experienced assaults and/or limitations of freedom (N = 65)		p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
I try to make my appearance conform to what society would expect from my gender.	2.49	1.390	1.94	1.145	2.28	1.244	> .05
I behave in the way it is expected from my gender.	2.48	1.328	2.17	1.056	2.25	1.199	> .05
I keep my sexual orientation secret.	3.22a	1.178	2.36b	1.073	2.86a	1.130	< .01
I avoid speaking of my emotional or sexual life.	3.24a	1.301	2.33b	1.095	2.88a	1.279	< .01
I give a wrong impression about my love life (e.g. I present my boyfriend/girlfriend as a friend).	2.23a	1.395	1.50b	1.000	1.91ab	1.247	< .01
I keep quiet about my attitudes, thoughts and feelings about homosexuality/bisexuality in general.	2.34a	1.247	1.75b	1.025	2.02ab	1.008	< .05
I keep quiet about my attitudes, thoughts and feelings about LGBT movement, community and persons in Croatia.	2.32a	1.244	1.64b	0.867	1.95ab	1.082	< .01

Note: Different sexual orientation concealment strategies in three groups with different experiences of sexual orientation violence between 2002 and 2005. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed for testing the significance of differences among groups with different experiences of violence due to the unequal size of the three groups. In order to examine which groups are different in relation to other groups, we used the Mann-Whitney's U test. There is statistically significant difference at $p < 0.05$ between means labelled with "a" and "b" while means labelled with "ab" do not differ from those labelled with "a" and "b."

Our data reflects violence experienced in the last four years prior to the research, while the answers on concealment strategies are related to the time when the survey was conducted. Thus we cannot draw conclusions about dynamic relations between violence and the application of concealment strategies. In order to clarify the processes affecting victims' behaviour, and especially their decisions about hiding their sexual

orientation longitudinal studies and/or in-depth interview studies need to be conducted with people who have experienced homophobic violence.

Conclusion

In this paper we applied different theoretical concepts of stigma juxtaposing them with our empirical findings of the experiences of lesbians, gays and bisexual persons in Croatia. Discussing our findings we have shown that Goffman's concept of information control can be applied to the LGB community in Croatia even some forty years after the model of stigma management was formulated. It can also be seen that members of the LGB community are aware that they could become victims of discrimination or violence, as Crocker, Major, and Steele (1998) suggested when discussing the collective representations of the stigmatized communities. In line with Crocker and her colleagues (1998), our results show that a significant number of respondents avoided talking about their private life or did not kiss or hold hands with their same-sex partners in public because of concerns that they could experience unease, discrimination or violence due to an open manifestation of their sexual orientation. This caution is evidently reasonable when one is a member of a stigmatized community. According to Major and O'Brien (2005), discrimination and negative treatment are mechanisms of stigmatization and our findings support their thesis given that a significant part of our respondents had experienced violence just because somebody had assumed them to be bisexual or homosexual.

Having in mind that over 50% of our respondents experienced some type of violence we can conclude that damaging consequences of the stigmatization of sexual minorities are present in Croatian society, where the strength of heteronormativity indicates conservative social tendencies. As long as it remains that way, everyday life experiences of LGB people will be confined within the circle of stigmatization, strategies of sexual orientation disclosure or concealment and their consequences. Our research findings indicate that lesbians, gays and bisexuals do not feel free or secure in their family environment as they hide their emotional life from their parents. A majority of them conceals sexual orientation in the workplace because of fear of discrimination. Contrary to heterosexuals who can talk openly about their romantic relationships in daily conversations, homosexuals and bisexuals do not have the "luxury" of sharing information about their loved ones. LGB people need to think twice about public manifestations of their relationships since the streets are not safe for them. On the other hand, heterosexuals take these mani-

festations, such as holding hands in the streets, for granted. Lesbians, gays and bisexuals avoid showing signs of emotional bonds, affection and care toward their partners in public places because they fear that somebody could harm them. In spite of all these problems, lesbians, gays and bisexuals in Croatia face their challenges and grasp their opportunities to build communities and create spaces where they can feel safe and free.

