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THE UNBEARABLE COMFORT OF PRIVACY

THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF GAYS AND LESBIANS

Peace Institute

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POLITIKΣ

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CONTENTS

ON THEM WHO ARE US

Tanja Rener

This book is a research document describing the everyday life of lesbians and gays in Slovenia. It is a representative and emancipatory work in the field of Gay and Lesbian Studies,[*] which, in addition to providing valuable information, also has political significance. In several respects, as I will attempt to demonstrate, it is a unique work. It is a sociological analysis of the empirical material collected by the researchers and their collaborators between 2002 and 2004. It is not the first work of this kind in Slovenia. As the researchers themselves pointed out, this study would not have been possible had it not been for the two previous thematic studies and more than twenty years of lesbian and gay activism in Slovenia. Or, it would not have been possible with this scope and in this manner.

But let me first explain why this work is exceptional in terms of methodological approach. First, because it is an optimal combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. While this approach is not unusual in the social sciences, it becomes exceptional the moment it is applied to the study of hidden social groups.

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[*] Gay and Lesbian Studies have thirty years of tradition. Much as in the case of Women's Studies, the initiative came from non-academic circles and was a direct result and effect of various social movements. Over time, Gay and Lesbian Studies have become part of university programs, primarily in Western Europe, the USA, Canada and Australia. Although they are today included in the university programs of some non-western countries as well, their status in both western and non-western countries is somewhat ambiguous, and they are invariably found on the margins of academic respect – as if the story of women's studies were being repeated.

It is not possible to say that all gay and lesbian studies share the same theoretical and methodological starting points. Rather, their thirty-year history is full of diverse theoretical starting points and positions. The 1980s, for example, were characterized by the Essentialism vs. Constructivism debate, or in other words, the question was whether homosexuality is an essential core of identity and thus a consistent experience of a minority regardless of the temporal, geographical and social contexts, or whether it is a socially and historically constructed cultural invention. Recently, theory has been dominated by queer studies that radicalize the constructivist perspective by questioning the fixedness of sexual boundaries and by offering instead an image of sexuality as fluid and performative. Queer theorists have consciously opted for a theoretical per-

These hard-to-reach groups are accessible to researchers only through qualitative methods, because sampling and the resulting quantitative methods are quite demanding. But not impossible. In this case, researchers could carry out a questionnaire-based survey because they not only identified a favorable research situation, but also helped to create and develop it. Snow-ball sampling proved to be an extremely productive approach, thanks to two factors: first, the researchers established firm mutual trust between themselves and the respondents; second, rather than merely "supplying information," respondents in this study were obviously willing to talk. They were free to choose whether and how they wanted to identify with the homosexual identity matrix and social networks. It is not surprising, therefore, that this study had a conspicuously socializing and emancipatory significance for many participating gays and lesbians. A research situation characterized by exceptional motivation and personal engagement on the part of participants is rare and difficult to repeat. In addition, there is another point that must be emphasized. The researchers did not try to delude themselves or others with tirades about the "objectivity" and non-politicality of their project. On the contrary, they were aware that their point of departure in this project was political and that the implications of this project will also be such. But this does not relieve them of responsibility for theoretical consistency, methodological accuracy and rigor, or for potential errors of interpretation, ambivalences or questions they cannot, or do not want, to clarify.

spective that is subversive, that teases and kicks against all self-evident categories. Furthermore, virtually all feminist polemics have had theoretical influence on gay and lesbian studies, for example, the issue of the construction of sexuality and the relationship of sexuality and power/state power. One characteristic trait of Gay and Lesbian Studies is the fact that, regardless of the domination of one or another theoretical or conceptual trend, alternative voices have never been fully suppressed or silenced. On the contrary, theoretical differences are viewed as a valuable source of strength. For example, essentialist or biologistic assumptions about a "homosexual gene," which is quite alien to some GLBT theorists, are valuable because this triggers debate and has social implications and political effects.

Gay and Lesbian Studies also lack common methodological approaches. Similar to social sciences and various disciplines of the humanities, gay and lesbian studies use a combination of methodological approaches, if possible and if resources are available. Empirical studies based on both small and large samples are as frequent as personal narratives and case studies. In the field of qualitative methodology, gay and lesbian studies boast one celebrity. This is Ken Plummer (1995, 2003), who is widely acclaimed for his theory and methodology of narrative biographies. Feminist influence on the field of methodology is also present, with the emphasis being on the reflexive method. This means that the researcher listens to the interlocutor and becomes involved instead

This book explores a relatively large number of issues, and I am not going to list all of them. I think it is more appropriate to emphasize the three issues that, in my opinion, are a kind of connective tissue, or a fluid that permeates, and occasionally swamps, the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. These are the boundless taken-for-grantedness of heteronormativity, the social invisibility of homosexuality, and violence.

Heterosexuality, or in other words, heterosexual normativity, is all-pervasive and, paradoxically, invisible at the same time, because it is practiced on a daily basis. Social life and public spaces are by no means sexually neutral. The street is heterosexualized, and so is the workplace, not to mention various everyday rituals. The fact that some social norm is taken for granted becomes obvious only when one transgresses it, or is accused of transgressing it. Therefore, every attack on a gay or a lesbian in the street, including a disapproving stare, a gesture, or a word, reproduces the sexualization, or to be more accurate, the heterosexualization of the street, meaning that the street is hostile to and intolerant of everything threatening that taken-for-granted "invisibility." And this invisibility is a firmly entrenched assumption. It lies behind every parent's reproachful question as to why the child has not yet introduced his/her partner; it underlies every embarrassing silence and predicament, barely expressed tenderness, and the fear that relatives or colleagues at work will "discover it." Institutionalization makes heterosexuality

of remaining outside the research process; he/she eliminates the boundaries between the "subject" and the "object" and does not conceal his/her (political) position or engagement. This approach aims to turn "objects" into "participants." It should not be overlooked that the "objective scientific approach" (which we all know does not exist) is a powerful tool when it becomes necessary to persuade influential public institutions (e.g. universities, ministries and so on). The best illustration is research on AIDS.

The absence of methodological and theoretical uniformity (is it needed at all?) is matched by the absence of a common political platform. In contrast to various types of feminisms, where all activists and authors are left-wing, making it virtually impossible to imagine feminism outside the leftist political arena, gay and lesbian political ideology (conviction) is quite different. It spans practically the entire political spectrum, to the left and to the right of the center, including conservatives, liberals and so on. But, regardless of these differences in political views, they all share the same political origins. They were born of the 1970s movements that demanded sexual justice, meaning greater social and legal rights for non-heterosexual individuals. Without these movements, Gay and Lesbian Studies would not have emerged. If nothing else, this is their basic unifying, defining and substantive dimension.

Let us try to define more accurately what gay and lesbian studies are and what they could be. Their essential feature is that they accept the need for life with differences and

normal, natural, fixed and stable, meaning taken for granted. Yet despite everything, it is not possible to overlook one trait that is immanent to heteronormativity – its reliance on repression and violence for its own reproduction. And if it is truly natural and normal, why does it have to rely on violence for its reproduction? If it is self-evident, why does it have to "work on itself" intensely and why does it have to be continually displayed and re-asserted?

And what can be said about the display of homosexuality? In connection with it, it is possible to detect another rationale present in the apparently liberal and tolerant attitude of the "normal majority," which reasons along these lines: "Why do homosexuals declare their sexual orientation with such pomp, but heterosexuals do not feel the need to do the same?". It is not necessary to declare publicly your sexual orientation. Be what you are in privacy, and do not provoke others. But if you nevertheless decide to challenge others, be prepared to accept the consequences, or in other words, keep in mind that you are responsible for the consequences. These attitudes reflect the traditional hierarchy characterizing oppressive power, which is all the more frightening for its self-congratulation about its openness and liberal thinking. We are tolerant towards those who are different as long as they remain invisible, deeply buried in privacy or shut away in a ghetto. The strategy of forcible confinement to privacy is not a recent invention of power structures. Usually, the victims are (were) oppressed social groups in totalitarian regimes.

that they look for ways to foster the co-existence of these differences in an open, constructive, non-exclusivist and democratic manner. Therefore, the first definition that attempts to capture their essence is political, intra- and extra-textual at the same time. Is it, then, the first academic discipline whose bases are political and beyond science? Second, although it lacks common political grounds, the argument is political and original, since it fights for sexual justice and equality. One should not overlook the fact that the key and most influential gay and lesbian texts have emerged in the contexts and historical circumstances crucial for gay and lesbian movements.

Such an example is a cult article by Mary McIntosh (1968) on the role of homosexuality, a document that is the key to a new understanding of homosexuality. It was written in the late 1960s and offered novel analytical options; it was written in a specific political context, when the British legislation was amended to decriminalize homosexuality, recognizing it as a disturbance, or a disease. Another such example is a famous book by the American historian John Boswell (1980) on the role of the Catholic church in disseminating homophobia. Himself a Roman Catholic, Boswell wrote an emotional account showing how Catholicism abandoned its initial tolerant position supportive of co-existence and embarked on the moral war only many years later. In his recent books, Boswell deals with the attitude of Catholicism towards homosexual marriage and the family. Another political example is the French gay theorist Guy Hocquenghem (2000),

One could wonder (but we do not) how it is possible that some of these groups that were themselves locked in "forcible privatization" in the past are not capable of basic critical reflection on such conduct, but on the contrary, widely practice it oppressing those who are politically weaker than themselves. Here I have in mind the viewpoints on homosexuality among the Catholic Ministry for Persons with Same-sex Attraction found on their webpage at www.kapis.org. There, one can read: "A message of hope. Ex-gays prove that change is possible." Or an article entitled "Top 10 Reasons to Support Marriage," where it is said that the government is by the people, for the people, and the people oppose same-sex marriage.

Violence, as the authors say (p. 17), is a constant strand permeating all topics addressed in this study, and it is continually present in the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. Violence here means not only psychological and physical violence perpetrated against homosexuals, but their own constant fear of violence as well. Violence or fear of violence is the constant companion of homosexuals. There is virtually no coming out without fear. "*As soon as I first fell in love for real, I told my mom. But at that time I wouldn't have cared even if the whole world was to know it and even if the next moment I was going to burn. I wanted to be with that man, no matter what, even if it meant that I was going to die the next day*". Every walk around the town is fraught with fear: "*We hold hands like two ... I don't know what. We are not relaxed. We hold hands and walk along*

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who tackled the issue of pedophilia in a politically incorrect manner. Finally, we should not forget several other important and frequently quoted (almost) classic authors, among them Jeffrey Weeks (1999), Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and others.

There is another trait shared by all Gay and Lesbian Studies: the treatment of the relationship among sexuality, eroticism and society, meaning the thematizing of eroticism and sexual practices as socially subversive topics. Enthusiasm for "dangerous adventures," if only in the form of discursive practices, introduced an unexpected point of unification (questioning of sexual orthodoxy and historical favoring of heterosexuality). Accordingly, Gay and Lesbian Studies talk not solely about gays and lesbians, but also about the manners in which societies structure sexuality and about how this structuring influences the non-heterosexual way of living. This means that the essential theme addressed by gay and lesbian studies is identity politics, which involves both affirmation of homosexual choices and identification of the power/ruling power that denies these choices. This area also includes the issue of collective identities and choices. Identities are constructed as a means of political mobilization, a fact that becomes obvious in the case of national, or rather nationalistic, racial and racist identities. In other respects, politics is nothing but a struggle for collective identities, i.e. the production of these identities. Although the majority of gay and lesbian theorists accept the

the street like two paraplegics and we just wait for that remark. [...] Whenever I have a wish to take him by the hand I ask myself. 'Well, what is this now? An activist gesture? Will it be spontaneous?' And in the meantime we have reached the end of the pedestrian mall". Social life is filled with fear: "*I was considering what to say. I won't say 'a friend,' and 'partner' sounds as if I said, 'this is a hypotenuse.' [...] For some time I even agreed to introduce him by his name. So you can think whatever you want. So now, when I'm totally scared, I introduce him by his name. On other occasions I say 'this is my boyfriend.' But I'm still very scared ...*". But the most painful form of violence, worse than beating, insults or spitting, is the self-violence into which gays and lesbians are forced: "*I'd say that even a beating wouldn't be comparable to the sort of violence I used against myself*". Were they not peace-loving, they would have to brace themselves up and strike back.

Finally, let me broach two current political topics also addressed in this book.

Homosexual marriage and related regulation of partnerships and rights, and adoption of children are the issues currently heading the political agenda of gay and lesbian movements in Europe and America. The registration of homosexual partnership has recently been a hotly debated political issue in Slovenia as well. While only a few countries have legalized homosexual marriage and adoption of children by homosexual couples, in the majority of countries the

thesis about fluidity, nomadism and looseness of modern identities, it would probably be dishonest not to mention that a great part of Gay and Lesbian Studies is oriented precisely towards constructing collective identities. Their penetration of universities is, therefore, much more than just an acquisition of place inside these honored and boring temples of knowledge.

Their next interesting peculiarity is their attitude to being inside/outside, to transgression/subversion, on the one hand, and integration and full citizenship, on the other. The majority of counter-cultural, alternative and other such studies preferred the either/or stance, i.e. either integration into odious civil institutions or firm rejection of these and continual existence on the freedom-enabling margins. However, Gay and Lesbian Studies and movements, characteristically do not perceive this as an either/or option, but they want both – to be different and equal at the same time. Recently, this has been understood as a tension between transgression and citizenship, and the tension caused by being outside and inside at the same time. There is another breakthrough that I find very important. In "Telling Sexual Stories" (1995), Ken Plummer talks about a new concept of intimate citizenship. This calls to mind Marshall and the revival of his concept of citizenship (political, civil and social) which has been the leading topic discussed by social sciences and theory of social politics for more than a decade. Plummer added to these rights the right of intimacy, giving excellent grounds for the necessity to protect

dilemma revolves around the question of how to achieve hypothetical (but not certain) gradual progress towards equal rights for homosexuals. In other words, the question is whether it is sensible to consent to the regulation that ensures selective rights for gays and lesbians (e.g. the right to marry or register a partnership, but not also the right to adopt a child), hoping that at some point in the future full equality will be achieved, or whether it is more reasonable to reject the proposed compromise in the name of *equality now!*, particularly because there is no guarantee whatsoever that the next steps (gradual progress) will be implemented (Lešnik 1998). Apart from the question of gradual progress, there is another dilemma: are the attempts to become integrated into the social institutions of marriage and family sensible at all, given that historically and ontologically these institutions are ones of inequality and oppression (oppression by men of women, and by parents of their children). Supporters of integration find justification for their arguments in the discourse of human rights and equality. They demand inclusion in the social organization that is equal for all (even if bad). At the same time, they argue, homosexual marriage would radically denaturalize social constructions producing gender inequality and would thus create opportunities for changes in the direction of greater equality and a "pure relationship" between genders and generations. Opponents, on the other hand, point out that marriage alone would not bring about essential changes unless heteronormative cul-

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and ensure intimate choices and styles of intimate life. In my opinion, the model of politics offered by Kuhar (2005) represents one step further in this respect.

The next trait of Gay and Lesbian Studies is opposition to existing belief as self-evident belief, which is such because it is firmly entrenched in institutions and because it relies on the argument of power instead of on the power of argument. Much effort has been invested in fighting perceptions that excluded gay and lesbian reality and against repressive measures that were legitimized by these perceptions (for example, medicine and psychiatry tortured and imprisoned, history kept silent, sociology overlooked owing to ignorance, psychology was self-complacent in its stupidity, and so on, and so on). Through this, a corpus of knowledge was formed over time; it comprises specific knowledge and perceptions about the GLBT population and about heterosexuality and the repression exerted by the dominant social matrix.

There is another peculiarity that Gay and Lesbian Studies share only with Women's Studies. If you are part of it, that is to say, involved in Gay and Lesbian Studies, you virtually cannot keep away from activism. In this sense, Women's Studies and Gay and Lesbian Studies are, in principle, the last stronghold of Gramscian organic intellectuals, although they are not safe from the classic danger posed by academic ivory towers. We should continually test all that we say and do, especially when speaking on behalf of those who have less power or skill than we do, and fewer chances to be heard. For

ture changes itself, and that many gays and lesbians would not dare exercise their rights. In addition, it would introduce differentiation between those who are integrated, normalized and disciplined and those who evade or explicitly reject this. These dilemmas remain open and the authors do not take a stance on these issues. But respondents did take a stance, and they opted for a pragmatic solution. Most of them support the homosexual marriage option, because it would mean greater social security, and more chance of resolving housing problems, property issues and so on. There is no theoretical position that could reject this option without remaining aloof.

The last important issue I would like to mention is the issue of identity politics and struggle. The authors dealt with homosexual identities at length, but what I want to point out is their conclusion that gays and lesbians are not a uniform or monolithic social group. Homosexual identity is important for them (probably the greater the oppression and violence they suffer, the more important it is), but it is by no means their only identity, and in many cases it is not the most important one. This conclusion would be trivial were it not for those who lend extra meaning to it, that is to say, those heterosexual individuals who reduce gays and lesbians to an identity formation of an almost trade-union type that is allegedly hermetic, self-reliant and concentrated on self-interest, and unconcerned about other oppressed groups and social minorities. Even if this were true, the reproach would still be hypocritically perverted; even if the social and political struggling of GLBT movements were "egoistically limited" and concerned only with their own identity politics, it would be our civilian and human duty to stand by their side when they demand equal rights. Not because of them, but because of us who include them.

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those of us, who want to be/remain alive ivory towers are lethal, although alluring and attractive.

Finally, let me mention one dilemma that calls to mind the situation of Women's Studies and feminism. Gay and Lesbian Studies have become popular; they have become hot-selling products for which publishers fight expecting a commercial success. Does this mean, then, that we face a risk of commodification, cheap commercialization, and scandalous attraction? Of course we do, but despite this it is probably necessary to exploit the opportunities and not moralize more than necessary.

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FOREWORD

Originally, the planned scope of this study was quite modest. We were thinking in terms of a small-scale qualitative research project on same-sex families, meaning a topic that has been a bone of contention in political, moralistic and scientific discussion and that represents – so it seems – the most radical divide between the old world and the new. However, as early as during the planning stage, it became clear that same-sex families could not be studied outside the general context of the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. The broadening of the subject hence appeared to be a reasonable decision, particularly given the fact that this issue has been tackled by very few researchers in Slovenia.[1] Therefore, the study presented here is the first attempt to analyze the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. Let us point out that we by no means imagine that we have exhausted the subject or touched upon all important aspects and levels of the everyday life of gays and lesbians living in a society that is governed by heterosexual norms, i.e. a *heteronormative* society. The issues we examined include identity and coming out, same-sex partnership, violence and discrimination, especially in schools and in the workplace, gay and lesbian subculture and the media, and last but not least, the issue of children in same-sex families.

The first step was the design of an extensive questionnaire. It contained almost ninety questions and the filling out of this questionnaire took on average slightly more than an hour of intensive work. Once we selected the methodological approach, it became clear that the sample had to consist of at least 400 gays and lesbians (the population of Slovenia is 2 million). At this stage we began to fear that our modest original intention had grown into an overly ambitious

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[1] Here we have to mention two studies conducted by the non-governmental organization ŠKUC LL on a non-random sample of the Ljubljana gay and lesbian scene. These studies were the first attempts to analyze a part of the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. For more on this, see the chapter on methodology.

project, and that we could not hope to attract a sufficient number of gay and lesbian participants, who would be prepared to speak "in person" about their life and set aside a considerable amount of time to fill out such an extensive questionnaire. But our doubts were soon dispelled by the flood of e-mail from all parts of the country and the lengthening lists of individuals willing to take part in the survey. The story of one respondent, who stated that our interviewer was only the third person to whom he had come out, was a confirmation that by selecting the snowball method, we managed to reach out to the social networks that had been missed by previous studies in this field. Credit should go not only to the twenty-five interviewers, who were certainly well-motivated and efficient, but to many respondents as well, who became our informal collaborators in seeking out and encouraging other gays and lesbians to take part in the study. So our goal, i.e. a sample consisting of 400 respondents, was soon not only achieved but even exceeded. Were it not for the rapid dwindling of financial resources, the sample would have been even larger. Undoubtedly, we were working with the 'interested population,' who were highly motivated to participate in the survey, hoping that the findings of this research would contribute to the formulation of anti-discriminatory policies and laws. After all, the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs invited applications for this goal-oriented research project because at that time the bill on same-sex partnership was in the process of creation, and the prospect that it would be passed into law seemed good. The preliminary findings of our study were used as the basis for various public debates about this bill, although, regrettably, they were also abused by the Catholic group *Pogovori*, which publicly appealed for a "No" vote on this bill. But a favorable 'political climate' was not the only factor of the success of our project. More than twenty years of gay and lesbian activism in Slovenia contributed an equal part: had it not been for the work already accomplished by gay and lesbian organizations, a research project of this proportions would very likely have been impossible to carry out. Some of these organizations took an active approach and helped us to achieve the required sample size. Needless to say, we are well aware of the 'political character' of this study, and we do not have the slightest intention of hiding it by resorting to empty phrases about the non-politicality of the researchers. Moreover, in our

opinion, the belief that political engagement signals a lack of scientific credibility is simply a prejudice revealing precisely that which it tries to conceal, i.e. the political significance of a research subject and the politicality of those who state that their statements are not politically motivated. Let us stress, however, that we by no means allowed this to affect our theoretical consistency or methodological accuracy, and that we were no less rigorous or critical in analyzing the results of our research.