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Hate Crimes against Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in Belarus

Viachaslau Bortnik

Introduction

The primary goal of this article is to draw attention to cases of hate crime, violence and harassment experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people in Belarus, where no original publications with any scientific value on this topic are available yet. Issues related to Belarusian LGB people tend to be dealt with in reviews on LGB issues in general (Bortnik 2003; Solberg 2004; Takács 2006). It is not the purpose of this paper to provide a scientific background to the extent, patterns, causes and consequences of hate crimes motivated by homophobia. The information presented in the article was collected from reports of the Belarusian Lambda League for Sexual Equality (Lambda Belarus) as well as from the results of two focus group interviews conducted with LGB people in two cities.[1] The aim of the focus group interviews was to highlight the main features of the problem and to work out recommendations to improve the situation by generating discussions about homophobic hate crime with its victims.

Overview of the Situation of LGB People in Belarus

Although homosexuality has not been a criminal offence in Belarus since 1994, homophobia is widespread and instances of harassment occur in all spheres of society (US Department of State 2006). Homophobic attitudes and prejudices are very strong. According to the results of a small scale (N = 287) survey conducted by Lambda Belarus in April 2002, 47% of Belarusian respondents think that gays should be imprisoned (Sol-

[1] Belarusian Lambda League for Sexual Equality (Lambda Belarus) was established in 1998. Similarly to other LGB groups in Belarus, the authorities have never registered it. Two focus group interviews took place: one in Gomel (5 July 2006) which was attended by 11 LGB people aged 17 to 42; one in Minsk (8 July 2006) with 9 LGB people aged 18 to 46. The cities were chosen on the basis of the following criteria: population size and the presence of LGB groups or activists within the city. In relation to Gomel (population size: 500,000), LGB people feel a lack of support and a greater sense of isolation and invisibility because the Belarusian gay scene is concentrated in Minsk.

berg 2004, 46). A negative statement about homosexuals by President Lukashenka in September 2004 also demonstrated that homophobic attitudes exist at the highest levels of government (US Department of State 2005).[2]

According to *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Byelorussii*, 6 April 2005, Belarusian MP Viktar Kuchynski proposed to re-criminalize homosexuality. "My position as a deputy is: all these 'queers' and others are to be punished to the maximum," said Kuchynski at the parliamentary session during the discussion concerning the presidential decree "On some measures of the prevention of human trafficking" on 4 April 2005. According to Kuchynski, the Criminal Code is to be amended, and the penalty for homosexuality ought to be re-introduced. However, this proposal was not supported by the parliament. Interior Minister of Belarus, Uladzimir Navumau gave this comment to the Russian News Agency Interfax: "Mutual consent is usually present [in homosexuals relations], and we would not like to encroach upon this sphere too deeply."[3]

According to Lambda Belarus reports, in April 1999 Russian Orthodox Church officials have publicly called for the execution of gays. In May 2003 in Minsk the European Humanities University banned the screening of the documentary film *Outlawed* on discrimination of gays and lesbians in different parts of the world,[4] which had been planned as part of the Amnesty Film *Festival*, organised by Amnesty International Belarus at the university. According to the university staff, the ban was made under pressure from the Russian Orthodox Church.

The government-controlled media try to smear the political opposition by associating it with homosexuality. The media broadcast footage of a fake demonstration by a small group of "sexual minorities" at the opposition congress of 2 October 2004 along with comments of bystanders that "gays are evil." Program announcers added commentary to the effect that homosexuality goes hand-in-hand with Western paths to development (US Department of State 2006).

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[2] On 28 September 2004, at the Consultation meeting with the Belarusian Security Council Lukashenka said: "We have to show our society in the near future, what they [EU and USA] are doing here, how they are trying to turn our girls into prostitutes, how they are feeding our citizens with illicit drugs, how they are spreading homosexual perversion here, which methods they are employing."

[3] Olga Ulevich, "Deputy Kuchynski proposed to imprison homosexuals," *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Byelorussii,* 6 April 2005.

[4] *Outlawed* that was produced by Amnesty International Dutch Section in 1998 tells the stories of lesbians and gay men in five countries (India, Nicaragua, South Africa, Romania and the USA) and is an excellent tool for raising awareness about discrimination and LGBT activism across cultures.

Three foreign diplomats were expelled from the country on the pretext of their sexual orientation in the period between October 2004 and August 2006. According to the reports of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, the first case was the expulsion of the Second Secretary of the German Embassy on the false pretext of drug use in October 2004, while his Ukrainian boyfriend was arrested.[5] The story was commented on at length on government-controlled national TV with a lot of homophobic rhetoric. According to Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, 25 January 2005, the Belarusian Foreign Ministry on 21 January expelled the Czech diplomat Pavel Krivohlavy, accusing him of depraving minors and inciting them to "antisocial behaviour."[6] "To put it plainly, Czech diplomat Pavel Krivohlavy made juvenile boys drunk in order to subsequently try to drag them into bed," Belarusian TV alleged.[7] The network's main news program Panarama on 21 January 2005 broadcast secretly recorded footage showing Krivohlavy purportedly drinking alcohol and kissing young men in what appeared to be a café or a restaurant. "You'll certainly agree that our neighbours' understanding of democracy is peculiar: intoxication of youths, debauchery, and pornography. Do they have the moral right—they who are spreading the worst, vile predilections in our country—to teach us how to live?" Belarusian TV commented in Panarama. In July 2006 Minsk police accused Reimo Smits, a former Latvian diplomat in Belarus, of distributing pornography. Scenes of a homosexual act involving the diplomat were also broadcast on TV.[8]

Most Belarusian LGB organizations have never been registered by the state and operate illegally.[9] In April 1999 the Ministry of Justice blocked efforts by the Lambda Belarus, the country's first and only lesbian and gay rights organization at that time, to gain official registration as an NGO. The Ministry cited technical reasons, although Lambda Belarus

[5] International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA). 2005. <http://www.ilga.org/news_results.asp?LanguageID=1&FileCategory=9&FileID=491> (24 June 2006).

[6] Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). 2005. <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/01/83701c0a-3289-404c-8677-10e1c72070ad.html> (24 June 2006).

[7] Ibid.

[8] Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 2006, <http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2006/08/3-cee/cee-010806.asp> (24 June 2006).

[9] There are only two exceptions. Lesbian group YANA was officially registered as a young women's NGO. Although their members are lesbians and they work specifically for lesbians, they have to hide their activities from the officials. The group is mostly involved in organizing educational and social events for lesbians in Minsk and Brest. Gay group VSTRECHA was registered as a nationwide youth HIV-prevention NGO. Their target audience consists of men having sex with men (MSM). They constantly experience resistance from the side of the state while trying to address needs within the organization's mission.

members claimed the authorities were seeking to deny registration of a gay and lesbian organization (US Department of State 2001). Members of LGB groups have been targeted as hate crime victims many times. For instance, on 13 November 2001, Edward Tarletski, the leader of Lambda Belarus was physically assaulted in Molodechno, which resulted in brain concussion diagnosed in the hospital where he was rushed to and in which he spent seven days. The police refused to take action in connection with the assault for the reason that it was "impossible to find the perpetrators" (Solberg 2004, 47).

Belarusian LGB groups also do not receive civil society support. In July 2001 the Organising Committee of the 1st Belarusian Youth Congress voted against the participation of Lambda Belarus delegates. In March 2002 several Belarusian media outlets published a press release of Youth Front, one of the biggest youth groups in the country, which contained homophobic statements and humiliating notes about gays. Pavel Severinetz, the leader of the Youth Front, called homosexuality a "sin and perversion deserving death." According to Severinetz, the existence of homosexuals is "the result of decay and sinfulness in the world."[10]

In March 2002, the State Press Committee annulled the registration of the only Belarusian publication for sexual minorities, *Forum Lambda* (Human Rights Watch 2002). The vague wording of the recent amendments of the Criminal Code adopted on 15 December 2005 (Law N 71-Z) provides wide discretionary powers to the authorities allowing them to label activities of LGB groups as illegal attempts to discredit or harm the Belarusian state.[11] Criminal persecution has been introduced for the coordination of activities by an association or a foundation, which has been suspended or liquidated (Article 193-1). Bearing in mind that most of Belarusian LGB groups do not have any legal status anyone who organizes such activities may face a fine and six months imprisonment, and in vaguely defined "serious cases" they can be subjected to a "restriction of freedom" for up to two years. A new regulation makes "education or other forms of preparation" for mass demonstrations, or financing such actions illegal, and punishable by imprisonment for up to six months, or a "restriction of freedom" for up to three years (Article 293-1). Training or preparation of people for participation in group activities which "grossly violate public order," as well as the financing or material support of such activity, can also lead to a jail term of up to two years (Article 342).