In developing the concept of this research project and subsequent analysis, we aimed to build a model that would enable us to explain the characteristic features of gays' and lesbians' day-to-day life in heteronormative society. This research position requires an explanation of at least two aspects. First, it is necessary to stress that we consider the gay and lesbian population to be heterogeneous; there is no such thing as a monolithic social group consisting of gays and lesbians, although their homosexual identity is a trait that meaningfully interconnects them. This has also been the basic point of our research interest, i.e. how (stigmatized) social identity intertwines with individual identity. Second, our intention has not been to make a comparison between the gay and lesbian population and the heterosexual population, because we are aware that gay and lesbian practices need to be viewed and analyzed by themselves. A comparison with heterosexual practices (and, once again, it is not possible to speak of heterosexual practices as a homogenous category either) only reproduces the binary opposition heterosexual-homosexual. So, in our study heterosexual practices were not viewed as a control group, but as a way to put the issues under consideration into a wider perspective. In so doing, we started from the thesis that societies of late modernity have been experiencing significant social changes on both the systemic level and the level of everyday and private life, and that the homosexual population is part of these social changes. They contribute to the transformation of intimacy, privacy and lifestyles by creating new forms of living (in partnership or individually) and new lifestyles, and through this they are significantly involved in the reshaping of the traditional social patterns (family, partnership relations, marriage etc.).

In the view of some social scientists, for example Giddens, these social changes are eradicating the dividing line between heterosex-

uals and homosexuals. For example, with the weakening of the power of social conventions, which once played a significant role in the formation and maintenance of partnerships, all partnerships are becoming increasingly alike; they are based on commitment, reflection, and work on the relationship, rather than on socially pre-scribed norms, rules and conventions. Although these processes are quite obvious, we thought it necessary to take into account yet anoth-er crucial factor influencing the everyday life of gays and lesbians: i.e. the fact that social conventions still have very strong implications for the homosexual population (this was actually the point of depar-ture for our study, later confirmed by our findings). What we mean by this is the power of heteronormativity constituting the heterosex-ual social framework of gays' and lesbians' lives, in which the assumption of heterosexuality lies at the root of the operational pat-tern of all social institutions. In our opinion, heteronormativity has a twofold effect on the everyday life of homosexuals: it generates social exclusion (e.g. explicit and implicit stigmatization, homopho-bia and violence against gays and lesbians), and it puts pressure on gays and lesbians to adjust themselves to heterosexual social norms and heterosexual behavioral patterns. On the one hand, therefore, heteronormativity operates as a mechanism of exclusion for gays and lesbians, while on the other, it puts pressure on them to imitate heterosexual roles, norms and patterns. In our study, this effect was evident in answers to the questions concerning children. Some gays and lesbians expressed reservations regarding this issue, believing that as homosexuals they were not justified to claim that "heterosex-ual privilege."

To sum up, in this research study and the resulting paper, we began with a twofold thesis. We perceive gays and lesbians as a key factor in later modern societies, that is, as the generators of changes that undermine traditional heteronormative ties. At the same time, we understand a heteronormative social arrangement as constitut-ing the main social framework for the everyday life of gays and les-bians, and one which frequently produces hierarchy and negative effects, by attaching a stigma to homosexuality and hence generat-ing homophobia and violence.

This book is divided into five chapters examining five sets of top-ics. In the first chapter, we present in detail the methodological back-

ground of our research. Relying on comparable studies, we problematize research on invisible social minorities while particularly stressing the dilemmas accompanying research into homosexuality. We describe the concept and the progress of both the qualitative and the quantitative part of our research, and we present the main socio-demographic characteristics of the sample used in this study. The second, shorter chapter is theoretical, including a more detailed discussion of the changes in late modernity mentioned in this foreword. We also present the theoretical apparatus on which we based our concept for the research plan and data analysis. The remaining three chapters contain detailed presentations of the findings of the quantitative and qualitative parts of the research. We begin with the issue of homosexual identity. We discuss early reflections on homosexuality, the shaping of homosexual identity, and especially the act of coming out. We devote special attention to the family as a place where this painstaking process takes place, that is, the disclosure of homosexual identity followed by the acceptance and managing of new (stigmatized) identity. In connection with this, we draw attention to the potential violence that follows coming out and remains hidden within the family circle. In the fourth chapter we discuss homosexual partnerships, placing them in the context of Gidden's thesis about pure relationships, while pointing out the inevitability of the heteronormative social context within which these partnerships exist, and which can essentially influence their functioning. This is supported by concrete examples of coming out in the public (e.g. in the street) while discussing the place of these partnerships within wider family networks. The fourth chapter concludes with the issue of same-sex marriages and potential formation of same-sex families. Chapter five deals with the (homophobic) violence that was a constant strand running through all the topics examined in this study. We place particular emphasis on discrimination against gays and lesbians in the workplace and, in connection with the heteronormativity of public spaces, the violence they encounter in everyday life, i.e. on the streets, in bars, cinemas and so on. Finally, we add some proposals for the formulation of a politics of homosexuality and a summary review of the quantitative part of the study, through which we want to draw the readers' attention to several themes that were addressed in this research, although not analyzed in-depth in this book.

Although we presume that this book will be of interest primarily to professional circles, the policy makers and students who increasingly address these topics in their seminar and diploma papers, we hope that the lay public will also find it useful, especially gays, lesbians, their parents and friends. Each chapter is self-contained, so readers interested only in the findings or in particular issues may comfortably omit the introductory theoretical chapters.

Finally, a few words about the title of this book. One conclusion of our study is that homosexuality is still privatized and confined to privacy. "I don't mind them as long as they don't do it in front of my face" is an apparently liberal stance. Therefore, gays and lesbians may be gays and lesbians only in privacy. In this sense, privacy becomes "unbearable." But our study also pointed to a degree of passivity, perhaps even resignation, on the part of gays and lesbians themselves. If we are cloaked in privacy, we do not need to face discrimination, stand up for our rights and expose ourselves. In this sense, privacy can equal "comfort." An illusionary comfort.

text accurately into English. We would also like to thank the Ministry of Science and Sport and the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Affairs for funding this study, and particularly the Open Society Institute, New York, which stepped in when our research ambitions exceeded our initial financial plan.

Finally, we owe much to all respondents in this research. This book is dedicated to you. Thank you for your trust.

Alenka Švab and Roman Kuhar,
Ljubljana and Šenčur, October 1, 2005

RESEARCH ON THE EVERYDAY LIFE
OF GAYS AND LESBIANS

The design of the empirical study
and the dilemmas concerning the methodology
applied in the study of hidden social groups

Methodologists recognize that research on hidden and hard-to-reach social groups, including gays and lesbians, is a demanding task, primarily because of the problems connected with the representativeness of the sample and the choice of methodology. Traditional quantitative methods of data collection used with representative samples are not possible in this case, because the socio-demographic characteristics of the group are usually not known. At the same time, this type of research usually involves relatively small groups that are also anonymous owing to a social stigma. This represents the main difficulty in sampling.

For these reasons, researchers of the everyday life of hidden social groups (Salganik, Heckathorn 2004; Spreen 1992) occasionally employ *qualitative methodologies*, for example in-depth interviews, focus groups and the like (Plumer 1995; Stacey 2002; Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 1999b). This approach enables them to study hard-to-reach social groups using smaller samples and to delve more deeply into the explanation of the phenomena. Gamson (2000), for example, noted that, as a rule, research on homosexuality involved qualitative methods. Our research is not an exception in this respect. The qualitative method had a special weight, although for various reasons presented later in the text, in the empirical part of the study we combined the quantitative method (a survey using a structured questionnaire) and the qualitative method (a focus group as a type of group interview).

We employed the quantitative questionnaire-based empirical method. One of the main reasons was the lack of virtually any data on the life of the target population. In Slovenia, research in this field

has been very limited, so there exists no integral or empirical study of the gay and lesbian population or their everyday life. There have been several specific surveys, part of diploma or master's theses with a limited scope, and two surveys that used non-random samples conducted by Škuc LL .[2] Systematic research of this kind has not yet been developed in Slovenia, while an empirical study that would yield concrete socio-demographic data on the gay and lesbian population would be difficult to carry out, since it is not clear what their share in the total population is. Furthermore, there are ethical issues involved, plus the question of how to define a homosexual and the issue of fluid identity (all discussed below).

In conducting the quantitative survey, we aimed to obtain the basic statistical data, or rather, the characteristic traits of this social group. However, since this research looked into private and intimate lives, quantitative data would not have sufficed for complex interpretations in the later part of the study, so we employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative method.

There were other reasons for choosing such a combination of methods in addition to those mentioned above. These are discussed in the next two sections of this chapter, dealing with individual segments of the empirical study. Most arise directly from the nature of both methodologies, each of which has certain advantages over the other as well as certain drawbacks. This is why researchers conducting empirical studies of social phenomena, and of everyday life in particular, increasingly use a combination of both methods.

Quantitative method

In conceptualizing the empirical part of our research, we first had to resolve the question of how to define the target population, including the question of how to determine the same-sex orientation of an individual. Such a definition presupposes the existence of fixed and uniform identities, which are ideally divided into three types: homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual. Yet it is not quite clear if this classification refers to the sexual experiences only or to one's emotional

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[2] "On Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation" (N = 172), conducted in 2001 in collaboration with ILGA Europe, and "On registered Partnership" (N = 205), completed in 2002. See Velikonja and Greif 2001, 2003.

makeup as well. The Dictionary of Slovene Literary Language describes these categories as a "sexual tendency" towards persons of the same sex, opposite sex or both sexes. However, this classification may cause the researcher a number of difficulties in practice. The first arises from the fact that the definition of sexual orientation and sexual identity is usually subjective and may either deviate from these categories or change over time. A further, even greater problem is the relationship between same-sex orientation, sexual identity and sexual activity. The question that presents itself at this point is how many sexual contacts with a person of the same sex would justify the definition of someone as gay or lesbian. Another important question is whether someone should be considered gay or lesbian although he/she has not yet had sexual contact with a person of the same sex. Those research studies that seek to locate persons oriented towards the same sex within large samples of the general population frequently fall into this trap by asking the respondents whether they have had sexual experience with a person of the same sex in the last year. In our opinion, this approach to the topic of homosexuality is limited, because it reduces homosexuality to sexual experience only. Some researchers, therefore, emphasize that these data illustrate only sexual experience and tell nothing about the individual's preferences or identity. In fact, an individual may perceive his/her sexual identity as heterosexual, homosexual or the like, even if he/she has not yet had any sexual contact whatsoever. In addition, sexual identity may change over time. In everyday life, sexual and other identities frequently intertwine, or succeed one another. Some individuals who today self-define as homosexuals may have once perceived their sexual identity as heterosexual. Similarly, there are people who live as homosexuals and have homosexual experiences but never assume homosexual identity, and so on. In our opinion, the expression 'fluid identity' (Ule 2000) more appropriately reflects the situation, so we left it to the respondents to define their sexuality. Those who self-defined as gays or lesbians were included in the study.

Defining the target population is a first step in the research process, and it is especially important at the stage of *sampling*. We have already mentioned the problem of the absence of socio-demographic data on the homosexual population, meaning that we did

not know what their share in the total population of Slovenia was or what the structure of this population was, in terms of gender, age and education. This prevented us from establishing a representative sample and consequently, from extrapolating conclusions to the entire homosexual population. However, the purpose of the survey in our study was not to determine the share of the homosexual population, but to obtain information on the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. This information was the basis for the qualitative part of the study in which we examined individual topics.

Basically, there are two methodologies used in research on hidden social groups: *descending and ascending* (Atkinson, Flint 2001). The latter is used primarily when attempting to define the size of the homosexual population. Some researchers employing this method try to establish the sexual orientation, preferences or sexual behavior of respondents either by asking indirect questions about their sexual practices, sexual partners or sexual experience, or by asking direct questions about their sexual orientation, or they base their estimates on the population censuses or even on the sex of a partner in the same household (Diamond 1993; Sandfort 1998; Black et al. 2000). This descending approach is deficient in many respects. We have already mentioned some controversial points, among these the problem of how to define a homosexual, the reduction of homosexuality to sexual experience only and the absence of data on the socio-demographic characteristics of this group. Another fact that suggests unreliability is a low percentage of persons identified by these studies as same-sex oriented. Trust is crucial for every discussion about intimate subjects, since people are usually reluctant to talk openly about their sexual practices and orientation. And, with the descending strategy, it is not possible to speak about *trust* as a basis for the recruitment of the target population. So, for example, a Dutch research study in 1989 found that 13.4% of men had at least one homosexual contact, and a comparable study conducted in Portugal in 1991 identified only 0.9% (Standfort 1998). Percentages obtained in the studies using this approach thus essentially depend on the sampling method, the way in which questions are posed, and, above all, on the social climate affecting the individual's readiness to speak about homosexual orientation or experience. Another important factor is the (implicit) political agenda of a research team,

which in certain cases may give rise to fears that the findings could be used as the basis for disqualification.

In preparing our research, we attempted to avoid these problems and dilemmas by selecting an ascending sampling strategy. This also tied in well with the goal of our research. The method we chose involved qualitative sampling based on mutual trust, intimate social networks consisting of friends or similar, and primarily self-identification. As a result, our sample included only those respondents who self-identified as gays or lesbians, whereby their sexual experience was of no consequence for our purposes.[3] By using the ascending approach, we also wanted to overcome the basic problem of the limited accessibility of this population. In fact, many gays and lesbians have come out only to the family and narrow, informal social circles consisting, for example, of close friends, while some have not yet come out at all. The reason is a high level of homophobia, the risk of social stigma and of becoming a victim of violence. All these factors essentially determine the accessibility of this social group.

Yet, one advantage of hidden social groups is that their members often know one another and belong to the same social networks. This enables researchers to use *snowball sampling*, or the *link-tracing* method (Spreen 1992). This qualitative sampling method is especially useful in studies involving smaller target groups where the establishment of contacts presupposes a certain level of trust (Atkinson, Flint, 2001). The philosophy of the link-tracing method is based on the assumption that members of hidden or hard-to-reach groups may be located through the social networks to which they belong, or in other words, that the initial sample of respondents have links that may be used to access other individuals in the target population. A major drawback of this methodology is that it may fail to locate (isolated) individuals who are not members of social networks or belong to small, tightly closed networks. In addition, there is a danger that by using this method we recruit respondents from just

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[3] Focus group interviews revealed that some individuals, owing to various sexual and emotional experiences, had a problem with using fixed categories such as "gay" or "lesbian." Although they disclosed their homosexual orientation, they did not necessarily self-define as gay or lesbian, or they deliberately rejected such identification. The survey did not reveal these nuances, which only shows how important is the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches in investigating these social minorities. See also Savin-Williams 2005.

one, readily accessible social network (in our example this would be the Ljubljana gay and lesbian scene). Atkinson and Flint (2001) propose that these weaknesses may be overcome by increasing the sample. So in order to avoid this risk, it is necessary to engage several social networks, or the results may reflect the experience of just one network, or one kind of experience may be overemphasized.

The survey method was personal survey, i.e. a face-to-face survey using a structured questionnaire.[4] Our questionnaire contained 88 questions, plus 9 questions for respondents with children. It was divided into seven thematic sets: demographic data, homosexual identity, partner relations, violence and discrimination, gay and lesbian subculture and the media, and children. The filling out of the questionnaire lasted 35 to 70 minutes on average. The sample consisted of 443 respondents.

In selecting respondents for our sample, we first drew a list of 45 "initial" respondents, whom we (the authors) invited personally or who responded to our advertisements and public invitations. These appeared on gay and lesbian web pages (SIQRD, Out in Slovenija, GayKokoška, SGS) and in Legebitrina oznanila (a magazine by the Legebitra group). The first contacts were established through e-mails, in which we asked for permission to give their names to 25 interviewers, all of whom received special training on how to carry out the survey. Most of these interviewers also had their own contacts. Some of them were gays or lesbians, and as insiders they had easier access to potential participants who could not be located using conventional methodological approaches.

The snow-ball effect then worked as expected: during the initial weeks the number of participants increased, then the identified social networks began to close down, although many remained open

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[4] Another possible survey method was web-based survey. Its advantage is that respondents may complete the questionnaire on their own. Self-survey creates the impression of greater privacy and the answers are more accurate, especially when delicate themes are involved (Tourangeau 1996). By publishing the survey on the Internet, we would probably have elicited an even greater response, but we nevertheless decided against it for two main reasons. The face-to-face survey enabled us to establish a great deal of control over the sample, which would not have been possible with a web-based survey. In addition, we thought that an 88-item questionnaire (plus 9 questions for respondents with children) was too extensive to be published on the web. The respondents would need a lot of time to fill out the questionnaire, and it is very likely that one consequence would have been missing data in the questionnaire.

even after the completion of the survey. In fact, we had to bring the survey to an end for financial reasons, rather than for the lack of potential respondents. The chart below shows the course of the sampling procedure.
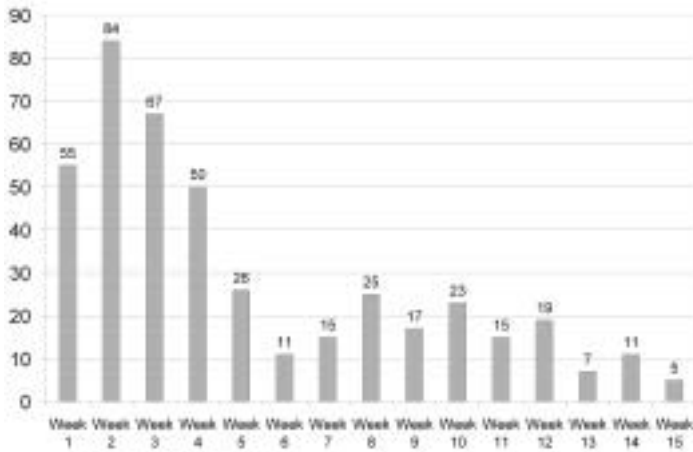
FIGURE 1: SAMPLE FORMATION BY WEEKS

Initially, most respondents were from Ljubljana and its surroundings, but then the sample branched out, so we were able to reach out to other parts of Slovenia. We therefore managed, at least to a degree, to overcome the shortcomings of previous research studies, where the sample was mainly recruited from the Ljubljana gay and lesbian scene, meaning a specific social network characterized by urban concentration and gay and lesbian activism. The link-tracing method opened the door to gays and lesbians belonging to social networks not included in previous studies. For example, 12% of our respondents stated that they never visited a gay or lesbian club or other such gathering place in Slovenia; 13% were unfamiliar with the work of gay and lesbian activists in Slovenia; 11% were not aware of any gay or lesbian media or of the Slovene GLBT web pages, and 48% came from other parts of Slovenia (outside Ljubljana or its surroundings). None of these is characteristic of the Ljubljana gay and lesbian scene.

FIGURE 2: THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE

The recruitment was based on personal *trust*. All respondents were requested to ask their homosexual friends to join in. This proved to be a good method, since those respondents who had already completed the questionnaire could relate their experience to potential new participants. In this way, we managed to win over for participation individuals who would never have responded to our invitation of their own accord, or filled out a survey questionnaire published on the Internet or sent by post.

Other studies (Sandfort 1998) have found that the characteristics of the homosexual population are similar to those of the general population, except for a few details: the percentage of males (gays) is larger than that of females (lesbians); the majority of this population is concentrated in urban centers; their educational level is on average higher than that of the general population and, quite expected-

ly, as a rule these individuals are not married. Nevertheless, these general conclusions do not suffice for statistical weighting of the sample, so it is inevitably distorted to a certain degree. Despite this, the demographic data drawn from our sample point to general characteristics similar to those obtained by other researchers. Sixty-six percent of the sample was male, compared to 34% female; 62% of respondents currently live in an urban center (Ljubljana or Maribor); their educational level is above the Slovenian average (55% have secondary education, 28% have university or higher education, and 4% have a master's or doctoral degree); 95% of respondents have never been married. Here we should emphasize that sampling errors may have been responsible for these differences; it is possible that higher-educated men living in urban centers were more willing to speak about their sexual orientation than homosexual individuals from other demographic groups.

The main purpose of the quantitative part of the study was to identify the main determinants of the family and social contexts of gays' and lesbians' everyday life. We have already pointed out that the absence of data on the socio-demographic characteristics of this population made it impossible to generalize the findings to the entire gay and lesbian population. According to quantitative methodology standards, the sample was not representative. The data are therefore generalized to the studied sample only, and the population is only described. On the basis of the data collected, primarily the size of the sample, its geographical distribution and the correspondence between our socio-demographic data and the findings of other studies, it is possible to assume that we came close to our goal, which was to include as diverse as possible a gay and lesbian population coming from various social networks.

The qualitative part of the study

Researchers conducting qualitative studies of hidden or hard-to-reach social groups usually opt for individual interviews (Madriz 2000). However, the use of a focus group as a variant of group interview has recently become more common. Although this method began to gain recognition in the 1920s and the 1930s, it began to flourish only in the 1980s and later, when it was widely applied in

studies of education and teaching, in feminist studies, linguistics, environmental studies, research on social movements and the like (Litosseliti 2003).

The focus group method involves a guided discussion with a selected group about their experiences with and views on selected topics (Krueger, Casey 2000). Focus groups are a form of group interviewing, although the two are distinctly separate, because one outstanding feature of the focus group is interaction within the group. This enables the researcher to collect a wide spectrum of information on the subject discussed (Litosseliti 2003). The main purpose of the focus group approach is to gain insight into the views, feelings, experience and reaction of the participants, which would not be possible using other methods (Gibbs 1997). The purpose of the focus group is not to measure viewpoints, but to understand them (Brečko 2005).

The structured survey questionnaire, like the one used in the first part of our study, does not allow for in-depth questions and answers. Therefore, for more detailed analysis of the problems identified in the quantitative empirical part of our study, qualitative research was needed. In deciding between individual in-depth interviews and focus groups, we chose the latter for several reasons. One of these was purely pragmatic, i.e. time constraints, given that the research project was limited to two years. The focus group method makes it possible to interview more people within a shorter span of time. This approach also enables greater concentration on selected themes, while an individual interview may easily delude participants into discussing issues that are of minor importance for the study.

Interaction is an important element of all focus groups, because participants may pose questions to one another, which enables them to reflect on and re-assess their views on particular experiences (Barbour, Kitzinger 1999). A focus group makes possible mutual reflection on the part of all participants, including the moderator, and at the same time it is possible to observe interaction within the group. This last element proved especially useful with those focus groups that included partners who had differing interpretations of the same event, and groups where participants knew each other well. Nevertheless, their narratives were mainly prepared and well thought out beforehand, since we were exploring the subjects that they already considered extensively in the past and discussed in

their social environments. All participants demonstrated a high level of self-reflection, which may be a result of their continual exposure to homophobic reactions.

We chose the focus group method because it is a collective research method used in the study of complex individual and shared life experiences (Madriz 2000). The homosexuals are a social group whose strong common denominator is a stigma attached to homosexuality by the predominantly heteronormative society. A group interview enables strong identification with the group, and through it makes participants more ready to talk. Precisely because of this, the focus group method has an important emancipatory sub-tone.

Yet the focus group method inevitably has some drawbacks as well. First, the interview does not take place in an environment in which social interaction usually occurs. Furthermore, an assistant has to be present, and for some participants this may be distracting, so it is difficult to assess how authentic social interaction within a focus group actually is (Madriz 2000, 836). In our opinion, the presence of the assistant in our focus groups was not disturbing, although we are aware that some would have preferred individual interviews. We assume that in our case the individuals who consented to take part in the focus group were mainly homosexuals who had already come out, meaning homosexuals who had no difficulties with their homosexuality in this respect and were therefore ready to talk about it. Several gays and lesbians refused to participate in focus group discussions, explaining that they did not want to speak about their sexual orientation within a group, but they were willing to accept an individual interview. One reason frequently stated was the fear that the group would include a person to whom they had not yet come out, or a person whom they knew well and in whose presence they would not like to answer certain questions (e.g. a former partner, an acquaintance etc.). Owing to the high level of anonymity and data protection, we could not guarantee these individuals that a group would not include a person they knew.

Focus groups were segregated by gender for two reasons. In phone conversations with lesbians and gays who were willing to participate in focus groups, we asked whether they wanted the moderator to be male or female. While most gays did not have preferences as to the gender of the moderator, lesbians mainly opted for female

moderators. Accordingly, we decided that both the moderator and the assistant participating in lesbian focus groups should be female, and we also assumed that participants' readiness to talk would be greater if the focus group as a whole was homogenous in terms of gender.

Focus groups interviews, seven in all, were carried out in May and June 2004. Four interviews were with male and three with female groups. There were 36 participants in total, most of whom had already filled out the questionnaire by that time. In fact, all respondents who participated in the quantitative part of the study were invited to participate in the second, qualitative part. We invited seven to eight participants to each focus group, but eventually the average size of a group was five participants. This means that three participants per group at the most, who had initially confirmed their participation, later changed their minds. Focus groups usually consist of seven to ten people (Krueger, Casey 2000, 6). However, compared to market research where focus groups are used most frequently, in our case smaller groups proved to be an advantage, because the research subjects were of a more intimate nature. Had the focus groups been larger, we would have risked a situation in which some participants would not have the opportunity to express their views and experiences. Madriz has come to a similar conclusion when using focus groups to study the everyday life of Latin American and Afro-American women. In her opinion, smaller groups were better suited, since the moderator could avoid the problems of guiding the discussion and channeling it to the research subject (Madriz 2000, 845). In our example, focus groups consisting of four to five participants proved most effective, while in the groups consisting of eight participants, maintenance of the focus turned out to be a more difficult task for the moderator and the assistant, on the one hand, and participants, on the other. In addition, it was not possible to go into depth for each of the subjects discussed.[5]

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[5] Focus groups included 19 men (53%) and 17 women (47%). All interviews were held in Ljubljana, but participants came from various parts of Slovenia. The majority were from Ljubljana and Maribor (81%), 6% were from smaller towns, 8% from bigger towns and 6% from the countryside. The average age of participants was 27; the youngest one was 19 years old, and the oldest 40. The structure of focus groups by educational attainment was as follows: 58% were secondary school graduates, 28% were university graduates, 6% had only primary or lower secondary technical education, and 3% were voca-

During the quantitative part of the study, it was established that several issues required a more in-depth discussion; these were the coming out process, partnership relations and violence. Violence was a constant strand permeating all discussions, since it is continually present in the everyday lives of gays and lesbians. It is not manifested only as psychological pressure or physical violence, but above all as a (constant) fear of violence. Our quantitative data on homosexual identity confirmed existing theories about the coming out process and homosexual identity formation (Troiden 1988; Plummer 1996). They primarily pointed to the fear of coming out to fathers. The data on partnerships confirmed our assumption that same-sex partnerships, owing to the absence of gender-determined roles characteristic of heterosexual couples, come closer to "pure relationships" (Giddens 2000). However, the main difference between heterosexual and homosexual partnerships is that the latter are part of a usually stigmatizing and homophobic heteronormative social context. Individual sets of themes are analyzed in the next chapters.

Basic socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

The questionnaire-based survey took 105 days (15 weeks) and lasted from the end of March to the beginning of July 2003. The sample included 443 respondents; of these, 292 were men and 151 women.
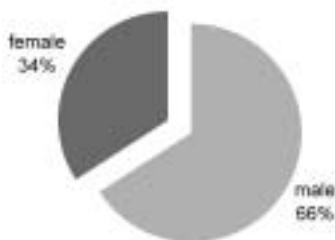
FIGURE 3: SAMPLE BY GENDER

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tional school graduates. Most of the participants (53%) were university students (both undergraduate and graduate); 31% were employed, 8% were secondary school students, and 8% were unemployed. At the time of conducting focus group interviews, the majority of participants had a same sex partner. Some focus groups included both partners.

The majority of respondents were between 21 and 40 years old, so the findings primarily reflect the experience of this age group. The oldest respondent was born in 1943 and the youngest in 1987. The age of respondents spans a continuum from 17 to 60 years.
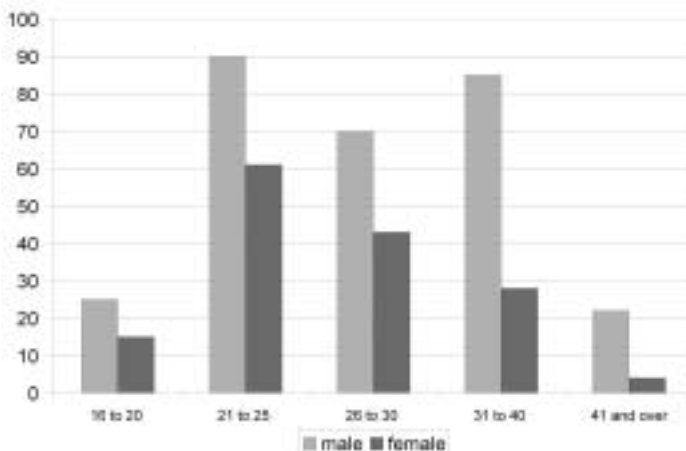
FIGURE 4: THE STRUCTURE OF THE SAMPLE BY AGE AND GENDER

The majority of respondents live in larger urban centers, i.e. Ljubljana or Maribor (62.1%). More than half of respondents had moved to a bigger urban center at some point in time (54.4%). In most cases, the reason for moving was education or job, while in 4.5% of cases the main reason was problems with the family or the environment because of the respondent's sexual orientation.

Somewhat more than 14% of respondents were from the country-side, and a similar percentage came from smaller towns (Celje, Kranj, Nova Gorica etc.) or from a smaller place (categorized between the smaller town and the countryside).

The majority (44.9%) share households with their parents; 25.5% live with their partner, and 18.7% live alone.
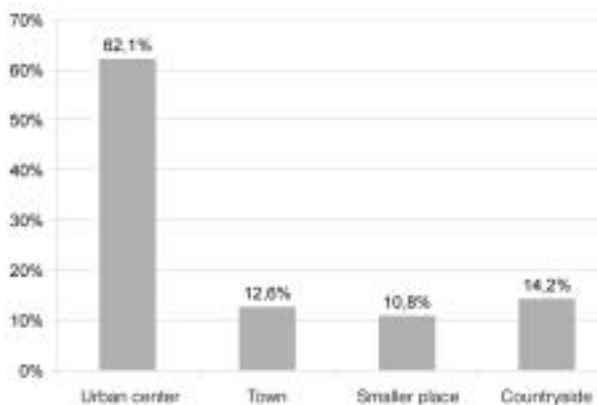
FIGURE 5: GEOGRAPHICAL DISPERSION OF THE SAMPLE

Employed persons and students accounted for the major part of the sample. There were more women than men in the student group, and this ratio was reversed in the employed group. Gender differences with respect to employment status were statistically significant:[6]

			Gender		Total
			male	female	
What	Secondary school student	%	8.3	8.7	8.4
is your	University student	%	31.1	45.6	36.1
status?	Employed	%	46.7	31.5	41.6
	Unemployed	%	5.5	8.7	6.6
	Free-lance	%	3.1	2.7	3.0
	Entrepreneur, self-employed	%	4.8	2.7	4.1
	Pensioner	%	0.3	0	0.2
Total		%	100	100	100

FIGURE 6: STRUCTURE BY STATUS AND GENDER

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[6] p=2,441; df=6; sig=0,025. "df" means "degrees of freedom." This is a statistical parameter used in various statistical tests (e.g. ANOVA, Pearson Chi square etc.) describing the number of observations used to calculate the sum of squares (e.g. in variance analysis) where n-1 and n is the number of observations. "sig" and "p" denote statistical significance. This is the degree of characteristic by which we decide whether or not the result is random. "p" represents the probability that the null hypothesis will be rejected (the first degree error). Usually, the highest value that can still be regarded as statistically significant is 0.05.

As in the case of other studies mentioned in the introductory part, our findings also confirm that the educational structure of this sample is higher than that of the general population.[7] The majority of respondents had completed secondary school, while 28% had higher or high education. There were no significant differences between genders with respect to their educational attainment.[8]

			Gender		Total
			male	female	
What is	Primary school	%	8.0	10.0	8.7
your	Vocational school	%	6.6	2.7	5.3
level of	Secondary school	%	54.2	56.0	54.8
edu-	Upper-secondary technical school	%	8.0	6.7	7.5
cation?	High school, university	%	20.1	20.0	20.1
	Master's degree, specialization	%	2.8	3.3	3.0
	Doctoral degree	%	0.3	1.3	0.7
	Total	%	100	100	100

FIGURE 7: EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE BY GENDER

One of the questions asked related to religiousness. Thirty percent of respondents answered that they were religious; 47% said that they were not religious, 21% could not answer this question, while somewhat less than 2% chose not to answer this question.

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[7] According to the 2002 census, there are 6.9% of people without primary school in Slovenia; 26.1% have completed primary school, 54% secondary school, 11.9% have higher or university education, and 0.9% have a master's or doctoral degree. In our sample, the most outstanding with respect to average is a group with higher or university education (28%). See http://www.stat.si/popis2002/si/rezultati/rezultati_red.asp?ter=SLO&st=17

[8] p=0,099; df=1; sig=0,753.
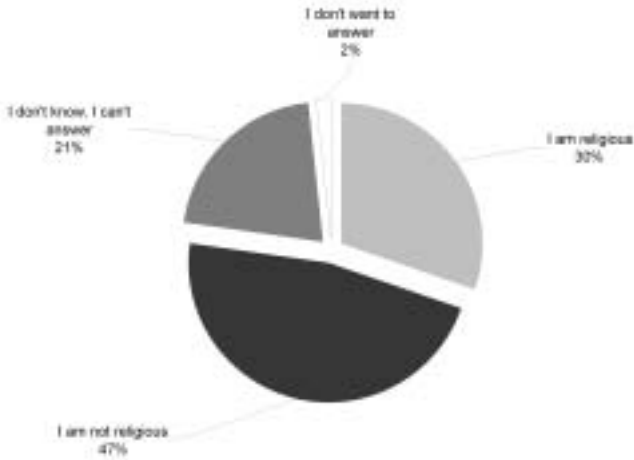
FIGURE 8: ARE YOU RELIGIOUS?

Of the religious respondents, one half stated that they were Roman Catholics, others were Evangelists or Orthodox Christians. Almost 36% of those who stated that they were religious said that they were not members of any institutionalized religious congregation.

		N	%
To which congre- gation do you belong?	Roman Catholic	68	50.7
	Evangelist	4	3.0
	Orthodox Christian	2	1.5
	Other non-Christian	1	0.7
	None	48	35.8
	Other	6	4.5
	Don't want to answer	5	3.7
Total		134	100

FIGURE 9: AFFILIATION TO RELIGIOUS GROUPS

The basic socio-demographic data gathered in our research point to a picture comparable to that of the gay and lesbian population emerging from other studies (Sandfort 1998). For example, our sample included more gays than lesbians. This does not necessarily indicate that the number of lesbians in the general population is smaller. Despite the fact that other researchers have also noted fewer lesbians in their samples, which may indicate the greater social isolation or invisibility of lesbians, as a consequence of the fear of social exposure or stigma, in our case this may be partly attributed to the sampling procedure itself. The initial sample included more gays than lesbians, and the consequence was that we located and mobilized more gay social networks, indeed not homogenous in terms of gender, but still predominantly gay. The ratio did not essentially change even after we began to encourage both researchers and respondents to make an effort towards recruiting more lesbians. A similar problem awaited us when shaping the focus groups. The fact is that more lesbians than gays refused to participate in group interviews. Despite these difficulties, when shaping the focus groups, we did have control over the ratio of men to women, thanks to the relatively high share of both male and female respondents willing to take part in the second part of the study.

The majority of respondents have never been married and most live in urban centers (Ljubljana, Maribor). Researchers generally attribute this greater concentration of gay and lesbian population in urban areas to the greater anonymity characteristic of these environments. In urban areas, the possibilities for shaping a "homosexual lifestyle" are more numerous, because of the lower degree of social control and the presence of infrastructure supporting this lifestyle. In our opinion, the same can be said of our sample. Although somewhat less than 5% of respondents mentioned that the main reason for moving to an urban center was their sexual orientation, the sample consisted of a large percentage of young people attending university courses in Ljubljana or Maribor, where they live temporarily and may decide to remain for good, because of their sexual orientation, among other reasons.

INTIMATE STORIES AND COUNTER-STORIES FROM EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE LATE MODERN AGE

Intimate stories ...

Late modernity is a time of important social changes. These transformations do not take place solely on the institutional level, but also affect individual lives and the self. It is difficult to draw a clear-cut dividing line between the two levels, since the effects are closely intertwined. New lifestyles give rise to new institutions and in the process existing institutions also undergo changes. Yet, these processes also operate in the opposite direction; the existing institutions and the traditional patterns of everyday life resist novel forms. Giddens concludes that tradition, customs and habits still retain a significant role in our age, too (1990, 38). In line with this, we are witness to appeals to preserve the old and to protect the moral principles that these changes seem to undermine. New narratives encounter their opposite images in old narratives, and in the process late modern society is becoming crystallized.

One of the key segments in which these transformations take place is the everyday world of individuals. These are changes that Giddens (2000) described as the *transformation of intimacy*. Changes in intimate and private relationships are closely connected with the process of individualization, which is today everyone's 'destiny,' according to some social scientists (Bauman 2001; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002). This means that daily life is increasingly less subject to societal influence, and that the responsibility for one's own biography is increasingly shifted to the individual. In the view of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), individualization means that traditional social relations, ties and tenets, which once determined the lives of people down to the minutest detail, have been losing their significance. Giddens (1991) speaks of the reflexive project of the self: the individual's identity is no longer defined in advance or delimited,

but it is constantly in the process of formation and deconstruction in the presence of ever-changing potential identities. The age of late modernity is an age of fluid and changing social identities, which are, nevertheless, not entirely independent from the social context, habits, customs, norms and traditions within which they exist.

Without doubt, all these changes significantly influence the everyday life of gays and lesbians, since they themselves co-shape these social processes by pursuing new, non-heterosexual ways of life and lifestyles. The legal regulation of gay and lesbian partnerships, which is one of the topical political issues, is very illustrative of this process – the new lifestyle recognized by society led to the emergence of a number of new institutions regulating these relationships (e.g. registered partnership, co-habitation, homosexual marriage). All of this, along with a number of other social, cultural and political factors, transforms old institutions such as the nuclear heterosexual family or marriage of opposite-sex partners. In Belgium, Canada, Spain and the Netherlands, for example, the traditional perception of marriage as a union of a man and a woman has been redefined and the institution of same-sex marriage introduced. Yet, the protests accompanying the introduction of such laws testify to the fact that new narratives do not replace old ones easily. As of the time of this writing, newspapers are brimming with reports on the protests and marches against same-sex marriage just introduced in Spain by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatera's government. The protests are organized by various religious groups and groups for the protection of the traditional family and values.

In the processes of the transformation of intimacy and reflexive projects of the self, which require from us to decide continually, day by day, who we are and how we should live (Giddens 2000), interpersonal relations undergo radical democratization. Among its implications is the equality of partners and freedom of choice with respect to both the lifestyle and the form of partnerships. Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy, therefore, believe that we are witnessing a convergence, i.e. the disappearance of differences among various partnership arrangements. For example, differences between heterosexual and homosexual partnerships have been disappearing, because the basic drive that propels all partnerships is a search for satisfactory relationship (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 85).

All these assertions have been confirmed by our study as well. Same-sex partnerships undoubtedly contribute to the transformation of intimacy and to the disintegration of traditional notions of intimate partnerships and lifestyles and related behavioral patterns. The dissolution of the traditional meanings of old institutions such as the family is one such consequence. The meaning of the family has been extended to include friends. Particularly in connection with gay and lesbian partnerships, it is possible to speak of the "family of choice," that is to say, families that do not consist of the traditional triad mother-father-child, but new family formations including, for example, close friends. This by no means implies that traditional family relations are being replaced by new ones. Judging by the results of our study, they are still very important components of the everyday life of gays and lesbians.

According to our findings, gays and lesbians form intimate relationships that rest on equality, commitment, constant work on the relationship and so on. This clearly shows that the transformation of intimacy involves not only the option of individual choice, and through it plurality, but that contacts with others based on commitment are also gaining importance (Finch 1989). The *relationship paradigm* (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a) as a trait of intimate life in the late modern era is therefore being established in relation to freedom of choice. In other words, these two aspects of the transformation of intimacy are complementary and predicated on one another.

During the past decades, the possibilities of living openly as a lesbian or gay increased, thanks to the constitution of *new spaces of everyday life* (Bell, Valentine 1995, Valentine 1996). Seidman (2002), for example, thinks that young generations of gays and lesbians increasingly organize their lives beyond the closet.

Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy identified two important factors to which we have been witness ever since the 1980s, and which enable life beyond the closet. One is the already mentioned transformation of intimacy and society at large in the post-modern era. The other is the emergence of a discourse on homosexual life that is no longer restricted to sexuality and identity, but shifts emphasis to personal relations, friendship, experience of intimacy, same-sex parenthood, the rights of homosexual partners and homosexual marriage (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 84). As a result, contemporary gay

and lesbian activists' agenda is no longer dominated by the individual rights of gays and lesbians, but increasingly by the issue of personal relationships. Homosexual marriages and related regulation of partner relations and rights, as well as the issue of the adoption of children, are currently heading the political agenda of gay and lesbian movements in Europe and the USA.

The new social contexts that enable lesbians and gays to organize their lives outside the closet are not the result solely of the activism of the past two or three decades. The roots of these changes which today bear importantly on lesbians' and gays' everyday life should be sought in the more distant past, say, the end of the 19th century in Germany, when agitating for the rights of homosexuals and for destigmatization of this sexual practice took place for the first time, under the auspices of Magnus Hirschfeld. Even more instrumental in bringing about changes and political organizing of homosexuals were the personal narratives of lesbians and gays themselves.

Coming out as a form of intimate narrative about personal experience is not a new phenomenon. Early on, these narratives found their way into literary and other forms of artistic expression, provided that they managed to escape censorship or present themselves as fictitious stories, probably eliciting pity and hence considered harmless to the then dominant morality. In addition, these stories were also accumulating in medical and psychiatric books, which in fact, as Foucault argues (2000), constituted a homosexual as a subject – as an individual with *distinct* sexual identity. Intimate narratives about coming out began to shatter the silence surrounding homosexuality more decisively around the end of the 1960s. At that time, stern views on homosexuality began to lose their grip on society, thanks to the decriminalization of this sexual practice (in Slovenia, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1976). More and more people chose to speak out and relate their intimate stories about their feelings, wishes, and sexual and intimate choices. And, according to Plummer (1995, 144), the stories we tell about ourselves are closely connected with the morality and politics of a specific society. New intimate narratives imply moral and political changes. Every narrative is a form of empowerment for anyone who could tell a similar story. Intimate stories about coming out in fact shape a new "language" through which it is possible to communicate similar

stories. In the case of homosexuality, this was first the language of psychiatry and medicine, later succeeded by the language of human rights and freedoms. Intimate narratives, therefore, inevitably imply political change. Much like the stories about rape, domestic violence or illegal abortion that shattered the silence and brought about feminist politics, the stories about coming out paved the way for the gay and lesbian politics and gay and lesbian movements that have been around since the 1950s. Therefore, it seems that precisely these stories about sexuality contributed to today's less rigid sexual morality, but in the process they encountered, and they still contend with, counter-stories and counter-discourses that endeavor to preserve a morality that rests on traditional religious tenets and beliefs.

... and counter-stories

These sketches of social change in late modernity can be very misleading if the social context is disregarded. Although it is likely, as many theorists argue, that society's influence on everyday life has been diminishing, this does not mean that its influence should be entirely omitted from consideration. The everyday life of gays and lesbians is still strongly determined by the fact that they live in a society in which heterosexuality continues to be the predominant norm. Queer theorists speak about heteronormativity and heterosexuality as a presumably universal norm. It finds expression in various types of 'counter-stories', for example homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians, and is hence inscribed in lesbians' and gays' experiences of everyday life.