[10] GAY.BY. 31 July 2001, <http://www.apagay.com/press/release/2001/2001012e.php> (24 July 2006).

[11] Zakon Respubliki Belarus ad 15 snezhnya 2005 N 71-Z, Zvyazda, 22 December 2005.

Article 369-1 on "discrediting the Republic of Belarus" punishes those who provide "false information" to a foreign government or organization, which is interpreted to misrepresent the political, economic, social, military or international situation of Belarus, its government agencies or the legal situation of its citizens. Such actions are punishable by six months in jail, or a "restriction of freedom" for up to two years. Starting from 1999 all LGBT events have been banned by the government and attacked by the police. According to the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the Military of the University of California, Santa Barbara, Belarus is among those countries that ban gays from serving in the military. Amnesty International Belarus has documented at least seven cases of gay men from Gomel who did not serve in the army because of their sexual orientation. No cases of harassment of gays in the army have been reported, but this may be the result of gay individuals hiding their sexuality. The currently effective legislation provides no protection to victims in cases of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity (Bortnik 2003).

Impact of Hate Crime

Hate crimes against LGB people represent the most insidious manifestation of intolerance and discrimination,[12] based on sexual orientation or gender identity. They are liable to inflict considerably greater emotional and psychological distress upon their victims than non-bias offences. According to the American Psychological Association, victims of hate crimes may experience higher levels of anxiety, anger, intense fear, and isolation and feelings of vulnerability and depression (APA 1998). For many victims, this emotional degradation leaves deeper scars than physical injury.[13] The fear and anxiety generated by hate crimes extend beyond individuals, however, and affect the family and wider community to

[12] A working definition of hate crime is given by OSCE/ODIHR. It takes national differences into account, such as differences in legislation, resources, approach, and needs. A hate crime can be defined as any criminal offence, including offences against persons or property, where the victim, premises, or target of the offence are selected because of their real or perceived connection, attachment, affiliation, support, or membership of a group, which may be based upon a characteristic common to its members, such as real or perceived race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or other similar factors (OSCE/ODIHR 2005, 12). The term homophobia is used to describe fear of, discrimination against or hostility towards lesbians, gay men or bisexual people.

[13] A report issued by the American Psychological Association likened the symptoms exhibited by victims of hate crimes to those exhibited by individuals suffering post-traumatic stress disorder. Like other victims of post-traumatic stress, victims of hate crimes may

which the individual is perceived to belong. Members of the same group feel victimized, while members of other commonly targeted groups are also reminded of their vulnerability to similar attacks. The behaviour and actions of victims and communities may also be impacted. Victims of hate crimes, and the groups to which they belong, may avoid particular shops or streets and adjust their daily routines, clothing, and appearance for fear of being targeted.

Perpetrators of hate crimes may be motivated by range of biases, including those based on sexual orientation or gender identity (OSCE/ODIHR 2005, 25). According to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, a clear association exists between the presence of hate motivation and the extent of injury inflicted against a person. Hate crimes, as compared to offences and incidents with no hate motivation, are also more likely to involve multiple offenders, serial attacks, heightened risk of social disorder, and greater expenditure of resources to resolve the consequences of the act (CCJS 2001).

Belarusian law enforcement agencies do not collect data on the number and type of hate crimes motivated by homophobia. In its response to the OSCE/ODIHR's *Notes Verbales* the Belarusian government provided raw statistics only pertaining to hate crimes and violent manifestations of anti-Semitism (OSCE/ODIHR 2005, 27).[14] The lack of information on hate crimes against LGB people makes it impossible to assess how widespread the phenomenon is nationally. The only sources of information on this issue are NGO and media reports. From January 2001 through June 2003 activists of the human rights advocacy program of Lambda Belarus documented at least 33 cases of hate crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity. They mostly received information through interviewing victims and their families, witnesses to hate crimes and local human rights activists. They also monitored newspapers, websites and other media outlets. In the following I will provide examples of hate crimes featured in an unpublished report of Lambda Belarus issued in July 2003.[15]

Between 2001 and 2003 hate crimes resulting in the murder of gay men were reported six times by Lambda Belarus:

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heal more quickly when appropriate support and resources are made available soon after incident occurs.