Heterosexuality is a norm pervading virtually every pore of life in modern societies. Although it may seem that heterosexuality can be discussed only in connection with sexuality, this normative assumption may be identified in a number of other (non-sexual) aspects of everyday life. After all, it is implicitly present in all human relations, either business or friendly relations, parents-to-child relations, teacher-to-student relations and so on. At the same time, the assumption of heterosexuality is taken for granted to such an extent that its ubiquity blinds us to its presence. Similar to Butler's conclusions about gender (2001 [1990]), which as a coherent and fixed category becomes established through repeated stylizations of the body, pro-

ducing an image of a 'natural' body that 'by nature' reflects a specific gender identity (male or female), heterosexual societies, too, become established through constant repetition of the performance of heterosexuality. Eidman (2002) hence denotes the closet as a form of social isolation and adjustment to the domination of heterosexuality. The latter implicitly presupposes feelings of shame, fear and guilt in all who cannot be incorporated into the heterosexual imagery. The closet is therefore a form of managing stigmatized identity (Goffman 1990 [1959]). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993 [1991], 46) graphically observed that, owing to the flexibility of heterosexual assumptions, new walls surrounding homosexual individuals are continually being constructed, even while they sleep. In her opinion, the closet is a defining structure of the oppression of gays and lesbians. Precisely because of this, says Valentine (1996, 138), the naturalization of heterosexuality signals the inability of the individual to perceive himself/herself as the Other. The inability to recognize one's own heterosexual identity as *different* is an act that has its specific meaning and which, in terms of performativity, repeatedly reestablishes heterosexualization of both the physical space and social relations between people.

Heterosexuality is therefore an institutionalized form of practices and relations. It appears as natural, normal, fixed and stable. Through it we interpret, evaluate and observe virtually all aspects of social life. Richardson (2000, 20) adds that it is precisely the heterosexual couple that forms a framework inside which society interprets and perceives itself. For this reason, coming out cannot be defined as a single-event move; coming out is a never-ending process. People continually enter into new social relations that are based on heteronormative assumptions, so coming out is repeated time and again.

To a large degree, the concept of heteronormativity provides an answer to the question frequently asked in popular discourse, that is, whether the disclosure of homosexual identity is really necessary. The argument usually runs to this effect: "Why do homosexuals declare their sexual orientation with such pomp, but heterosexuals do not feel the need to do the same? No heterosexual ever speaks about his/her sexual orientation." This is apparently a liberal and tolerant position, to the effect that sexuality is a private matter and

it should stay so. Yet this argument obviously neglects the blinding presence of heterosexuality, which makes unnecessary its disclosure, in the sense of disclosing something previously hidden. Heterosexuality is obvious whenever one encounters a man and a woman holding each other by the hand; it is also obvious when one talks about his/her wife/husband, and when one places a picture of a partner of the opposite sex on the office desk. Heterosexuality is both expected and taken for granted, so it is an implicit assumption in other social situations and contexts as well. The more heteronormativity is self-evident, the more needed is the disclosure of non-heterosexual identity.

Personal and social identity

Today identities are not given or fixed, but they change over time and depending on the context. Complex social contexts increasingly influence the shaping of and changes in personal identity. Accordingly, a gay or lesbian identity is just one among many premises in the formation of personal identity. A plurality of identities was the point of departure in our study as well. This means that, in our opinion, lesbians and gays do not form a uniform or monolithic social group, but rather a group consisting of individuals pursuing various lifestyles, being in various situations and having a number of other identities. The results of the study confirmed this, although it is clear that homosexual orientation, as social identity, strongly marks their personal identities. This marking occurs primarily because the environment in which these identities emerge and are still stigmatized to a certain degree is heteronormative. It seems that in this case it is possible to speak about an inevitable relationship between personal and social identity. Although theorists stress that society's influence on the life of individuals is continually decreasing, the social framework still importantly determines everyday life. This is clearly noticeable in the everyday life of gays and lesbians, who, in the context of identity transformation, do create new non-heterosexual ways of life and hence destroy the traditional patterns of partnership, intimate and family life, but this 'freedom' of choice and options are inevitably predicated on the wider social context. It seems that it is possible to speak about greater freedom of choice

only in the environments in which heteronormativity has been losing its significance. Consequently, these environments are also characterized by a declining rate of violence against gays and lesbians, and of homophobia in general, which, in turn, weakens the influence of the social context on the intimate life of gays and lesbians. As regards Slovenia, it is possible to conclude that these processes are unfolding slowly and in stages, given that we are still witnessing a high level of homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians.

Our findings point to a peculiar situation characterized by the pressure of heteronormativity, on the one hand, and the privatization of the everyday life of lesbians and gays, on the other. The pressure of the heterosexual norm compels many of them to restrict the expression of their same-sex orientation to safe private spaces, while in public spaces defined by heteronormativity it seems that there is no room for expressions of homosexuality.[9] Despite the thesis that today homosexuals organize their lives beyond the closet, our study has shown that in Slovenia this is not the case on all levels of social life. Our findings suggest that gays and lesbians still close themselves within private circles of friends, and an increasing number of them, particularly young people, within their families of origin as well. However, it is also true that the family of origin is frequently a place where heteronormativity, homophobia and violence find many forms of expression, ranging from the rejection of homosexuality, psychological and even physical violence, to the cutting off of contacts or the establishment of the *transparent closet*. This expression denotes a (family) situation where a gay or lesbian comes out to their immediate family, but this information is ignored or shunted aside and turned into a 'family secret.' Such a secret then continues to inhibit personal relations in the family.

Privatization of the everyday life of gays and lesbians comes as a response to threats they face in public spaces. We were able to iden-

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[9] In this context, the public space/the public is not used in the political sense of the word. The concept of the public in the political sense has been rehabilitated, among other reasons because of the establishment of so-called counter-publics, where the GLBT or queer counter-public plays an important role. When referring to the heteronormativity of the public space, we mean the dominant public space or the mainstream social space. To be more specific, heterosexual norms apply to the street, shopping centres, centres of mainstream culture and so on. For more on the publics and counter-publics see Pajnik 2005.

tify a degree of mimicry to which they resort in an attempt to protect themselves against potential violence in the street, which may be provoked by any innocent gesture, such as holding a partner by the hand. In this respect, public spaces perpetuate the strong heteronormative framework where all signs of homosexuality continue to be heavily stigmatized or eliminated through the use of violence. In Slovenia, life beyond the closet in public spaces is still a painstaking venture for lesbians and gays.

COMING OUT

Today intimate narratives of coming out are no longer necessarily restricted to the narrow circle of 'significant others.' It seems that coming out is taking place everywhere – not only in the family, but in the workplace, in politics, on television, and in the public. This in itself creates an impression that today there are more gays and lesbians than before. Regardless of the statistical accuracy or inaccuracy of this assertion, the fact is that today there are more gays and lesbians who are willing to talk about their intimate choices and relate their intimate stories, and who no longer want to remain locked in silence at any price, or live the intimate stories dictated by society. In this way, they open public discussions, challenge social norms, change culture, create spaces in which these stories can be heard, change and renovate morality, pave the way for political changes, and last but not least, provoke resistance and counter-stories that frequently take the form of various types of (homophobic) violence.

Coming out has several meanings. It can be understood in terms of politics, as fighting for equality. It involves intimate narratives with strong political potential. Every such narration establishes a new form of living; 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. The social heteronormative context that obstructs and plagues the coming out process is really a counter-narrative, since every narrative has its opposite – an old, traditional narrative (Plummer 1996). New forms of family organization (e.g. same-sex families) are countered by narratives about family values; in response to the narratives that deconstruct masculinity and femininity by proclaiming these notions a social fiction, narratives about natural determination and biologically determined masculinity and femininity emerge, and so on.

From the psychological point of view, for a homosexual individual, coming out brings to an end a considerable investment of energy in

a double life. Gays and lesbians are exposed to various types of behavior (homophobia) and valuations (heterosexism) that disqualify and condemn homosexuality, and this happens both inside the family and in the social environment. Homosexual feelings are perceived as unacceptable, so, as Drescher (2005) concludes, individuals attempt to separate these feelings from their selves and conceal them from others. Drescher here relies on Sullivan's (1956, in Drescher 2005) concept of *selective inattention*, which denotes the non-pathological processes through which one establishes control over everyday life. It involves the exclusion of a certain part of the information (e.g. sounds) by which one is bombarded at any given moment. Using this strategy during the period preceding the disclosure of homosexuality, lesbians and gays can push aside their homosexual feelings and in this way avoid the information that would otherwise generate a certain measure of anxiety. Only by coming out can they overcome self-hatred, feelings of inferiority, fear and uneasiness, half-truths and so on, all of which may be a consequence of the refusal to confront one's own homosexuality. Only by coming out, in the psychological sense of the term, in the sense of self-admission and admission to others, can they develop the feeling of their own value and create possibilities for more open relations with significant others, since coming out influences both the individual's self-perception and his/her understanding of relations with other people.

In the sociological sense, coming out of the closet is relevant in relation to a specific pattern of the social oppression/labeling of a group of individuals having specific, non-heterosexual identity. The closet may be described as a place between social heteronormativity and internalized homophobia. The individual is suspended between the expected and exclusive, or rather compulsory, heterosexuality (Rich 1993 [1979]) and homophobic notions that are variously internalized through the process of socialization. Coming out is thus an important point in the process of re-interpretation and re-definition of stigmatized identity.

Homosexual identity formation

Various models of the formation of homosexual identity have been proposed since the 1970s. In psychology, but also in sociology, these

models emerged from the discussions about homosexual identity in the context of social constructivism (symbolic interactionism, labeling theories etc.). These models explain the ideal-type trajectory of an individual confronting, on the one hand, social expectations about heterosexual identity (compulsory heterosexuality), and on the other, his/her own feelings that do not match these expectations (Dank 1971, Cass 1979, Ponse 1978 and 1998, Troiden 1988, Plummer 1996). These basically interactionistic models deal with three main sets of themes: individual considerations of one's 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, 10). The critics of these models point out that they insufficiently thematize the issues of gender, ethnicity, class, culture and the like, all of which can importantly influence the process of homosexual identity formation. Queer theorists draw attention to the fact that the models of homosexual identity formation presuppose linear transitions from one stage to the next, producing 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. Starting from a context in which identities are seen as fluid, they argue that sexual identity is continually in the process of formation, that what is involved is a continual process of the production of sexual identities which are always a result of the social, political and historical contexts in which they are being formed. Individuals change identity, have doubts about it, take on alternative identifications and the like. By contrast, the supporters of these models argue that the majority of people see their sexual identity as relatively stable throughout their lives, meaning that it is not as dissolvable as suggested by post-structural analysts. Although we will not venture further into this discussion at this point, we would like to point out that, in our opinion, the critique of the linearity of homosexual identity formation, which presupposes fixed identity as a final outcome, is significant and relevant. When speaking about sexuality, it seems reasonable to make a distinction between sexual orientation, sexual behavior and sexual identity. In fact, these three areas of sexuality are frequently understood as a monolithic unit, but this leads to erroneous beliefs (and expectations) that these three levels are consistent. Savin-Williams (2005, 28-

29), for example, says that sexual behavior and identity, rather than sexual orientation, are the subjects of conscious choice and therefore fluid over time. In his view, sexual orientation influences sexual conduct and identity, but it is frequently independent of both. Individuals who have homosexual contacts, or continually practice these, do not necessarily self-define as homosexuals. In addition, sexual orientation cannot be divided into two fixed, narrow groups, i.e. homosexual and heterosexual, but here, too, there is a degree of gradation, already indicated by Kinsey (1948) and many later authors.[10]

La Placa (2000, 27) further points out that the models of homosexual identity formation imply two processes that are indeed separate: one relating to the individual and the other to the collective aspect of identity formation. The former involves the recognition and acceptance of homosexual feelings on the individual level, and the latter one's confrontation with the social stigma attached to homosexuality and acceptance of the fact that he/she is a member of an oppressed social group. A consequence of this uncritical treatment of the two separate process as one is a belief that those gays and lesbians who are not politically active within, say, the gay and lesbian community have not reached the end of the process of identity formation.

Basically, it is possible to define four phases in homosexual identity formation (Troiden 1988). The first phase is the stage of sensitization usually coming before puberty. During this stage, the individual gains certain social experiences, consisting of conscious and semi-conscious moments that result in the perception of himself/herself as potentially homosexual. These moments occur during the general process of the construction of sexual meaning. Plummer (1996a) mentions social, emotional and genital experiences that lead to consideration of one's potential homosexuality. In practice, this comes through as a mismatch between the binary sexual matrix and

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[10] Kinsey (1948) divided sexuality along a continuum, a seven-point scale, with exclusive heterosexuality at one end of the spectrum, and exclusive homosexuality at the other. Even though his chart has been used for the determination of sexual orientation as well as sexual behavior and identity, Kinsey conceptualized this scale based on the sexual experiences of his respondents. Point 0 represents exclusively heterosexual behavior, 1 represents mainly heterosexual behavior with only exceptional homosexual experiences, 2 mainly heterosexual behavior plus homosexual behavior which is not only exceptional. Point 3, frequently interpreted as a point of bisexuality, denotes both heterosexual and homosexual behavior. Points 4, 5 and 6 are a reverse image of points 0,1,2 with homosexual behavior being predominant.

atypical sexual interests (social experience), emotional attachment to the same sex (emotional experience) and sexual attachment to the same sex (genital experience). It is necessary to stress that these experiences do not constitute an answer to the question why someone is a homosexual, nor are they a necessary, or sufficient prerequisite for the development of homosexual identity. What is involved here is a subsequent interpretation of childhood feelings which an individual has matched against the stereotypical social notions of masculinity and femininity. The transgression of "true" masculinity or femininity is in western societies understood and constituted as a 'sign of homosexuality', which in turn constitutes our perception of that which we understand as homosexuality. The binary sexual matrix as a form of social expectation, or as a component of heteronormativity, actually means that the world is perceived as divided into two fixed sexes (male and female). This assumption is the basis for social ramifications, mainly understood in the essentialist sense. A biological male develops masculinity "by nature," and he is "by nature" sexually interested in the opposite sex. All these are implications of his sex, although it may be determined entirely arbitrarily, as in the case of intersexed individuals. Ponse (1978) describes this as the "heterosexist principle of consistency," which combines sexual roles, gender identity and role, the choice of the sexual object and sexual identity. According to Ponse, this means that a lesbian is not at all a *real* woman, since her gender identity is in conflict with her sexual identity. This conflict is then resolved through the stereotype about a masculine woman as a 'real lesbian.'

In western societies, deviations from the principle of consistency (Ponse 1978), compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1993 [1979]), a binary sexual matrix (Devor 1987), or a heterosexist matrix (Butler 2001 [1990]) are in popular notions, in the media and everyday discourse, understood as a sign of (potential) homosexuality. For individuals experiencing homosexual feelings, this is usually a framework inside which they confirm/acknowledge or reject their own feelings. In this sense, these popular stereotypical images of effeminate men and masculine women have real implications. The definition of real masculinity is in effect the negation of effeminate behavior. Those who do not fit into these social images may lose the privileges of real men and be labeled as homosexuals. Therefore, these social categoriza-

tions have actual implications, although there is nothing objective in them that could be identified as the basis for the development of a specific sexual orientation/identity. In other words, the social notions of masculinity and femininity have nothing real behind them in terms of biological determination, but they have actual consequences, such as stigmatization, for those who do not fit into, or do not want to fit into, these social definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Let us mention at this point Heckert's (2004) post-structuralist critique of sexual orientation, in which he explains that our various sexual desires, practices, sexual behaviors and interests, meaning everything that Plummer (1996a) denotes as social, emotional and genital experience, have been re-coded into two recognizable types: homosexual orientation and heterosexual orientation. The next step involves the social expectations and pressures towards a behavior that is in harmony with these categories, or stigmatization if an individual does not conform with, or resists, this classification. Sexual orientation, says Heckert, is a form of organization that directs (*orientates*) an individual towards having a specific sexual desire. The individuals therefore do not have (do not appropriate) any sexual orientation, but they are in reality sexually oriented (set towards a specific sexuality). Sexual orientation is hence a system of organization whose consequences strengthen the very existence of the system (Heckert 2004, 258-9). So it would be possible to argue that, owing to specific social, emotional or genital experiences in childhood, and through becoming familiar with the social categories of "homosexuality", "heterosexuality" (and, conditionally, "bisexuality"), individuals are set towards adopting a particular sexual identity, self-identification with that identity and behavior that is congruent with that identity.

Plummer (1996a) concludes that that which separates homosexuality from the common is a result of the social reaction to this type of behavior. Homosexual behavior is frequently described as deviant. The properties of homosexual experiences therefore depend on the social context in which they occur. "Thus, it may be true," writes Plummer "that homosexuals exhibit pathology, are promiscuous, are exaggeratedly effeminate, and so forth. But if this is the case (and I suspect that it is not generally true), the explanation for this may not reside in the homosexual experience per se, but rather in

the hostile reactions surrounding it – which lead for example to self-devaluation and despair, and inhibit stable relationships" (Plummer 1996, 65).

First reflections on homosexuality

Miha,[11] 38, lives with his partner in his own apartment. Initially, the immediate family did not accept their relationship, but over time they have both been accepted into the family. He had problems coming to terms with his homosexuality. The identity crisis even forced him to move to another country, to a bigger urban center, where he could explore his sexuality while being less burdened by the expectations of the immediate family and rural environment. In his words, his first confrontation with his sexuality was the definition of homosexuality in a dictionary of foreign words. At that time he was 12.

> "After that it took me one year to start to live with these feelings, but at that time I did not accept it. I grew up in a Catholic family in which many things were suppressed and very stereotyped." (Miha, 38)

Between the end of primary school and enrolment in secondary school, he was wholly split and contended with a huge gap between his wishes and the expectations of the environment.

> "That weakened me, it oppressed me enormously, I was extremely frustrated." (Miha, 38)

Contrary to Miha, Gabrijel, one of the older focus groups participants, initially was not at all aware of the negative connotations attached to homosexuality. It was in a friendly circle where he realized that "being a faggot" could not be anything positive, and he inferred it from the context. He never heard anything about homosexuality in school or in the family.

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[11] The statements of focus group participants have been translated from spoken language to literary language, while taking care that the meaning and various shades of meaning are preserved. All names mentioned here are invented. These are the names used by gays and lesbians participating in focus groups interviews. The name has been changed only in two cases, because one used her real name and another a name already selected by someone else. The number next to the name denotes the age of the participant.

"Nothing was clear to me. At that time I was 15. That is, until I found friends and started to socialize with them, and they talked about faggots, faggots this, faggots that. At that time I already had some relations with boys. We played intimate games. And then I realized: it is probably not good to speak much about it or stress it." (Gabrijel, 40).

The absence of relevant information (not) supplied by the agents of primary and secondary socialization contributes to the delay in interpreting one's feelings as homosexual feelings. The highly stereotyped images of individuals who do not match the binary sexual matrix contribute to the internalization of homophobia and, consequently, self-hatred.

"In the beginning, when you are all by yourself, because of wrong information, the lack of information from the environment, the family … you start to use a very serious form of violence against yourself. I'd say that even a beating wouldn't be comparable to the sort of violence I used against myself." (Matjaž, 25)

Similar to other studies, our research also confirms that most gays and lesbians begin to consider their (potential) homosexuality around the age of 15, very likely thanks to the three types of experience (social, emotional and genital) and the resulting sexual orientation, or inclination towards a specific sexual orientation as a denominator of identity.
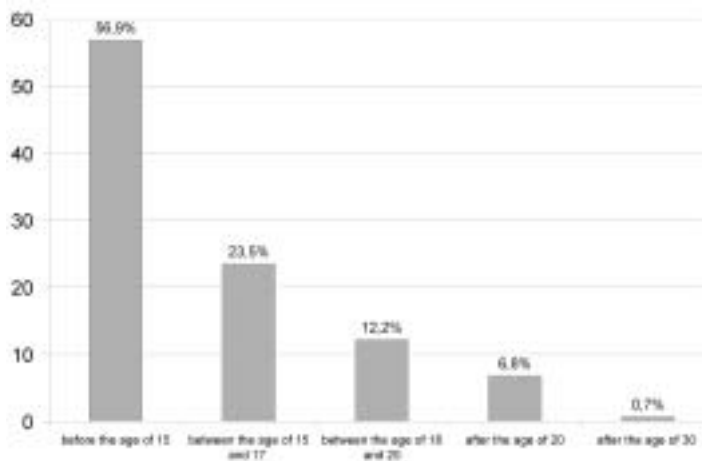
FIGURE 10: WHEN DID YOU FIRST START TO CONSIDER YOUR (POTENTIAL) HOMOSEXUALITY?

The data show that men begin to reflect on their potential homo-
sexuality earlier in life than women. It seems that men have fewer, or
no channels through which they can express their emotional needs,
so they make inadequate transitions from emotionality to sexuality.
Every emotional relationship between two young men is almost
invariably re-interpreted into a sexual relationship and placed in the
sexual context, while in the case of women it seems that these types
of relationships are socially acceptable, possible and frequently
placed outside the context of sexuality. Men become equipped with
the vocabulary that enables self-identification with homosexual
identity earlier than women (an emotional relationship between two
young men is invariably understood as sexual), while lesbian feel-
ings may be accommodated for quite a long time, or reduced to just
a friendly emotional relationship. Despite the statistical significance
of these gender differences as regards the first considerations of
potential homosexuality, we still need to emphasize that more than a
half of male respondents and somewhat less than half the female
respondents began to reflect on their potentially homosexual identi-
ty before the age of 15.[12] We also established that younger people
typically began to reflect on their homosexual feelings earlier in life
than did the older generation. The reason is that they have less ex-
perience of a social context in which the notion of and knowledge
about homosexuality was missing.