[14] Decision No. 4 of the Maastricht Ministerial Council encouraged all OSCE participating States "to collect and keep records on reliable information and statistics on hate crimes" and tasked the ODIHR to serve as a collection point for information and statistics collected by participating States and to report regularly on the information received.

[15] Text of the report was included in the book *Let Our Voices Be Heard: Christian lesbians in Europe telling their stories* (Solberg 2004).

On 18 April 2001, the dead body of pensioner Alexander Stephanovich, a well-known Minsk gay was found in the backyard of the apartment block where he lived. His body had knife stab wounds all over.
On 4 July 2001, Ivan Sushinsky, former director of Minsk's Oscar gay club died in the city's 5th Clinical Hospital after a violent assault by homophobic thugs. Mr. Sushinsky was rushed into hospital in a critical condition. He had a head injury, there were knife-shape burns on his body, and his hands and legs were tied with adhesive tape. The police department of Minsk's Sovetski district started an investigation into the case, but the perpetrators have never been found.
On 15 February 2002, the dead body of Victor Kovyl, 34, was found in his parents' apartment in Zhlobin. He was openly gay both at work and in public. The police refused to give the details of the murder to Kovyl's partner, Alexander, and one of the officers said to him: "It serves you right, faggots!"
On 17 November 2002, the mutilated body of Mikhail M., 50, was found in his flat in Minsk. According to the police, this was the fifth murder of this kind committed in the capital during the last two years.

Rape of gay men was documented by the report two times:[16]

In the night of 16 May 2001, Andrei Babkin, an activist of Lambda was badly beaten and raped by the entrance of his apartment and subsequently was taken to hospital with severe injuries. Later, on 3 August 2001, unidentified person(s) broke into and vandalised his apartment where fliers, posters and booklets of the Gay Pride Festival had been kept.
On 10 June 2002, three unidentified men heavily beat and raped a local resident Dmitri L., 18, in Komunar. The victim was taken to the intensive care ward of Gomel Regional hospital where he spent 2 weeks.

Aggravated assault took place in 13 cases:

On 12 April 2002, verbal assault and beating of the two gay and one bisexual man took place outside a gay club "Babylon" in Minsk. According to witnesses a group of skinheads (around 12 young men) who attacked three visitors of the club ran away before the police arrived.

[16] The Criminal Code in force at the moment in Belarus was passed in 1999. The only homosexual acts that remain crimes are those that violate the consent of the sexual partner. The crimes of homosexuality are covered in Chapter 20 (Section VII) that is dedicated to "crimes against sexual inviolability or sexual freedom." Article 167 covers "forced actions of a sexual character." It states that "*Muzhelozhstvo* [specific Russian definition of "male sexual intercourse with male," literary "man lying with man"], *lesbianism or other actions of a sexual character committed by use of force or threat thereof against the victim, or by exploiting the victim's vulnerability, are punished by deprivation of freedom from three to seven years*" (The National Legal Internet Portal of the Republic of Belarus—Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus, <http://www.pravo.by/webnpa/text.asp?RN=HK9900275> (23 June 2006)). The age of legally relevant consent for participation in sexual acts is equal for homosexuals and heterosexuals—16 years old.

Despite an apparent rise in reported homophobic attacks, in most cases police officers refused to take a complaint of a potential hate crime or failed to properly identify and investigate hate crimes. Additionally, a number of hate crime cases also involved police brutality against LGB people:

> On 2 July 2001, in Minsk the police detained and badly beat Andrei Scherbakov, one of the founders of Lambda Belarus.
> On 29 March 2003, the security guard of the Buda-Bar nightclub in Minsk heavily beat Yuliya Yukhnovetz, volunteer for Minsk Pride Festival, only because she kissed a girl in the club hallway. She was taken to hospital where she was diagnosed with a "closed injury of the cranium."

The Lambda Belarus report featured cases of simple assault (1 case), threats (2), burglary (1), destruction of property (1), civil rights violations (5), and dissemination of hate material (2), as well.

> On 29 August 2002, before the "Gay Pride 2002" festival Edward Tarletski, leader of Lambda Belarus was called to the City Department of Minsk Police where he was told that if he organizes a gay parade on the streets of the city "the police will not take any responsibility for possible disorders." The police also threatened Tarletski with criminal prosecution if a demonstration like that of 2001 reoccurred.
> On 10 May 2003, an unknown hacker broke into the Belarusian LGBT web site APAGAY. He deleted all the topics of the site's forum and introduced a new one calling for the murder of gays. In addition while downloading the home page of APAGAY the notification "FAGGOTS MUST DIE" and "STOP FAGGOTS IN BELARUS" appeared on the screen. The break-in was followed by telephone calls to the members of the site's team with threats of physical violence.

A special concern arose from cases of Internet censorship:

> In December 2002, the administration of the Belarusian State University in Minsk banned access to all gay internet resources in the computer labs.
> On 20 March 2003, the administrators of Soyuz Online, the biggest Internet café in Minsk popular among gays blocked the Belarusian gay and lesbian web site APAGAY.

The report emphasized that victims of hate crimes have likewise included those, not necessarily LGB people themselves, who are taking action against human rights violations and discrimination motivated by homophobia. In this context homophobic violence becomes a human rights issue engaging the state's responsibility under international standards relating to torture and ill-treatment. The failure of Belarusian authorities to protect LGB people against hate crimes, violence and harassment can be seen in a range of different areas. These include inadequate pre-

ventive measures, police indifference to abuses, bias against non-heterosexual forms of sexuality in the court system, failure to define abuses as criminal offences, and legal loopholes hampering criminal prosecution.

Personal Accounts on Hate Crimes

Most aspects of hate crimes against LGB people have also been reflected in the focus group interviews. The experience that living as an LGB person in Belarus is difficult and often painful is reported by most of the focus group interview participants.

> It scars the victim more deeply. It is much more difficult, I think, as a victim to say I was put in the hospital because I'm lesbian . . . you are beaten or hurt because of who you are. It is a direct and deliberate and focused crime, and it is a violation of, really, a person's essence . . . you can't change who you [are] . . . And it's much more difficult to deal with . . . Because what a hate crime says to victim is, "You're not fit to live in this society with me. I don't believe that you have the same rights as I do . . . you are second to me. I am superior to you" (Lesbian, 39, Minsk).

The majority of respondents hide their sexual orientation from strangers to avoid unfavourable treatment, but they are relatively open about it in the local LGB scene. 75% of respondents reported that they had been violently attacked and/or harassed because of their sexual orientation, and 45% of them referred to experiencing three or more cases of violence and/or harassment. The most common form of harassment was homophobic verbal bullying.

> I came out when I was 13 and I was always being called a "faggot" at school. Even teachers gossiped about me (Gay man, 18, Minsk).

> My fellow student bullies me verbally in the college dormitory and in other public places whenever he meets me. Usually he does it in the company of his friends. He calls me dirty names often used to denigrate homosexuals (Bisexual man, 19, Gomel).

Other less frequently occurring forms of violence and harassment reported by our respondents included threats, hate mail, and blackmail.

> I often receive humiliating letters via e-mail and on the forum of the site I run in Gomel (Gay man, 22, Gomel).

> A group of teenagers in my neighbourhood threatened to beat me up and damage my car. They usually bully me verbally on the street (Gay man, 32, Minsk).

> My girlfriend and I got an anonymous call from someone who said that we would be killed. I didn't go to the police because I was afraid of a scandal. People might find out, and I might lose my job (Lesbian, 39, Gomel).

More than half (55%) of the focus group participants reported experiences of physical attacks against them.

> Several young men were walking down the street, and one of them said that I'm a "faggot." Right away, another one hit me very hard on the head (Bisexual man, 28, Gomel).

> We were attacked by a group of young men while returning from the gay club. They did not like it that we were walking hand-in-hand (Gay man, 20, Minsk).

Violent attacks and harassment were committed by various categories of perpetrators: an acquaintance (8 cases), a family member (6), an unknown person (6), a neighbour (5), a fellow student (3), or a co-worker (2 cases). Respondents referred to domestic violence as a serious problem: individuals coming out to their families as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, particularly young people, were often rejected and in some cases subjected to violence within their families.

> I was falsely accused of committing domestic violence against my mother in an unfair investigation by corrupt prosecutors. My status as a lesbian was used against me. I spent 6 weeks in a pre-detention institution (SIZO) and was given a 12-month suspended prison sentence by the court. Although I'm a lawyer I was unable to protect myself in the national justice system (Lesbian, 31, Minsk).