Identity crisis and coping strategies

Since thoughts about potential same-sex orientation are not harmo-
nious with the already existing self-image, and particularly with the
social expectations of the majority, they create dissonance that leads
to the second phase of identity formation, i.e. identity crisis.
However, the crisis is not caused solely by the changing perception
of the self or the potential experience of both heterosexual and
homosexual behaviors, but also by the stigma attached to homosex-
uality and, equally importantly, the lack of information on homosex-
uality. For example, our research has shown that homosexuality is
not a subject frequently discussed in the family, nor is it a subject

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[12] p=15,933; df=1; sig=0,000.

included in school curricula. Seventy-six percent of gays and les-
bians in our sample stated that during the period of their growing-
up or schooling, their parents did not talk to them about homosexu-
ality, or if they did, it was on rare occasions. The trend towards dis-
cussing homosexuality more frequently in the family circle is observ-
able among younger generations, although the majority of these
conversations were placed into the "little" or "very little" category.
The differences are statistically significant.[13]

			Please assess on the 5 point scale how much your parents discussed homosexuality with you during your adolescence and schooling.						Total
			1 very little	2	3	4	5 very much	Not at all	
Age	16 to 20	%	22.5	20.0	15.0	7.5	0	35.0	100
	21 to 25	%	29.1	17.9	3.3	1.3	0	48.3	100
	26 to 30	%	21.2	15.0	11.5	0.9	0	51.3	100
	31 to 40	%	23.0	8.0	4.4	1.8	0.9	61.9	100
	41 and over	%	23.1	0	7.7	0	0	69.2	100

FIGURE 11: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY BY AGE GROUPS

Similarly, homosexuality is little discussed in primary and second-
ary schools. Forty-five percent of respondents stated that homosex-
uality was not a theme discussed in school, or they could not remem-
ber any such discussion. The reported degree of accessibility of
information on homosexuality in school varies with the age of
respondents. The youngest participants more frequently stated that
they talked about homosexuality in school "rather a lot", and con-
versely, older respondents stressed that homosexuality was not a
theme addressed in school.

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[13] p=3,889; df=5; sig=0,002.
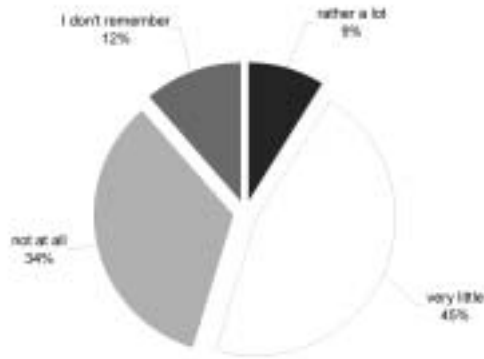
FIGURE 12: HOW MUCH WAS HOMOSEXUALITY DISCUSSED IN SCHOOL?

The conclusion that parents do not talk to their children about homosexuality and that it is not a theme discussed in school either, means that lesbians and gays grow up in the absence of information, which perpetuates the stigma attached to homosexuality. This was definitely characteristic of older generations, while for the younger generations important sources of information are the Internet and other media, which, in the absence of other agents of socialization, play the main educational and socializing role with respect to homosexuality.

All these are factors that either deepen or alleviate the identity crisis, characterized by a feeling of restlessness or uncertainty about one's sexual status. Typical answers to identity crisis are a denial of homosexual feelings, attempts at making corrections (e.g. seeking professional help), avoidance of these feelings and suppression of sexual desires, enforced immersion in heterosexuality or the adoption of bisexual identity, and even escapism. (Troiden 1988). Lesbian respondents in particular frequently mentioned the enormous pressure from the immediate social environment to form heterosexual partnerships. They were expected to have boyfriends.

"I had a feeling that I had to meet the expectations of my parents. They always asked a lot of questions about boyfriends [...] Whenever I was without a boyfriend for a month or two, my family wondered what was wrong with me. That pressure was really huge [...] I took that concealment so far that I developed a serious depression. Then this depression made me tell my family. " (Vivika, 27)

"If you have a large family, these questions, like 'when are you going to find a girl-friend?' or 'when are you going to get married?' are asked all the time. And you try to come up with some answer. You try to be smart. If you appear with a female friend, it is immediately taken that she is your girlfriend. But I don't think about it, because it would take too much energy. People gossip all the time and invent stories. If they weren't talking about that, they'd find something else." (Martin, 25)

When a person is split between inner sexual desire and external stigmatization of that desire (and consequently, of his/her identity), he/she experiences the fear that these intimate thoughts will come to light in his/her social milieu. The fear of coming out forces people into mimicry and avoidance of potentially risky situations.

"At times I was so paranoid that I imagined that people on the bus were reading my thoughts. That can be a huge pressure. I hid everything I read." (Amalija, 26)

"I lived in a boarding school and when my roommate started to talk about it, I just went out. Or I tried to change the subject." (Tomaž, 31)

Some focus group participants mentioned religion as one of the main causes of identity crisis.

"I had grave feelings of guilt because of religion. [...] My parents are not very religious, but I myself was very close to the Catholic religion at one stage, and particularly the church. At that time I prayed a lot to be cured and I intensely read the Bible, underlining things, copying them [...] I have everything underlined, Sodom and Gomorrah and all that stuff. I felt great fear and I prayed intensely to be cured. And, of course, I had a feeling that I was the only one out there." (Borut, 30)

Some went through a longer period of identity crisis, because they tried to resolve the discrepancy between their desires and social expectations in favor of the latter. For others, primarily younger people, the identity crisis represented just a period of destigmatization of homosexuality and of overcoming heteronormativity by putting their own expectations and wishes first, which they evaluated positively and for which they found confirmation in various social milieus (ranging from the media to self-help groups).

Coming out

The social devaluation of homosexuality may lead to secrecy, feel-
ings of guilt and the like. However, as Plummer (1996a) notes,
through these experiences the sexuality of the individual becomes
crystallized and significant. The inability to legitimately express
one's sexuality causes frustrations that contribute to a prolongation
of the process of signification. Only when the person overcomes
his/her own internalized homophobia and begins to translate homo-
sexual feelings into more acceptable terms, and when he/she destig-
matizes this sexual orientation and thus "normalizes" his/her behav-
ior, does the adoption of a new identity, which is the third stage in the
process of homosexual identity development, become possible. It
now becomes the identity that he/she presents to certain circles.
However, this phase still does not mean that homosexual identity is
accepted; it has more to do with a kind of accommodation of gay or
lesbian identity. The time lapse between the first feelings of potential
homosexuality and at least partial acceptance of this identity, i.e.
(partial) coming out, is several years long. Our research has shown
that this period lasts four years on average.
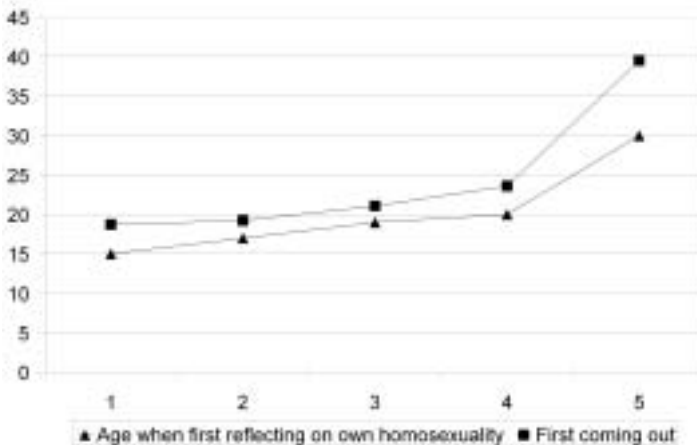
FIGURE 13: THE TIME LAPSE BETWEEN THE FIRST HOMOSEXUAL FEELINGS AND
THE INITIAL COMING OUT

For older generations, communication with other homosexuals was much harder, or even impossible, because of the absence of lesbian and gay infrastructure. This certainly produced additional frustrations. There is evidence (Troiden 1988, Seidman 2002) that one way in which gays and lesbians define their sexual identity is through interactions with other same-sex oriented individuals, which, among other things, enable them to rethink their own ideas about homosexuality. Only a small number attain the stage of self-identification without such contacts. If the initial experiences are negative, one may relapse to various forms of concealment of homosexuality, or even to self-persuasion that his/her feelings are not actually a sign of homosexuality. This is the result of the impossibility of identifying with the image that one forms through the initial contacts with homosexuals, for example, on the lesbian or gay scene.

> "At that time we frequented the gay club K4. […] There was this man sitting at the bar, with a pony-tail and in a woman's dress. A long black one, and he had elbow-length black gloves. It was really grotesque because he was also unshaven. […] That sight really scared me early on. It confused me for a while so I refused to have anything to do with men. Because I said to myself: 'So, that's it. Horrible.'" (Gabrijel, 40)

For the younger generation, initial experiences on the gay and lesbian scene are essentially different, because today the main source of information is the Internet[14], which, among other things, enables virtual gay and lesbian communities.

> "At that time I thought that it would go away. That it would pass with time, that it was only a phase. Then I got access to the Internet, and the situation changed. I started to communicate with people who were like me, gays like me. I knew that I was not the only one on this planet. That also convinced me to tell my friends. But between the age of twelve and eighteen, I did not feel the need to talk about it. It seemed to me that it would go away." (Timotej, 22)

This kind of resocialization needs social confirmation, which is realized precisely through the disclosure of homosexual identity. At

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[14] Among the various media that our respondents were asked to assess with respect to the quantity of information on homosexuality they got from it, the Internet scored 4.35 points on a five-point scale. This was the highest score, which confirms the thesis that the Internet is a primary contemporary source of information on homosexuality. It is followed by specialized gay and lesbian media, expert literature, magazines, popular literature, television, daily newspapers and radio.

the time of initial disclosures, one is highly vulnerable to potential refusals. Therefore, if circumstances allow, a gay person will choose to come out to someone whom he/she expects to accept his/her sexual orientation.

Our respondents were on average nineteen and a half when they came out. While there are no differences between genders in this respect,[15] statistically significant differences were observed between age groups;[16] thanks to the destigmatization of this sexual practice (media exposure of this subject, accessibility of information on the web, lesbian and gay activism, gay and lesbian groups, legal protection against discrimination and so on), younger generations come out at an earlier age than did their older counterparts. The latter had to confront greater stigmatization, and some even lived through the time when homosexuality was a crime. It seems that the older generation had no choice: an apparent heterosexual life and a hidden homosexual life constituted their only option, one that exacted a large degree of mimicry. They could live beyond the closet only in narrow, usually very intimate social circles. For younger generations, however, the closet is only a transitional phase, during which they destigmatize their homosexual identity.

Age	Average	N	Standard deviation
16 to 20	16.27	40	1.60
21 to 25	18.31	151	2.15
26 to 30	19.74	113	3.12
31 to 40	21.22	109	4.64
41 and over	23.77	26	8.09
Total	19.54	439	4.08

FIGURE 14: THE AGE OF INITIAL COMING OUT BY AGE GROUPS

[15] sig=0,946.

[16] p=26,647; df=4; sig=0,000.

As the figure below shows, homosexuals most frequently, in 77% of cases, come out to their friends.

others	2.1%
partner	2.7%
father	3.4%
acquaintance	3.4%
sister, brother	4.8%
mother	6.8%
male friend	34.2%
female friend	42.7%
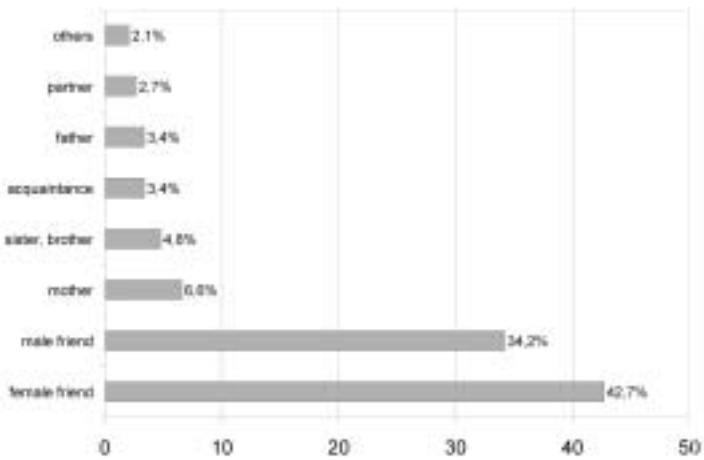
FIGURE 15: TO WHOM DID YOU FIRST COME OUT?

Only 4% of gays and lesbians in our study said that the person to whom they first came out rejected them or reacted in a negative way. Usually, the reaction to the first coming out is positive, but this should be attributed primarily to the meticulous and well-considered choice of the person to whom one comes out. At the same time, we should not overlook the subjectivity of individual assessments of reactions. For example, some respondents interpreted silence and non-reaction as a form of positive reaction, because they had expected a much worse response (e.g. physical violence). In this, of essential importance is the individual's sensitivity to various forms of psychological violence, the interpretation of which is inevitably dependent on the context.

negative 4%
other 4%
neutral 18%
positive 74%
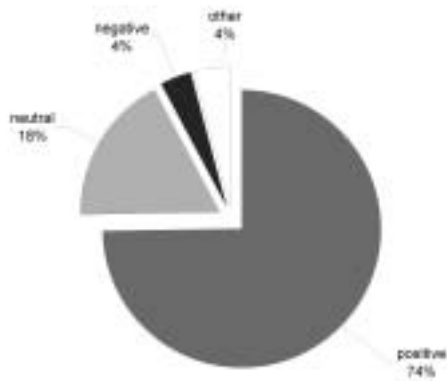
Figure 16: Reactions to the first coming out

The information about positive reactions is most illustrative of a well-developed sense of who to come out to. The lesson of expected heterosexuality is obviously mastered during the process of social-ization, and at the same time all potential consequences of coming out, in the sense of stigmatization, are clear. All of this represents a pressure for individuals intending to come out, so it is not surprising that the majority of respondents spoke of the relief that followed coming out, regardless of the reaction. For example, Amalija, 26, a focus group member, recounted how she first came out to her friend, who already had some "out" lesbians in her social circle, so she was certain that the friend's reaction could not be negative. Yet, "despite all", said Amalija, "I had to get drunk to be able to talk to her."

It seems that what contributes to the first coming out is, on the one hand, one's gradual acceptance and redefinition of homosexual feel-ings, which before that seemed unacceptable, and on the other, crip-pled relationships with friends as a result of hiding in the closet. In this sense, coming out may also be interpreted as a condition for the continuation and advancement of friendships. Concealment makes sincerity impossible on many levels that are important for friendly

relations. This is especially obvious at the time of starting the first homosexual relationship. Gays and lesbians frequently delay the disclosure, especially coming out to their parents, until they form their first partnership. For many, intimate partnership represents the confirmation of their homosexual identity, as well as the main goal in the process of homosexual identity formation. It is in the partnership that they seek support and proof that their homosexual identity and desires are not just "transitional." At the same time, since this is the period when one is in love, it may be described as having the "effect of intoxication." The internalized homophobia and reservations caused by social expectations lose their power, if only temporarily.

> "As soon as I first fell in love for real, I told my mom. But at that time I wouldn't have cared even if the whole world was to know it and even if the next moment I was going to burn. I wanted to be with that man, no matter what, even if it meant that I was going to die the next day." (Jernej, 23)

> "At that time it all went to my head, and I couldn't hold back any more […] I talked because it was love. And there were no special problems. I didn't even think it over really, like who I should tell. It simply poured out of me during a family lunch […] The reason was that I first fell in love. I was simply carried away … it was obvious that I was in love, the only thing that had to be cleared up was who that person was." (Patrick, 20)

Despite the initial coming out, or several early coming outs, the third stage of homosexual identity formation is still characterized by a double life; individuals live their real sexual identity in certain contexts, but in other contexts they conceal it because of expected social reactions. Yet this is also the beginning of the wider coming out process, which is the final stage in homosexual identity development. Let us again point out that coming out is a process and not simply a linear progress from the first to the fourth stage. Identity is continually in the process of shaping and disintegration. Moreover, the coming out process is never concluded, since new people continually enter one's life, so the individual faces new social situations in which taken-for-granted heterosexuality repeatedly thrusts one back into the closet, from where it is possible to escape only by coming out again. Yet the reactions to the initial coming out are of crucial importance for the process of homosexual identity formation. If

the first reactions are very negative, they may lead an individual to revert to the previous levels of concealment, fear and identity crisis. A painful rejection may push one back into the closet. Matjaž, for example, recounted that, in a way, he expected a negative reaction, and although he did not really wish for it, he nevertheless hoped that a negative response would force him to seek a cure for his homosexuality. It would have been an additional external confirmation that his homosexuality was wholly unacceptable. He was 16 at the time, and he saw homosexuality as a kind of deviation, although not as something pathological. In contrast to the majority, he chose to come out to a person who he knew was soon going to move to another place.

> "I chose that friend for entirely practical reasons. I wanted to test the effect. […] So, is there any better option than to tell it to someone who you are not going to see much of in the future? […] Of course I was scared. […] At that time I still hoped that he was going to say that I was nuts and that I should seek a cure … I'd probably have done that. Well, I probably wouldn't. In fact, that's what I expected. Sincerely expected. […] Immediately after that I felt as if a great weight, a mountain, was taken off my mind. An enormous relief, really!" (Matjaž, 25)

Some focus group participants mentioned that their coming out influenced their friends to change their views about homosexuality. Coming out is not solely a stage in the formation of homosexual identity, but also a form of resocialization for the social milieu in which one comes out. Sebastian said that he was first afraid to come out, because he knew that his friends had quite negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays, and then it turned out that it was precisely his coming out that helped to dispel homophobia within his circle.

> "[My friends] frequently commented on these things, and they were very negative about it. I did not talk about that subject. But now I have to say that they changed their opinion, thanks to me. I have a feeling that they have great respect for me and that they accept both my boyfriend and me." (Sebastjan, 31)

> "If I only mentioned [to my brother] a g- or f- word, ouch, it was bad. He'd go on about 'guns,' 'kill them all', 'horror', 'holocaust.' It is really difficult to tell a person like that that you are gay. Because you don't know what he's gonna do, if he is going to plunge the knife into you or pull out the gun […] But then everything went smoothly. A person changes entirely if he knows someone in the immediate circle."
> (Boštjan, 31)

It seems that narrow circles of friends are most open to coming out. Most examples of acceptance and most positive reactions take place within the circles of closest friends. In somewhat more than 90% of cases, friends' reactions were positive.

			Initial reactions of friends			Total
			negative	neutral	positive	
Gender	male	% with respect to gender	1.1	6.7	92.2	100
	female	% with respect to gender	2.0	7.4	90.5	100
Total		% with respect to gender	1.4	6.9	91.6	100

FIGURE 17: FIRST REACTIONS ON THE PART OF FRIENDS

Ninety-one percent of gays and lesbians included in our study came out to their close friends. Although this percentage appears satisfactory, a look at this statistical figure from another angle shows a different picture: almost 10% of lesbians and gays do not feel safe enough in the circles of close friends to talk about this important component of their life, although such circles are expected to be based on mutual trust. Coming out can in fact be the reason for the termination of friendship or some other relationship. Eighteen percent of respondents reported such an experience; their coming out brought to an end their relationship with a person, and in somewhat more than half of these cases (56%), it was a friend. Therefore, circles of friends are the safest spaces for coming out, but at the same time, from the statistical point of view, if the relationship is terminated, it is most likely that it would be terminated by a friend.

> "When I openly stated that I wanted to be with that man, half my friends left. They started to tell stories about me, such that you'd hardly believe.. […] That I was disgusting because I had a boyfriend, and that I was disgusting because I had lots of sexually transmitted diseases […] Someone asked: 'Hey, you, do you really have AIDS?' […] But then I was really glad that they went away. Because they are the kind of people you don't need in your life." (Gabrijel, 40)

Gabrijel's neighbor reacted in a similar way when she eventually realized that his friend was in reality his boyfriend.

"She stopped talking to me. She even does not greet me. […] That's painful in a way. We've been living next to each other for forty years, and now, when she realized that he was my boyfriend, the debate is over." (Gabrijel, 40)

Although the first coming out to friends is an important experience, one of the most important milestones is coming out to parents. Some focus groups participants thought that this was the only real coming out, since no other instance of coming out is equally demanding or comparable in terms of the emotional strain involved.

Coming out to parents

Coming out to the immediate family is a central event for the majority of gays and lesbians, because of close emotional ties with parents and other close kin. The family is where one seeks support and acknowledgment, and it seems that coming out puts all these relations in the balance. As Markowe (1996) concludes, coming out to the family is destructive because it endangers conventional expectations about gender roles that are the basis of all family relations. As has already been established, 53% of lesbians and gays in our sample stated that their parents never talked to them about homosexuality during their adolescence and schooling. La Placa writes that stereotypes and negative images of gays and lesbians in society are frequently the only source of information available to parents. "Hence, sons and daughters can easily be slotted into these mainstream stereotypes where no other means of understanding them is possible. Stereotypes are also more likely to be a reminder to parents that an outside world exists beyond the family. This world can subject them to stigma as well as their sons and daughters" (La Placa 2000, 116).

"My mom told me: 'Go and get some treatment.' Odd, but in these moments you'd do all sorts of things just in order to cancel that out. At that moment your illusion is shattered, the picture of your child that has been there from its very birth, or even before that." (Rok, 30)

"[My parents] have their own view on how my happiness ought to look. My view will never match theirs, and that's the source of the conflict." (Martin, 25)

As with friends, gays and lesbians try in various ways to test the possible reaction of their parents.