> I was a victim of a homophobic attack during which I was badly beaten. When I got home my mother said that this would always happen to me because of my "lifestyle" (Bisexual woman, 23, Gomel).

It was also pointed out by our respondents that LGB people often avoid reporting crimes against them, in particular cases of hate crime and domestic violence, because of a reluctance to reveal their sexual orientation and fear of homophobic treatment by police officers. Therefore, it is not surprising that only less than one-third of all respondents, who experienced violence, said that they reported the incident to the police, and even among them there were two people who did not tell the police that sexual orientation was the cause of the violence. Fear of revealing one's sexual orientation to family members, friends, employers and others can prevent LGB people from not only contacting the police but also from seeking protection from human rights groups. Participants agreed that the police very often refused to act in cases of brutality committed against LGB people and failed to conduct investigations into homophobic hate crimes.

> We were the last visitors in the bar with my friend. The owner of the bar together with his son decided to beat us up. They locked the door and we couldn't escape. They

badly beat my friend … and I kicked the door in. The police showed up, but they behaved as though I was the guilty one. We were taken to the police station together with our attackers. The police let the attackers go, without even finding out who they were. The attitude toward us was very humiliating. It was as if we were the criminals, not the victims (Gay man, 26, Gomel).

The police told me nothing could be done, to forget it. 'Move on', they said. Two simple words, but I cannot put it out of my mind (Bisexual man, 42, Minsk).

We were drinking beer with friends in the city park when a guy walked by and decided that I was gay. He came up and punched me so hard that he knocked out a tooth. Others were shocked, but they didn't react, because they just thought that the attacker had drunk too much. I did not report the incident to the police, because it is my experience that the police in particular have a nasty and humiliating attitude towards gays (Gay man, 25, Minsk).

LGB victims of domestic violence hesitate to contact law enforcement for fear of being arrested, or because they worry about how their partner would be treated in police custody because of their LGB status. Respondents also mentioned that the police sometimes conduct unprovoked actions in bars and cruising areas frequented by homosexuals. It was emphasized that exposure is a precursor of the occurrence of harassment based on sexual orientation, especially on a direct and personal level. If nobody knows or suspects that one is an LGB person, one is less likely to suffer discrimination or harassment because of one's sexual orientation. Respondents believed that the Belarusian government shares responsibility for acts of violence and harassment against LGB people: on the one hand, hate crimes are instigated by officials at the highest level, and the government's tolerance of homophobic violence rises to the level of complicity or acquiescence, on the other.

Conclusion

Findings presented in this article leave no doubt that hate crimes, violence and harassment are particularly important issues for LGB people in Belarus. Homophobia and prejudice in society force LGB people to conceal their identity in everyday life to avoid unfavourable treatment.

75% of our respondents experienced some form of violence and/or harassment because of their sexual orientation. A striking aspect of hate crime against LGB people is the extent to which such crime goes unreported. LGB people often do not report crimes against them because they fear a dismissive, hostile or abusive response from the police. Under-reporting, coupled with the police response to those reports which

are made, indicate that people who commit crimes against LGB people tend to get away with them.

Most LGB victims of violence find access to legal redress and reparation difficult, if not impossible. Impunity and indifference habitually surround many acts of violence against LGB people. One of the key factors in breaching this climate of impunity is to ensure that police officers are adequately trained to respond appropriately to crimes against LGB people so that victims are encouraged to come forward, confident in the knowledge that the justice system will work for and not against them.

Only practical government action on equality and diversity can help to reduce the damaging effects of homophobic hate crime on Belarusian LGB citizens: the government should secure greater legal protection against homophobic abuses by adopting constitutional and other provisions prohibiting all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Special measures should be implemented to ensure that people who have been victims of hate crimes based on sexual identity have access to means of gaining redress and the right to an effective remedy, including rehabilitation and compensation.

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POLITIKΣ
SYMPOSION

BEYOND THE PINK CURTAIN

Everyday life of LGBT people in Eastern Europe

Edited by Roman Kuhar and Judit Takács

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EVERYDAY LIFE OF LGBT PEOPLE IN EASTERN EUROPE

The initial urge of *looking behind* "the Iron Curtain" will ultimately lead us to *look beyond* – and challenge the existing frameworks. Considering that the social and cultural homophobia still seems to be a unifying experience for LGBT people, "the West" is not necessarily as far from "the East" as it is sometimes suggested ...

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