"We watched TV and there was this love scene between two men. I was horrified to see my mother horrified and covering her eyes: 'This I can't watch. I get sick when I see two boys kissing.' … something like that. I was in a shock. I reddened and remained glued to the sofa, as if nothing had happened." (Jernej, 23)

"I expected that they were going to show me the door. Because when my dad watched some such movie he'd say: 'These people are sick'." (Vivika, 27)

The narratives about coming out to parents were diverse. These experiences in many ways depended on our respondents' previous relations with family members. Typically, there are two moments that can be said to describe the majority of these narratives about coming out to parents: after the first shock and various forms of psychological violence (for example, emotional blackmail), the calm settles in, and this issue is cloaked in silence. The fact about one's homosexual orientation is "noted," but as a rule it is not discussed in the family circle any further (or it is discussed, albeit with much discomfort). It is interesting that, in contrast to other researchers,[17] we did not observe any statistically significant difference between the urban and rural areas as regards reactions to coming out. The fact is that neither Ljubljana nor Maribor, which were both considered urban areas in this study, are yet "urban" in the sense of greater visibility for gay and lesbian communities, which would contribute to a stronger sense of the presence of this social group. Our research has not shown any correlation between the educational attainment of parents and their initial reactions to coming out.[18]

Coming out not only threatens the binary sexual matrix on which are based various heterosexual rituals (e.g. expected marriage of the child) and through which is established the presumed normalcy and stability of the family, but it also pushes parents into the closet. Coming out is always relational. Accordingly, the closet may exist only in relation to other individuals, i.e. society. To borrow an expression from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993 [1991]), coming out becomes a contagion which thrusts those to whom one has come out into the

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[17] Mother (x2 =7,139, df=8; sig=0,522), father (x2 =5,509, df=8; sig=0,702).

[18] Mother (x2 =22,929, df=16; sig=0,116), father (x2 =13,380, df=14; sig=0,497).

closet dictated by the conservative society already confronted by the individual who came out. The sexual identity of such an individual 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 and the same expectations of heteronormativity with which their child is coping.

> "My mom is ashamed of me. She is embarrassed for me. Just the thought that someone from my wider circle could learn that I'm after women makes her dizzy. [...] When I split up with my girlfriend, it was a great relief for her. She was obviously enjoying her happiness and that gets a little on my nerves. [...] That shame seems to me the crucial element. Being burdened by what one is going to say. And I told her: look, mother, society is you and me." (Tara, 30)

Fifty-seven percent of respondents said that they knew, or presumed, that their parents did not talk about their homosexuality with any of their closest friends or relatives. The weight of expectations, fear and shame keeps them confined to the closet established with the coming out of their child.

> "Now, after all these years, I've noticed that my mother has not come out to anyone. That she did not tell about me to any of her friends. I've also noticed that she can hardly bring herself to utter that word." (Ksenja, 30)

Despite everything, parents do sometimes talk to people from their circle of friends or relatives about the homosexuality of their children. In certain respects, their coming out is comparable to that of their children. Parents themselves first probe the terrain and then confide in someone who they think could be a source of support.

> "I think that they told a couple of friends, and one reason was that they themselves needed to talk about it. But, for example, my mom told it to her sister only two years later. More than two years later. And she is close to her sister." (Oskar, 24)

Parents find themselves in trying situations which they try to resolve in various ways. Their difficulties can largely be attributed to the absence of any infrastructure offering professional help to the parents of gays and lesbians (e.g. self-help groups). In saying so, we assume that these parents had never before contemplated homosexuality, that information reaching them was primarily stigmatized, and that they did not know how to use the Internet, where they could

find relevant information. This aspect of the disclosure of homosexual identity and its consequences calls for further academic study.

Mom knows, but dad doesn't

Our research shows that gays and lesbians first come out to their mothers or sisters, and only then to their fathers or brothers. Individuals who come out to both parents do that at the age of 20, on average, although as a rule younger homosexuals come out in their immediate family at an earlier age than did their older counterparts.

It seems that gays and lesbians have most reservations about, or they most fear coming out to their fathers. On average, fathers learn later than mothers about their sons' or daughter's homosexuality. Similarly, on average, gays and lesbians more rarely come out to their fathers than to other family members and significant others. The chart below shows that most gays and lesbians have come out to their closest friends, followed by mothers, first sister, first brother, with fathers being last in line.[19]
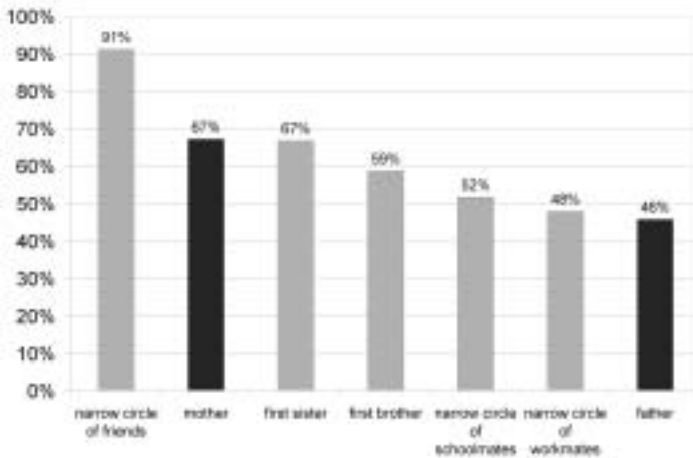
FIGURE 18: TO WHOM HAVE YOU COME OUT?

[19] We made a distinction between the first, second, third etc. sister or brother, because we assumed that there are cases where one of the sisters of the respondent knows about her sister's or brother's sexual orientation, and the other does not. The concept of the first sister or brother should not be understood as necessarily denoting the oldest sister or the oldest brother, because respondents themselves determined who was that first, second or third sister or brother. The first sister therefore means one of the sisters or the only sister.

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/inaccessible) father. This indicates that the patriarchal order in family relations is still present, if only on the symbolic level, manifested, for example, as fear of the father as an authority. Focus group participants frequently mentioned that they did not come out to their fathers because they had no relationship with the father.

> "I simply was always closer to my mom than my dad, which means that we could have a good talk. I spent incomparably more time with her than with my father. But I don't have problems with this, in the sense that my father doesn't love me or anything like that." (Sebastjan, 31)

> "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)

However, changes in the family that have been observed during the past few decades, also present in Slovenia although with some delay, indicate a growing shift away from the patriarchal family model. This involves the pluralization and legitimization of various forms of family life. As regards the role of the father within the family, one trend that should be pointed out is the erosion of the father's authority (Švab, 2001). Therefore, it is possible to expect that fear of the father would also be reduced in connection with coming out. This thesis has already been partly confirmed by the results of our study, which show that younger respondents who grew up in post-modern societies more frequently come out to both parents (and earlier in life).

Coming out to the father is contingent not just on the (non)existent relationship between the father and the child, but also on the power relations between mother and father. Although these are indirect assumptions, based on our respondents' narratives about their parents rather than on interviews with parents themselves, it seems that mothers more frequently accept "guilt," or take on "responsibility" for their children's homosexuality. They stereotypically believe that the children's upbringing is their duty (or rather, that is how they are constituted by the society in which they live), and they consequently

interpret their children's homosexuality as their own failure. During the first phase following coming out, many parents blame themselves, believing that their child's homosexuality had been caused by a mistake in their upbringing. By preventing information about the child's homosexuality being spread, the mother tries to protect not only her child, but also herself, and to conceal her "failure".

> "My mother's first reaction was: don't you try to talk about it with your father. In the sense of 'don't do it to me.' [...] He is a very aggressive man, psychologically aggressive, and she would be the one who'd bear the consequences. The fact is that it would be horrible if I told him." (Tara, 30)

Here we need to stress that when referring to the stereotype about the mother's responsibility for the bringing up of children, we do not mean to say that the father feels no responsibility for his children's upbringing. However, it seems that fathers express this to a smaller degree. This is the reason that children's emotional ties to the mother are stronger, and one result is the fear of coming out to the father.

In terms of statistical significance, the father's reactions to child's coming out are not different from those of the mother. Somewhat more than 40% of gays who came out to both parents reported negative reactions on the part of both. Lesbians experienced fewer negative reactions on the part of their fathers (37%), yet this difference, as already said, is not statistically significant.

			Mothers' initial reactions			Fathers' initial reactions		
			negative	neutral	positive	negative	neutral	positive
Gender	male	%	41.2	27.5	31.3	43.2	27.9	28.8
	female	%	36.9	29.7	33.3	37.0	20.5	42.5

FIGURE 19: COMPARISON OF FIRST REACTIONS OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS TO THEIR CHILD'S COMING OUT

It should also be stressed that the conclusions above may be misleading, since we have drawn inferences about these reactions solely from the narratives of respondents who came out to both parents, while the fears of those who have not yet come out to their fathers

may be well-justified. Coming out to the father is determined by many factors, not only the existing or non-existing relationship with the father.

Based on the narratives of our respondents, we formulated three main issues, or rather problems, confronted by parents at the time of their child's coming out.[20]

A) Parents question themselves about the causes of their child's homosexuality. It seems that parents often attach responsibility to themselves, and this often leads them to attempt to "correct the mistake." Some parents seek professional help (psychiatric, psychological or medical). All this has to do with their self-questioning as to where in the process of bringing up they made "that mistake," and with the belief that their child's sexual orientation may be changed, or corrected. This gives rise to interpretations of homosexuality as just one phase, or as an identity that is not real or felt.

B) They have apprehensions about the reactions of the environment. They wonder how society will accept their child's homosexuality and how the child will live in that society as a homosexual.

C) They have to re-assess their taken-for-granted expectations. For example, one concern is how their family life will look if the child has a same-sex partner. All of this also involves a measure of disappointment, because their child's coming out has made it clear to them that their implicit heteronormative expectations will not be fulfilled.

Psychological violence in the family

Coming out to parents seems to be a private matter, so psychological violence, and sometimes even physical violence against children remains hushed and invisible and goes unnoticed by society at large. In connection with this, the intimate narratives about coming out may be understood as a politicization of the issue that is connected with much hidden violence. The first reactions to coming out in the family frequently involve various forms of psychological violence, be

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[20]It should be pointed out here that these conclusions were based only on the narratives of gays and lesbians, while their parents were not included in our study. This area and related questions undoubtedly call for further analysis.

it emotional blackmail, ridicule or the breaking off of communication. Nancy Duncan (1996) writes that homophobia may be identified with the fear of going home, since home is the space of patriarchal and heterosexist exertion of power and regulatory practices.

"For some time they made the effort to split us up. Like putting him in boarding school. But the more they pulled us apart, the more we stuck together. That coming out was painful for me, because it was followed by practically three years of war [...] I don't remember now what we said that day, but I know that it was such a pressure that I still feel this pain in the chest. No, not the pain, let's call it weight. But, we've cleared up all these things by now, and today they like my boyfriend." (Gabrijel, 40)

"She was out of her mind and went on about horror and catastrophe. She was like, she had a daughter of 28 and now she doesn't have her any more [...] She first said: 'Think it over again if you really want to move in with her.' [...] So I told her again the next day, that she could turn herself upside down but nothing would change. That she had to swallow it. Then she got hysterical. [...] She screamed at me uncontrollably for half an hour and started to talk nasty, vulgarities I was not aware she could think of. All that barn-terminology. That was really an interesting life experience. [...] If I hadn't come out I'd still be convinced that my mother is a more or less sensible person. [...] At that moment it struck me that we owed nothing to each other, although you unconsciously do that, try to resolve all issues." (Tara, 30)

Not all respondents interpreted the first reactions of their parents as psychological violence. Some focus group participants said that they were aware that their parents needed time to come to terms with the new information. In so doing, they started from their own experience, remembering that they themselves needed time to accept homosexuality as part of their identity. Thanks to such a stance, it was easier for them to endure the emotional blackmail or attempts of their parents to turn them into 'normal' people. They reinterpreted these attempts and understood them not as a sign of violence, but rather as a sign of powerlessness.

"He was afraid that I was not going to be accepted in society and that it would make it harder for me. [...] He had a couple of these ideas, like, there are hospitals in America where you could be cured. I told him that there was nothing there that could be cured. Then something snapped in me and I burst into tears." (Patrick, 20)

"She always cried when she saw an advertisement with babies in it. 'And you, you are not going to have a child.' [...] She knew exactly which button to press, and that got right up my nose. Because when she cried, I did not feel really at ease. [...] Then she realized that crying didn't help and she changed tactics. So we started to yell." (Barbara, 26)

These types of reactions, writes Sedgwick (1993 [1991]), indicate how problematic the concept of homosexual identity is and how intensely society resists it. On the other hand, the understanding of homosexuality as a "phase", or as a "not serious" identity, suggests how authority over the definition of that identity is removed from the subject, i.e. a gay or lesbian. This is the point at which the need for that aspect of sexual or intimate citizenship,[21] which Richardson (2000) described as the "right of identity" and which implies the right to self-declaration, comes to light. The narratives of gays and lesbians clearly show how their parents primarily resisted their sexual self-declarations and how they (using violence) denied it, resorting to the assumption that it was just a transitory, flippant, and experimental identity that was unacceptable. Yet, these reactions can also be understood as a sign of powerlessness and distress, a position which, however, by no means justifies the violence described above.

> "In the beginning, she accepted it quite well, my girlfriend, too. But she still tried: 'Why don't you try with some man." Then I told her that she should try it with a girlfriend and see how it was. After that she calmed down and stopped it, but before that there were three horrible months." (Amalija, 26)

Although fathers are not immune to emotional blackmail, in this context mothers were mentioned more frequently than fathers (which is also a consequence of the fact that more lesbians and gays came out to their mothers, and that many first come out to their mothers). The reaction to coming out is also determined by the relationship of the parents and the child.

The average age at which lesbians and gays come out to their parents is 20. At that age they usually do not have sufficient resources for an independent life. By this we mean not only economic capital, but also cultural, psychological, social capital and the like. While for the student generation of the late 1960s youth ended when they left home, the young generation that grew up during the 1990s prolonged their youth through the so-called LAT phase (living apart together), or semi-family life. It is a phase of economic dependence or semi-dependence on parents, coinciding with social independence. Rener gives several reasons for this phenomenon, among

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[21] For more on this, see Kuhar 2005.

these unemployment, housing problems, and prolonged study, but also "subjective reasons," for example cheaper life at home, material and emotional safety and good relations with parents. While in the past the main motive that led young people to leave home and start independent life was inter-generational conflict, young people of today enter this process later in life because they do not face patriarchal authority in the family. Rener (1996, 141) calls this "inter-generational harmony," which has replaced inter-generational conflict. However, parents' protective attitude towards their children may be seriously challenged by the disclosure of homosexuality. While at the age of twenty most young people do not have the resources necessary for an independent life, gays and lesbians are even more vulnerable to potential violence on the part of their parents, especially because it frequently goes unnoticed, or is even encouraged by society. Therefore, gays and lesbians may be split between prolonged youth on the one hand, which keeps them dependent on their parents, and various forms of disapproval of their homosexual orientation, on the other. The latter may be a strong incentive to start an independent life, and some indeed do venture on this. For others, this is a good reason not to come out to their family, since the LAT phase enables them to create an illusion of heterosexual identity at home (living together), while during the week, in urban centers where they study (living apart), they can satisfy their social needs and the needs of their real sexual identity. However, this is a makeshift solution, or it is such for younger individuals, given that young people more frequently and at an earlier age come out to their family than did older individuals who were adolescents in the 1980s or earlier.

The tension that as a rule comes in the wake of one's coming out to the family is at least apparently eased with the help of what we refer to as the transparent closet; the first shock and attempts at correction are followed by a period of accommodation that is achieved by pushing aside the information about child's homosexuality. But this is not the only possible scenario. In the light of our conclusion that the inter-generational conflict is increasingly replaced by inter-generational harmony, it is possible to claim not only that today more young gays and lesbians come out to their family and at an earlier age, but also that more parents accept this fact more easily and faster. It is less frequently a cause of inter-generational conflict,

so the family represents a safe haven for many gays and lesbians. The inter-generational harmony in fact also implies a certain similarity of viewpoints and values.

Despite these processes, our research has shown that many parents, at least during the initial phases of coming to terms with their child's homosexuality, try to *change* this sexual orientation through psychological or other forms of violence. Parents either perceive their children's homosexuality as a "phase" which they try to bring to an end as soon as possible and using various methods (emotional blackmail, threats, physical violence, or ruptured communication), or they make demands. Emotional blackmail is frequently connected with the phenomenon of *conditional love* ("either you are going to change, or this is no longer your home," or "if you really love me, you'll change").

Parents' reactions to coming out may be categorized into several typical responses, ranging from extremely negative to positive ones:

A) Termination of the relationship is the most radical reaction, where the condition for re-establishing contact is a change of sexual identity. Some parents even throw their children out of the home "until they change."

B) Emotional blackmail is an attempt to achieve a change in the child's sexual identity. It is based on the conviction that a homosexual identity is not the child's real identity and that it will change if the child really loves them.

> "My mom reacted like all other moms. Perhaps she was even worse, because she is cunning and manipulative enough to gamble on certain emotions. She staged a nervous breakdown which I then witnessed three more times. Exactly the same as 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 I don't know what not. […] But eventually I told her that if she didn't want to see the truth, she shouldn't ask." (Martin, 25)

C) Attempts at correction are comparable to emotional blackmail, only that in this case parents try to "help" their child by suggesting a psychiatrist or some other kind of treatment. Generally, in all three types of response, it is a basic refusal of the child's homosexuality that is at work.

"Mom said: We have not yet laid down the weapons, because there are therapies for this." I told her that it was she who needed therapy, not me. Father did not say anything. " (Oskar, 24).

D) Conditional acceptance is a response where the parents do not doubt their child's homosexuality and do not try to change it, but they still impose conditions. In most cases, it is a request that the homosexuality should remain a family secret or that information should not be disclosed to certain persons.

"When I told my mum, she said: 'I'd rather see you with a girlfriend than with a cigarette in your hand.' Then she told my father, at my request. He said that there was no problem, as long as I was fine at school. But I know that she didn't want our relatives to learn about it, although I think that now she wouldn't really care." (Amalija, 26)

E) Full acceptance is a rare first reaction, but it may be achieved over time. In this case the parents fully accept their child's homosexuality as well as his/her partner.

These are ideal type responses. In reality, every reaction is a combination of these types and may change over time, depending on the circumstances and the situation in which the family and its members have found themselves, as well as on relations within the family. So, for example, parents may move from initial refusal to the consolidation phase, the transparent closet or full acceptance of a child's homosexuality.

Consolidation and the transparent closet

After the initial reaction, parents usually enter the consolidation phase. Despite a large percentage of negative initial reactions, in the long run these do not essentially affect the relationship between parents and children. Somewhat more than 3% of our respondents reported that their relationship with the mother or father deteriorated after coming out and ended in estrangement. However, in the majority of cases, the first shock is followed by the consolidation phase, when homosexuality is usually, but not always, swept under the carpet and turned into a *family secret*. The fact is noted, but discussions of this subject within the family are usually avoided. In this sense, coming out is, as Peter Davis says, not only "the acquisition of

a new and isolated piece of information", but "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).

An individual who has come out can thus be thrust again into the transparent closet – he is expected, for the sake of peace in the family, not to open discussion on the subject of homosexuality, not to bring his partner to family celebrations and so on.

> "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 just see how she hardly breathes. So I prefer to avoid that, because I still live with them. In our house my being gay is a 'pro forma' but nothing more than that. We do not talk about it. It's better if I don't mention it. [...]. I tried several times, but then there were emotions, tears, arguments, punishments." (Igor, 27)

> "I expressed the wish [to talk about it] several times, for instance, I showed them an article. [...] Mom takes a quick glance and doesn't say anything, then I give it to father, but he looks away. Then mom starts to yell, like, why do you rub our noses in it. Like, I shouldn't press them, they do not want to talk about it. She didn't say explicitly that they didn't want to talk about it, but just that I shouldn't press with these themes. Now I launch the subject every now and then, but there is no reaction. Mom sometimes says that it is hard now that she knows what I am." (Borut, 30)

Consolidation does not necessarily lead to the transparent closet. In some cases it results in acceptance, and this is an increasingly frequent outcome for younger gays and lesbians. Two factors at least are responsible for this: on the one hand, changed inter-generational relations, for example, the overcoming of inter-generational conflict and the establishment of inter-generational harmony, and on the other, the process of destigmatization in society at large. This is certainly a trend increasingly observable in connection with coming out, and something similar holds true of same-sex partnerships and their place within the wider family circles and networks of relatives. Although it seems that the strategy that is still predominant is to "take notice" of homosexuality and sweep it under the carpet, which affects not only the place of these relationships within the family and wider networks but also the very relationship of partners, more and more gays and lesbians manage to organize their lives outside the closet even within these contexts. This is the subject we are going to discuss in the next chapter.

ACCEPTED BY FRIENDS, REJECTED BY SOCIETY – SAME-SEX PARTNERSHIPS

Some social scientists (Giddens 2000; Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1999) argue that during recent decades the areas of privacy and partnerships underwent generic changes. Among these, the most important are believed to be the new forms of partnership based on democratic relations and reflection, which are the consequences of the reflexive projects of the self (Giddens 2000). These changes affect all partnerships, regardless of the sexual orientation of the partners. Other researchers, however, point to stigmatization of non-heterosexual partnerships and families, coinciding with the changes mentioned above (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a). These contradictory interpretations have various roots, but one thing is certain – same-sex partnerships are not a monolithic social category, and this is a result of the fact that contemporary identities are no longer given in advance, but are shaped within complex social contexts. Lesbian and gay identities are just one aspect of the wider process of construction of identities (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a), and they vary depending on the various factors of social differentiation (age, sex, ethnicity, race and social class). But they all share one common denominator – "institutional hatred of homosexuality" (Stacey 1996, 107-108).

In this chapter we analyze homosexual partnerships in relation to society, i.e. the place of homosexual partnerships within society in an age of transformation of intimacy. We will try to answer the question of whether today it is at all possible to speak about generic changes in the area of intimacy in connection with various aspects of the day-to-day life of homosexual couples. The theory of the transformation of intimacy offers some useful explanations and interpretations, but it also has several drawbacks. The most problematic is certainly the fact that it views these partnerships in isolation, mean-

ing that it leaves out of consideration society's influence on these partnerships. Although it seems that homosexual relations are indeed more egalitarian, supportive and reflexive, as found by a number of studies (e.g. Stacey, 2002), the question is what lies behind these observed characteristics, whether they can truly be categorized as pure relationships, and in what ways and with what implications heteronormative contextualization of homosexual partnerships takes place in everyday life.

Homosexual partnerships as pure relationships?

"My boyfriend spends Christmas and other holidays with my parents, and we spend weekends together. He goes shopping with my mom. We have picnics together. … Everything functions as if I had a girlfriend." (Jernej, 23)

"I cannot imagine expressing tenderness in the street just like that. It's not to say that I wouldn't do it, but I'm always aware of people around me." (Maruša, 27)

On the level of everyday life, the social changes of late modernity are manifested as a generic restructuring of privacy and the transformation of intimacy (Giddens 2000). The most outstanding feature of the process of the transformation of intimacy is a trend towards establishing pure relationships, a term that "refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfaction for each individual to stay within it" (Giddens 2000, 58). Pure relationships are thus believed to be free of social determinants and to apply to all types of intimate partnership relations, but particularly homosexual ones, since these are not predetermined by gender roles and division of labor as are heterosexual partnerships. The transformation of intimacy means that all partnerships share one trait – they are all propelled by the quest for satisfactory relations, which is a key element of personal affirmation (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 85).

The transformation of intimacy is characterized by two tendencies. On the one hand, there is extensive evidence of experimenting, by which we mean creative attempts of many non-heterosexual men

and women to establish patterns of relationship based on ideals of equality. On the other, these new patterns reflect the tendencies that also reshape heterosexual forms of living (Weeks, Heaphy, Donovan 1999b, 314). In Slovenia, the trends towards the transformation of intimacy are not yet sufficiently strong to justify claims about an obvious influence of non-heterosexual partnerships on the changes in heterosexual patterns, although it is a fact that such changes are present and that they do work in that direction. Our data shows that same-sex partnerships are, in some respects, somewhat more egalitarian than heterosexual ones, for example, with respect to the division of labor. It also seems that same-sex partnerships actually tend towards being pure relationships, primarily as regards the equality of partners, reflexivity, and active and constant work on the relationship. Nevertheless, we believe that when interpreting the characteristic traits of homosexual partnership relations in late modernity, it is necessary to carefully consider the social contexts in which these generic changes in privacy and intimacy take place. We will now have a look at several problematic points in the transformation of intimacy theory in this context.

A comparison of heterosexual and homosexual partnerships seems demanding, and even impossible in some aspects. One obstacle is the lack of empirical data on heterosexual partnerships, i.e. on how intensely they move towards the model of "pure relationships," or which characteristics of this ideal type model they actually exhibit. Empirical data is, therefore, scarce, and moreover, it is contradictory – some researchers have established that relationships have become more egalitarian, while others still report asymmetry in gender roles (Švab 2001). However, what is clear is that the trend towards pure relationships does exist and that some of its aspects are observable in all partnerships, meaning that differences between heterosexual and homosexual partnerships have actually been disappearing. This last statement is true in several respects at least: partnership relations today are reflexive; they exact active and intense work on the relationship, and they are more vulnerable to breakdown. In this connection, "along the discourse of difference which marks the non-heterosexual experience, we can also see the emergence of a certain logic of congruence" (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 85).

Despite the observed convergence of heterosexual and homosexual partnerships as regards intimate traits of pure relationships (reflexivity), the two essentially differ when it comes to their contextualization in the wider (heteronormative) social environment. Late modern society is not a sexually neutral society, but (still) a heteronormative society. Heterosexual partnerships are thus positioned differently from homosexual partnerships. The legal status of homosexual partnerships, for example, is not equal to that of heterosexual partnerships, and this essentially affects the everyday life of gays and lesbians.

The question is whether partnerships that are theoretically more inclined towards being pure relationships, for example cohabitation and homosexual partnerships, are unequivocally such, or in other words, it may be possible that these tendencies ensue from *entirely different reasons* that are not necessarily related to the qualities Giddens attributes to pure relationships (Jamieson 1998, 155). A number of studies, ours included, have indeed found that homosexual relations are more egalitarian and reflexive (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 1999b; Švab, Kuhar 2004). But these properties may today be attributed to all partnerships regardless of the sexual orientation of the partners. That which actually constitutes the real difference between various forms of partnerships (various not only with regard to sexual orientation) perhaps does not have a direct link with the traits of a pure relationship. Jamieson writes that partnerships, regardless of the degree of the couple's non-conventionality, are not formed *solely* on the premises of pure relations (reflexivity, openness), but exist in various other (social) contexts and are propelled by very diverse motives. She cites the example of co-habitation, to which some attribute lesser stability, but this could as well be a consequence of lower social support for these partnerships and of the weaker economic and material ties involved (Jamieson 1998, 156). In the case of same-sex partnerships, it is also necessary to take into account the wider social context. Owing to a different social positioning of homosexual partnerships, the traits that bring them close to pure relationships are not necessarily a result of the same social motives as those underlying heterosexual partnerships. An example would be legal rights arising from partnership. Registration of a homosexual partnership is driven by essentially different

interests than in heterosexual couples, since for homosexual individuals the legal regulation of their partnership is a road leading to the achievement of rights in this area, which heterosexual partners already enjoy thanks to family law. The observed decline in the heterosexual marriage rate is a consequence of the diminishing social significance of this institution and of the legal equation of marriage and co-habitation. So, regardless of their sexual orientation, couples do not marry for romantic reasons (this is a consequence of the diminishing significance of romantic love in late modernity in general), but the context that influences the decision of homosexual couples to enter marriage is essentially different from that influencing heterosexual couples.

The transformation of intimacy theory is also contradictory in the sense that, on the one hand, it views homosexual partnerships in isolation from the influences and contexts of the wider social environment (thus taking away from them, in a way, political connotations), and on the other, it understands the concept of pure relationship as an example of a transfer of democratic principles (of society at large) to the area of privacy (Giddens 2000).

Inevitability of the heteronormative framework

The most important factor of social differentiation between homosexual and heterosexual partnerships is precisely the fact that postmodern societies are still conspicuously heteronormative and that it is precisely this social context, one that favors heterosexuality and stigmatizes homosexuality, that accords a different place to same-sex couples compared to heterosexual couples. "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, Heaphy, Donovan 1999b, 313). This has also been confirmed by the results of our research. Gays and lesbians are exposed to various forms of pressure, both as individuals and as partners in a homosexual relationship.

Respondents in our research were 20.6 years old on average when they formed their first homosexual relationship, meaning that they were considerably older on average than their hetrosexual counter-

parts. There are several reasons for this delay. First, social pressure towards heterosexuality may compel individuals to first form heterosexual relationships, as several focus group respondents mentioned.

The second reason is the fear of stigma and the related process of homosexual identity formation. Homosexual individuals have to redefine their compulsory and expected heterosexual identity, and consequently, resolve the problem of the disclosure of their sexual orientation, both of which are stages not faced by heterosexual individuals.

The third reason is the scarcity of social spaces where one can meet homosexual partners. Compared with the situation in the past, a considerable improvement is noticeable, but our research suggests that even today these spaces are few, and more importantly, they are concentrated in the larger urban centers, Ljubljana in particular. Social spaces where one can meet same-sex partners are closed and intimate spaces, and they are mainly restricted to the private circles of acquaintances and friends.

> "It is difficult [to meet a partner], because there are no clubs here … There are no spaces where you can go and socialize with people. We have many straight friends, but no gay friends… We met through the web. Outside it, I don't see a space where I could find a partner." (Jan, 33)

Generally speaking, informal networks of friends are very important places where gays and lesbians can meet potential partners. These networks offer discretion and intimacy, and the exposure to a stigma is smaller. According to the quantitative data collected in this study, the majority of respondents met their current partners in circles of friends or in GLBT clubs or discos. But since GLBT clubs are concentrated in urban areas, they are not accessible to all gays and lesbians. Consequently, and expectedly, the significance of the Internet in this context has been continually increasing.
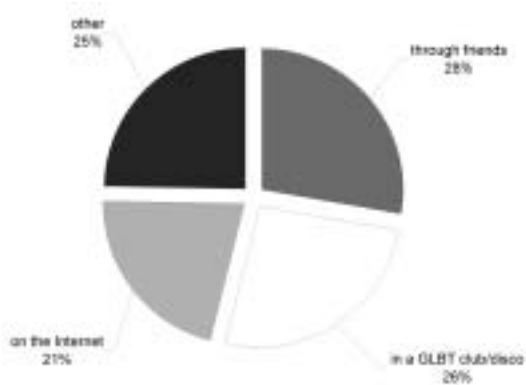
FIGURE 20: HOW DID YOU MEET YOUR CURRENT PARTNER?

Particularly for the younger generation, the Internet is a space where they can establish contacts with other gays and lesbians, where socialization takes place and where homosexual individuals get to know each other. Our hypothesis was that the group of homosexuals who met their partners on the web would be dominated by young individuals, and the results of the study confirmed it. In the age group 16-20, 32% of gays and lesbians had met their partners on the web, but this proportion drops sharply in each subsequent higher age group.
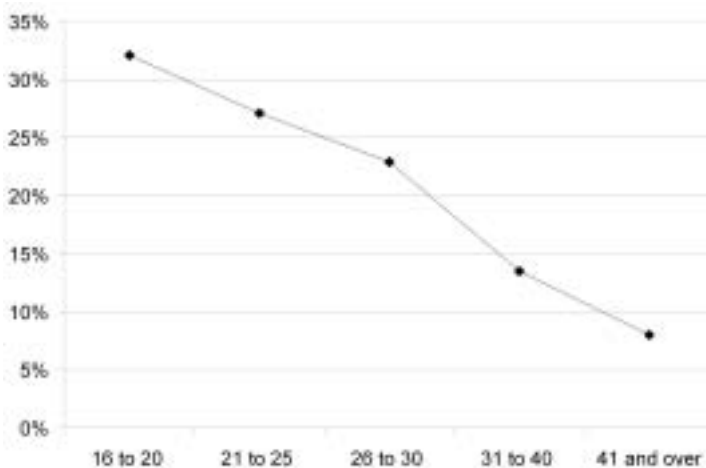
FIGURE 21: PERCENTAGES OF WEB-ORIGINATING RELATIONSHIPS, BY AGE GROUPS

There are considerable differences among age groups with regard to the age at which they formed their first homosexual partnerships. Younger gays and lesbians formed their first partnerships at an earlier age than older homosexuals. This is related to the fact that today young gays and lesbians come out earlier in life than did their older counterparts, and that the acceptance of homosexuality in intimate, family circles and circles of friends is greater.
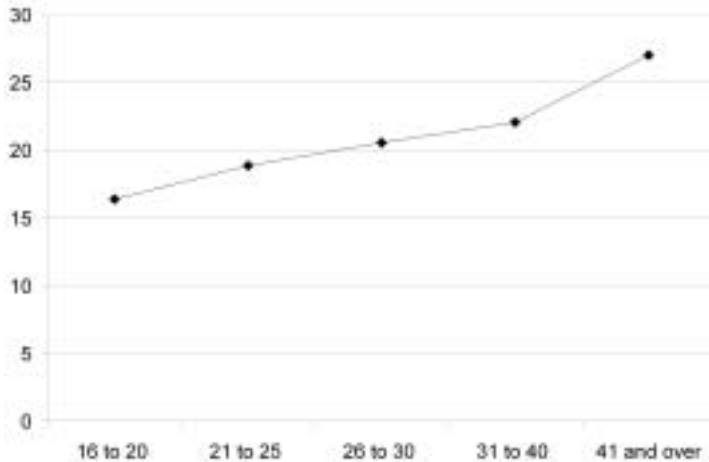
FIGURE 22: AGE WHEN FORMING THE FIRST PARTNERSHIP BY AGE GROUPS

Owing to the heteronormative social framework, the duration of homosexual partnerships is directly related to the issue of coming out in society. A partial disclosure of homosexuality on forming the first relationship is a condition on which depends the duration of such a relationship, since concealment may cause a break up, particularly in situations where there is an obvious asymmetry between the two partners regarding coming out.

"My last relationship broke down precisely because I didn't want to be seen just as her friend when we went somewhere. I coped with many things and used up a lot of energy to be able to admit to myself that I'm a lesbian. So this seemed unacceptable to me. I saw it as a denial. These situations were repeated time and again, and in this respect we could not establish a dialogue. I was not ready for a compromise, because this was too important for me. So I put an end to that relationship."
(Ana, 26)

The concealment of the relationship because one of the partners has not yet come out, and particularly concealment from the family and friends, may be so annoying in everyday life that partners eventually split.

> "He visited my parents, but my parents did not know it, because at that time I hadn't yet come out. I imagined that I'd settle these things sooner or later, because it was a nuisance and because I want to have open relations with my parents and friends. But he did not work towards it, and that annoyed me. He did not even introduce me to his friends, the way I introduced him to mine, as my boyfriend. That started to gnaw at me. After three years I despaired and said that things could not go on like that. And I ended that relationship." (Sebastjan, 31)

Coming out in a public space

Contrary to the obviously greater acceptance of gays and lesbians in private circles of family and friends, we observed a conspicuous fear of coming out in the wider social environment, which is undoubtedly a consequence of the high level of homophobia in our society. Gays and lesbians cope with various problems in various social milieus, for example, how to live openly in a homosexual partnership while at the same time avoiding the homophobic reactions of society. These homophobic reactions are diverse and may take the form of physical violence, harassment or insult, but also subtler forms, for example, ignoring, meaningful looks and so on. Yet even more worrying than the real threats is the fear that fills every moment of gays' and lesbians' life and imposes self-control. Gašper, a focus group participant, thus described the distress experienced whenever he takes his partner by the hand in public.

> "There occurs a spasm in Čopova street. There is always that controller who whispers inside your head: 'Be careful now, they are watching you…' Then you don't want it any more, because it is no longer an intimacy, but just an odd gesture and you don't really know if it is sensible any more. One time you're cool, but your boyfriend isn't. Another time he is cool, but you aren't. And then just when both of us seem cool, you come across a school-mate, and you really wouldn't do it right then… These are the types of coming out that are unpleasant in a way. I always make a check. If the environment is such that I can have control over it if there is an incident, then yes, otherwise rather not." (Gašper, 27)

It seems that gays and lesbians resort to mimicry to adjust to the heteronormativity of public spaces. They outwardly redefine their

partnership and contextualize it as "just a friendship." Only in circumstances that appear sufficiently safe, do some allow the expression of intimacies that point to their sexual status. Gays and lesbians are as a rule aware of the environment in general and the heteronormativity determining this environment. Many think that self-control and alertness about the state of affairs has become part of their life.

> "You feel pressure. You look around and if the place is empty, you do it. Or, if the environment is such that it allows for it. This does not mean that there are no people around. If there are no primitives around, you do it. But we don't hold each other by the hand when we walk around Ljubljana, definitely not. … Simply, it is probably in your DNA, that we live in a heterosexual society and that there are rules observed in this society and you must not provoke it." (Igor, 27)

A disclosure of homosexual identity therefore depends on the social contexts in which individuals find themselves. Much as in the case of coming out in the street, similar anxieties are present when introducing partners to friends and acquaintances. Respondents in our study talked about the embarrassment they experience whenever they have to introduce their partners, and about various strategies they use in these situations, such as introducing a partner only by name, as a friend or similar. Designations signify the relationship between two persons. They decide to disclose their partner, their relationship and sexual identity only after considering and assessing the circumstances in which they find themselves. As with expressions of intimacy, public declarations of partnership are also linked to the social context. Some gays and lesbians see the compulsory restriction of intimate partnership to friendship as being extremely annoying and problematic.

> "I was considering what to say. I won't say 'a friend,' and 'partner' sounds as if I said, 'this is a hypotenuse.' (laughter). For some time I even agreed to introduce him by his name. So you can think whatever you want. So now, when I'm totally scared, I introduce him by his name. On other occasions I say 'this is my boyfriend.' But I'm still very scared. … I'm scared that I won't be accepted. That it will be a reason for picking on me or some cold acceptance … Well, I know, theoretically, if they reject you they are not worthy of you, so goodbye. But that doesn't work like that. These theories do not work in practice." (Borut, 30)

Partnership relations
and family relations

Lesbians and gays have most trust in their circles of close friends and feel safest among them. The reactions of close friends to disclosures of homosexual identity and partnerships are mainly positive. The response of parents is much worse compared to that of friends – only somewhat more than one quarter of respondents experienced a positive reaction from their mothers, and only one fifth from their fathers. Our findings explicitly point to a fear of fathers – fewer gays and lesbians came out to their fathers than to mothers, and the same holds true of the disclosure of homosexual partnership.
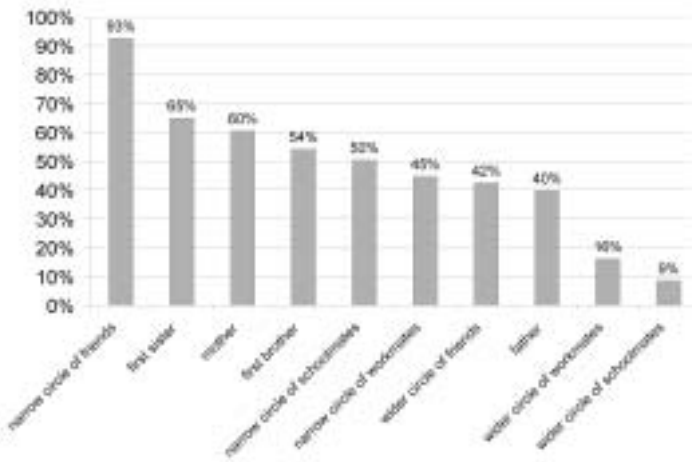
FIGURE 23: WHO KNOWS ABOUT YOUR INTIMATE PARTNERSHIP?

However, in the long run, a response to coming out does not essentially affect parents-to-child relations. This does not mean that these individuals, after coming out to their family, can live an open life (in intimate partnership). Quite frequently, the disclosure of homosexual identity in the family circle is followed by what we referred to as the transparent closet, a situation in which family members know about the homosexual orientation of the child, but they do not speak about it or rather, they do not take account of it in everyday life. After coming out to the immediate family, silence usually settles in, hindering the establishment of personal contacts with the partner's

family or wider family. The transparent closet frequently turns into the *family closet*, since after a gay or lesbian comes out to the family, the whole family together with the homosexual member finds itself in the closet in relation to the wider social environment (relatives, neighbors, friends, acquaintances). Parents frequently require from their child that the information about his/her sexuality should not be disseminated outside the family or that it should be hidden from a specific part of the family, for example, one of the parents (for more on this issue, see the chapter on the shaping of homosexual identity and coming out).

Some gays and lesbians managed, after a while, to establish relations with their families and with the family of their partner, as well as the wider circle of relatives. Others maintain contacts with one side only.

"My parents accepted her very well. She also gets presents, everything is as it should be … But on her side, I know only her brother and her niece. I did not have much contact with the others, because their reaction to her coming out was very negative." (Ana, 26)

"My girlfriend once proposed to bring me to the weekend cottage, but her father said: 'And why would she come?' So that was that for that subject. We met each other, they know about me, but we do not socialize." (Monika, 26)

Establishing of contacts with relatives and the acceptance of a lesbian or a gay into the family of her/his partner in most cases requires much effort and persistence.

"Some two years ago I started to make deliberate efforts to make such lunches and excursions happen. Because his mother … I don't know, she ignored me in a way, as much as she could. But I wanted to tell her that I'm here and that I'm going to stay, that she won't get rid of me just like that. And I did it in a way she wasn't used to. I came and said, let's do it, let's go, pack up now and let's go for an excursion. And she'd say things like 'Ah, I was just ironing…' 'I don't care, now we go for a walk.' So we went. I brought them face to face with the fact. Now the two of them call each other … there is coffee, and cake… But they needed a push from both sides. I worked hard on it, at least for one year, every weekend, and in between." (Matjaž, 25)

If one partner is not welcome in the immediate family of the other partner, the homosexual partnership may come under pressure, the same pressure as created by the concealment of homosexual iden-

tity discussed earlier. One focus group participant thus described the stalemate between her partner and her family.

"That was a burden ... I couldn't cut off my parents because of that. Well, if I were principled, I could say: 'Dear Mother, I won't come to your house any more.' But emotionally I couldn't do that. I maintained contacts with her, and naturally, went to family celebrations, Christmas dinner and such critical events. I did, but she didn't. That was very exhausting, because it made her sad, and I couldn't do anything. She knew she could not press me, like, you stay home and do not go there. But it was clear that she was tormented. But later on we somehow settled these things. I told her that I couldn't be responsible for my parents, only for myself." (Tara, 30)

Despite everything, the interviews revealed that in the families in which parents, or the whole family, accepted their child's homosexuality and his/her partner, contacts with the family are frequent and orderly. Acceptance into the family is indeed increasingly frequent among the younger generation, which points to the fact that in narrow social milieus, such as immediate family or circles of friends, homophobia is increasingly less present. The conclusion therefore is that many homosexual couples do manage to be integrated in the usual family relations.

There is another important change that should be mentioned, and it is manifested on the level of the perception of family and family relations. There is evidence that lesbians and gays increasingly frequently redefine the meaning of the family itself, and this is reflected in the expressions "elective families" or "families of choice" (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, Weston 1991). In this way, new, non-heterosexual relations influence the perception of partnership and family relations and meaningfully redefine them. Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy report that gays and lesbians extend the meanings of the family (understood, in modernity, as the union of children and a heterosexual married couple) to two new levels: first, in their understanding, children are not taken as a necessary precondition, and second, family relations are extended to include friends. The stress is on choice, commitment and friendship (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a). However, this shift is not characteristic only of lesbian and gay couples. Family theorists in fact observe a general trend in which family relations are no longer determined by taken-for-granted rules, but what is stressed are values such as commitment, care, responsibility and so on (Finch 1989).

However, Weeks, Donovan and Heaphy also draw attention to the fact that in terms of choice these new, non-heterosexual re-definitions of the family have their limitations. The three main limitations are: the historical setting (today it is easier to come out than it was in the past), differences between rural and urban areas (it is easier to redefine traditional meanings of the family in urban environments), and political circumstances (various other social factors, e.g. racism, create dual stigmatization) (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 89). All these are factors imposed by the wider social, primarily heteronormative environment and they confirm our hypothesis that in interpreting the transformation of intimacy, it is also necessary to take into account social factors that influence partnerships.

According to the results of our research, it is not possible to assert unequivocally that gays and lesbians in Slovenia give priority to networks of friends over the family. If we were to judge by the data on who they trust most, to whom they first come out and what reactions to their coming out they experience, we would have to conclude that networks of friends are more important than families. But focus group interviews suggest that family and family relations still bear more weight. This explains one reason why coming out to parents is more demanding, why it happens later and only after careful consideration, and why lesbians and gays attach to it great significance. For many gays and lesbians, good relations with their parents and the acceptance of their partner into their family are extremely important, in many cases so much so that unresolved family relations negatively influence their relation with the partner. This said, we do not mean to suggest that lesbians and gays in Slovenia have more conservative viewpoints about family relations than their counterparts elsewhere. Every disclosure of homosexual identity or partnership and establishment of family relations significantly demolishes and redefines traditional family relations and their perception.

Pure relationships – equality, commitment, care

Homosexual partnerships emerge and are maintained outside conventional institutional and legal supportive systems and structures, so they are less likely to be modeled after the traditional patterns

characterized by pre-defined obligations, duties and commitments (Weeks, Heaphy, Donovan 1999b, 306). But some gays and lesbians deliberately shape partnership relations contrary to heterosexual models (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 91). Kurdek (in Jamieson 1998, 153) even holds that as regards the division of labor, lesbian and gay couples cannot make use of the category of gender simply because both partners are of the same gender. In the opinion of Lynn Jamieson (1998, 163), this explanation is too general, since masculinity and femininity become constructed regardless of the sex of the physical body.

As early as the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, research on homosexual partnerships showed that homosexual couples do not make use of the categories of gender and do not interpret them based on the conventional heterosexual pattern (breadwinner/ housewife) (Jamieson 1998, 153). Judging by the results of our and other comparable studies (Jamieson 1998, Stacey 2004), homosexual partnerships are not caught in the patriarchal matrix of typically male and typically female tasks. Our research showed that work is divided equally between partners in the majority of partnerships. Partners divide work based on personal preferences and affinities towards specific tasks (some like to cook, others like to clean), or the division is arbitrary and determined by their daily schedules (work is done by the partner who has time).

Focus group participants also mentioned preferential or agreed division of labor. Some studies found that same-sex partners divide labor equally regardless of earnings, while others reported that an employed partner or a partner who is more career-oriented is more likely to keep away from domestic tasks, and that greater income translates into more power in the division of labor matters. However, this does not mean that the traditional heterosexual model of division of labor is transposed to homosexual partnerships (Jamieson 1998, 153). The results of our research do not suggest inequalities in the division of labor that could be interpreted as a consequence of greater earnings of one of the partners. On the contrary, focus group participants stressed on several occasions that the status of an employed partner, or a partner who earns more, does not create a hierarchy or consequential roles within the partnership. However, differences were observed in cases where one partner is employed

and the other is a student. A student partner sometimes handles more domestic tasks, but this division of labor is determined by the greater flexibility of the daily schedule rather than based on the argument of power.

It seems that lesbians and gays value equality in their partnership relations, although views differ on what equality actually is or what constitutes it (Weston 1991). New non-heterosexual arrangements by no means imply a less demanding relationship. On the contrary, duties, obligations and commitment continue to be vital components of these relationships, except that they have become a matter of free choice and conscious decisions (Weeks, Heaphy, Donovan 1999b, 306). At the beginning of the 1990s, Weston reported that in her research lesbians occasionally expressed a worry that their relationships were too intense or emotional, while gays reported that they frequently experienced problems with how to maintain a relationship (Weston 1991). Homosexual partnerships do not imitate heterosexual patterns, but they do operate in the same manner. There is no essential difference here arising from sexual orientation – in late modernity an intimate relationship is a demanding project necessitating constant work on relations, reflexivity and commitment (Giddens 2000) and changing in the process the very nature of partnerships as such.

It seems appropriate to mention here another important finding of our study not reported by other researchers. Among the various types of family tasks, maintaining relations with the family[22] proved to be an explicitly unilateral task in homosexual partnerships. In heterosexual families, this is typically a woman's task (Švab 2001), while homosexual partnerships and families frequently find themselves in situations in which relations with the family are not established or not sufficiently developed so as to allow for the integration of a homosexual couple or family in the wider network of relatives of both partners. Obstacles are diverse and may be on the side of a homosexual couple (coming out, partnership relations, weak/bad relations with the relatives/parents) or of the relatives (bad relations with children, non-acceptance of a child's homosexuality, non-

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[22]By 'maintaining relations with the family' we mean a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from the establishment and maintenance of contact to attending family celebrations and other family events, writing postcards from holidays and so on.

acceptance of his/her partner, restriction of family contacts or relations and similar). Being outside a partner's family network may prove to be very frustrating and restricting in everyday life, and it may eventually lead to the break up of a partnership.

Equality and rights: registering homosexual partnerships

Legal regulations significantly determine the life of gays and lesbians, so changes in the legal system are an important goal in themselves, and not only in the sense of decriminalizing homosexuality, but also in connection with gays' and lesbians' rights (Bernstein 2001, 421). During the past two years, registered same-sex partnership has been a hotly debated political subject in Slovenia.[23] Our research shows that 61% of respondents would opt to register their partnership. It should be noted, however, that our sample consisted of a large number of young people, which may explain the percentage of undetermined respondents (21%).
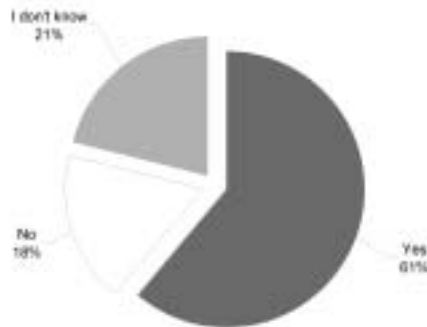
FIGURE 24: WOULD YOU OPT FOR A HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE?

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[23]The first reading of the bill on same-sex partnership took place during the last session of the National Assembly preceding the 2004 parliamentary elections. The new government prepared a new proposal, and this bill was passed into law on June 22, 2005 (Same-Sex Registered Partnership Act). Compared to the previous version, this law essentially restricts the rights of same sex partners. For more on this, see Mencin Čeplak 2005.

Gays and lesbians, as well as social scientists concerned with gender studies and queer theories, have differing opinions as to the advantages of the legal regulation of same-sex partnerships. Supporters of gay marriage start from the discourse on human rights and equality, while its opponents most often refer to the feminist critique of modern families and the institution of marriage, where the latter is seen as an oppressive social institution with heterosexist historical roots that should be condemned by gays and lesbians rather than embraced (Rahman 1998, Lehr 2003, Warner 1999, Sullivan 1997). Homosexual marriages are believed to block the critique of the institution of marriage seen among feminist critics as a social form historically rooted in gender inequality (Lewin 2001). Its supporters, by contrast, believe that one of the greatest advantages of the homosexual institution of marriage is precisely its potential for creating new, more egalitarian partnership relations, unburdened by gender roles and related expectations. Legalization of same-sex marriages would thoroughly change the conventional social arrangements, since the institution of marriage is a social construct that exists only inside the legal system and changes over time. Homosexual marriages would thus mean a radical denaturalization of the social construction of male/female differentiation, while at the same time it would be a form of civil disobedience that would enable further transformation of the public understanding of basic institutions (Kaplan 1997). Opponents point out that homosexual marriages would not change the fact that society is organized around the heterosexual family and that it will continue to oppress homosexuality (Lehr 2003). Rahman (1998) adds that the legal recognition of gay and lesbian marriage would not mean anything if gays and lesbians, for various reasons such as homophobia, will not dare exercise the ensuing rights. Without changes in culture and without overcoming heteronormativity as an organizing principle in virtually all societies, it is not possible to ensure equality and freedom, say queer theorists. They also point out that marriage is a social institution which, on the one hand, rewards those who are inside it (meaning married couples), and tries to discipline those who remain outside. This will produce differentiation between married gays and lesbians worthy of respect, while homosexual individuals who choose not to marry would only be additionally stigmatized and marginalized (Warner 1999).

Regardless of the arguments pro and con, it is a fact that in everyday life gay and lesbian couples do shape new narratives (Plummer 1995) that importantly redefine our perception of intimate or partnership life, while also creating new non-heterosexual forms of partnership. "Lesbians and gay men are establishing sophisticated social forms, which we describe as 'families of choice', with that sense of involvement, security and continuity over time traditionally associated with the orthodox family, and yet which are deeply rooted in a specific historic experience" (Weeks, Donovan, Heaphy 1999a, 83).

Gays and lesbians in Slovenia mainly do not agree with the statement that marriage means becoming stuck in the heterosexual way of life, a finding which can be explained by the strong awareness of the necessity to legally regulate gays' and lesbians' rights in the area of partnership.
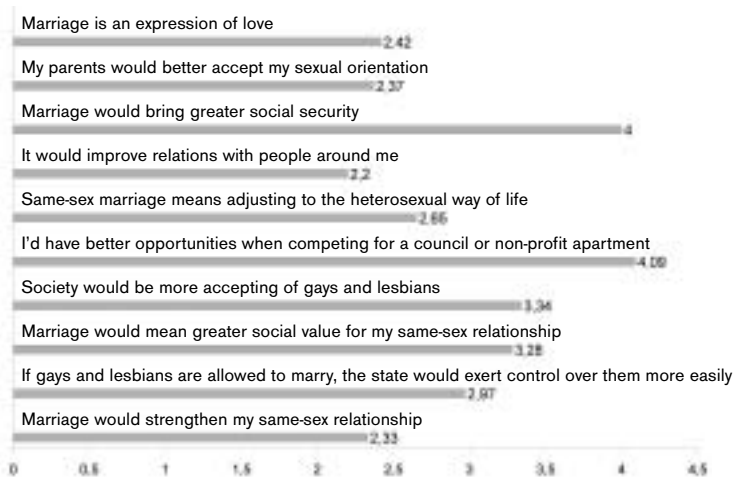
FIGURE 25: STANDPOINTS ON HOMOSEXUAL MARRIAGE

Lesbians and gays would not marry for ideological or romantic reasons. They do not agree with the ideology-driven statements about marriage that have been typical of heterosexual marriages in

the past. The diminishing significance of the romantic aspects of love and intimacy is at any rate one of the trends in the transformation of the intimacy process, and, as Giddens says, it is characteristic of all partnerships (Giddens 2000). An essentially diminished importance is attached to social acknowledgement and to the symbolic and political value of such partnerships.

> "We wouldn't marry in order to say to each other how much we love each other, but because of benefits enjoyed by heterosexual partners." (Darka, 28)

When citing reasons in support of registered partnership, our respondents placed stress on pragmatic aspects such as social security, housing issues, property issues regulation and so on.

In addition to material changes, legal regulation also has a symbolic function. By prioritizing certain family formations and by prescribing sexual conduct, it helps to construct certain identities, individuals and families as "normal" and others as "deviant." Individuals who do not adjust are deprived of certain rights (Bernstein 2001, 241). In addition to social and legal reasons in favor of marriage, gays and lesbians are also aware of the political symbolic function of this social institution. They are aware of their second-class status and demand equal rights and duties as accorded to heterosexual couples. This would create room for homosexual marriage, and although some would not use that option for their own reasons, they want to have it because as equal citizens they are entitled to it:

> "I don't want to marry, but I want to have that option." (Hana, 20)

> "My sister and her boyfriend have two children but are not married even after fifteen years. If they split, everything is divided in two. But we, we do not have anything." (Vivika, 27)

We noted a degree of skepticism about whether the legalization of homosexual marriage would in fact bring about essential changes in society. It is very likely that this stance reflects personal encounters with homophobia, since more than half of our respondents had experienced some kind of violence provoked by their sexual orientation:

"What most sticks in my mind is someone asking when this law will be adopted so that we can hold one another by the hand. No law can give that to you. If I don't dare take him by the hand, I won't dare once the law is in place either. All of them can already hold hands, that law will not change anything. Perhaps it will change opinion in the long run, but nothing will change overnight. Definitely not." (Janez, 33)

TABOOS, WISHES AND DELAYED PLANS: HOMOSEXUALS AND CHILDREN

"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. Yes, I think that I could make without that, too … since the realistic picture is exactly like that: never. And I also dislike it a bit that it cannot be the child of both of us." (Monika, 26)

Our research showed that 42% of respondents wanted a child, 40% did not want a child, while others were undetermined. There are no significant gender differences in this respect. The percentages of men and women who want a child are the same, but more women than men were undetermined and fewer women said that they did not want a child. These differences between genders are not statistically significant.[24]

		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

FIGURE 26: DESIRE TO HAVE A CHILD BY GENDER

The desire to have a child remains on the level of principle for both gays and lesbians. In principle, gays and lesbians would like to have a child, but focus group participants were also aware that their chances in this respect were slim, and the consequence is that these ideas are suppressed. Some openly admitted it, i.e. that they sup-

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[24] F=0,916; df=3; sig=0,433.

press thoughts about children, because they are afraid that any serious consideration of how to get their own child would be too burdening given the realistically small chance. Some gays and lesbians experience a kind of guilt, or think that they are actually not entitled to the right to have a child:

> "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)

Some take the suppression of this desire so far that they even deny gays and lesbians the right to have a child.

> "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 sometimes 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 at all create a context free of these prejudices?" (Gašper, 27)

Although there are no differences between gays and lesbians as regards their desire to have children, lesbians, not unexpectedly, proved less fearful that their wish would be unrealizable. The prospect of having a child is for them more realistic than for gays, so their reflections are primarily oriented towards how a child may change their life. In this respect, lesbians are much like heterosexual women, for whom the decision to have a child is a serious project that carries with it great responsibility (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1999, Švab 2001). These reflections are also a consequence of the fact that the focus groups included primarily younger gays and lesbians, who see a child as a possible option in the future rather than a pressing issue at present. One characteristic of young people living in late modernity is that, because of prolonged youth, decisions about marriage, children and the like are postponed (Rener, Švab 1998). This postponement is also characteristic of gays and lesbians:

"I'd have them 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)

It seems necessary to emphasize at this point one significant difference that separates heterosexual from homosexual women. While heterosexual women are exposed to social expectations and even pressure towards having a child, in the case of lesbians, social expectations are precisely the opposite – lesbian motherhood is seen as undesirable, even dangerous. So it is not surprising that gays and lesbians instead suppress their thoughts about children as something unrealistic.

The desire to have a child fades with age. While younger lesbians and gays want to postpone this issue, with older participants we noted a kind of resignation and acceptance of the fact that in Slovenia a homosexual person has only a small chance of having a child. Women without male partners are not allowed by law to use artificial insemination technologies, and homosexual partners are not allowed to adopt children. The results of the quantitative part of the study showed that in the age groups 31 to 40, 30% of respondents wanted a child, while in the age group over 41, this percentage was only 15.4%.

Non-heterosexual parenthood is still tabooed by society (Golombok 2001, Švab, Kuhar 2004, Weeks, Heaphy, Donovan 1999a). Gay and lesbian families are hence classified among "those family formations and family realities variously designated by social scientists – as non-traditional, non-conventional, alternative or elective families, social families," by which "the difference is actually exposed and stressed, i.e. a shift (away from heterosexual family) which then automatically becomes the subject of predominance" (Urek 2005, 157).

Lesbians and gays are therefore forced to use various strategies for contemplating children in same-sex families. The main reservations expressed by some focus group participants were concerns about how society would react to a child growing up in a homosexual family. This argument, indeed one of the popular arguments in debates about children in homosexual families, is a kind of defense mechanism, and it has been rejected empirically by scientific circles (Golombok 2001, Urek 2005). The majority of focus group partici-

pants opposed these arguments and transferred the responsibilities of parenthood 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 it to handle the homophobic reactions of society:

> "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)

As regards desire for a child, it needs to be stressed that gays and lesbians contemplate several possible options for acquiring a child, while the primary option for the heterosexual population, and for the majority of them the only one, is biological parenthood. The adoption option was frequently mentioned, although biological conception is prioritized:

> "To me, the most sensible option seems to be adoption. But this option is not available now and it probably won't be for some time to come. 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)

Adoption is seen by many as an optimal solution, making the child belong equally to both parents. This argument actually originates in the biological determination of parenthood. In these circumstances, adoption represents a kind of sacrifice, a forsaking of biological parenthood so that both partners, as social parents, can function as biological parents, insofar as it is possible. Probably, what is at the forefront here is not the desire to resemble other (biological) parents (as in heterosexual couples), but rather a wish that both parents be equal, i.e. that the child belong equally to both parents.

DISCRIMINATION AND VIOLENCE

"I'm not afraid of physical violence. A physical pain is a kind of pain I know how to cope with. But emotions escape, and you cannot trap them. If you are in pain, there are medication and pills. But when it comes to emotions, I don't know… "
(Vanja, 19, *on the fear of homophobic violence*)

In 2003, the Australian artists Deborah Kelly and Tina Fiveash carried out an artistic project entitled "Hey, hetero!" that included a series of jumbo posters questioning heterosexual privileges in society. One of these posters shows a heterosexual couple kissing in the street. The caption reads: "You can do it with your eyes closed. No fear. No danger. No worries."

FIGURE 27: "HEY, HETERO!" ARTISTIC PROJECT.
AUTHORS: DEBORAH KELLY AND TINA FIVEASH.
The complete set of posters is available at http://abc.net.au/arts/visual/stories/ venice/hh_01.htm

This poster alerted the viewers to the heterosexualization of the street. The street can bear the view of a heterosexual couple expressing emotions. A heterosexual couple need not fear any negative reaction provoked by their conduct. But a homosexual couple expressing emotions in similar circumstances could be exposed to verbal violence, and even physical violence. This frequently forces homosexual couples into mimicry and concealment of their partnership, since, as Ksenja, 30, one of the focus group participants said, "you don't really want to fight every day on the street or wipe spit from your face."

Heterosexualization of the street as one form of performativity is manifested in several ways, ranging from physical violence, most frequently perpetrated by anonymous individuals, to subtler regulating processes, such as meaningful looks, stares, remarks and the like. In fact, heteronormativity in the public space is a form of Foucault's panopticon. Amalija, 26, for example, said that "one wrong or strange look on the street suffices" to stop you holding hands with a partner.

By perpetuating discomfort, society sends a message to homosexual individuals that *they do not belong there*, that it is not their space (as well) (Valentine 1996, 148). It compels them to exercise self-control over their desires, which, in turn, enables the constitution of the public space as a heterosexual place. Valentine argues that homosexuals exercise self-control by controlling their gestures, dress and behavior in the public space. However, the thesis about self-control could be extended to other social minorities as well. Most women, for example, will not put on a dress that may be seen as (sexually) provocative. The street (as a public space) is not only heterosexualized, as Valentine says, but it is masculinized. Control over the public space symbolically belongs to heterosexual males.

In his study of the closet in America, Steven Seidman (2002) says that today the young generations of gays and lesbians organize their life beyond the closet, which only a decade ago was an inescapable part of the day-to-day life of a homosexual. Our research only partly confirmed this thesis. It needs to be stressed that for gays and lesbians in Slovenia, the closet is still a reality in most aspects of social life. We assume that these differences between research findings reflect differences in the cultural environment. In more liberal envi-

ronments, in which the level of homophobia and violence against gays and lesbians is lower, the possibilities for coming out of the closet are greater than in environments where homophobia is still quite conspicuous, as it is in Slovenia. It seems that in Slovenia the closet is increasingly less present in narrow social circles, although we should not overlook the phenomenon we previously referred to as the *transparent closet*. In other social contexts, the closet continues to be a social structure for the oppression of gays and lesbians. Starting from the results of our research, we can safely claim that there are at least two social contexts in which the closet has remained the main form of response to heteronormativity. These are the workplace and the public space.

The workplace and heteronormativity

Discrimination in employment and in the workplace is an issue that deserves special attention. Much like virtually all other areas of public life and privacy, this area also rests on heterosexual norms. However, since they are both obscured and all-pervasive, we are usually unaware of them. Lehtonen and Mustola (2004) point out that everyday practices in the workplace are suffused with the issues of sexuality and gender. Heterosexual norms thus lay down the boundaries of both masculinity and femininity, and through this determine which expressions of sexuality and gender are deemed suitable. Heteronormativity, say the authors, also determines what physical appearance is considered suitable in the workplace. All this creates a workplace culture that has implications for every employed person, regardless of his/her gender or sexual orientation.

Since workplace culture is suffused with taken-for-granted heteronormative assumptions, it is frequently fertile ground for various forms of (hidden) violence and (direct) discrimination against gays and lesbians. Social interactions in the workplace often transcend issues related to work. Many situations in which informal communication with our colleagues at work takes place (for example, during the lunch break) provide opportunities for discussions about privacy, intimacy, family situations and so on. "These discussions on and presentations of heterosexual relations at work is considered so natural, normal, commonplace and inherently automatic that it almost

passes unobserved, even if these relations are constantly present in the form of flirtation, sexual innuendo, talk, exchanges of news, sharing of family events or discussion on marital bliss or problems, among others" (Heikkinen 2002, 34). This does not mean that such circumstances in the workplace directly lead to violence or discrimination against lesbians and gays. However, the absence of awareness about the presence of gays and lesbians in the workplace, as a result of heteronormative assumptions, may expose lesbians and gays to various forms of homophobia, for example, "jokes about faggots." There is evidence (Lehtonen 2002) that these types of psychological violence are rarer if an individual has come out in the workplace. Yet our research shows that this may be a risky affair. One factor that influences the response of colleagues at work is the conduct of the employer who is responsible (in Slovenia also legally bound) for organizing the working environment in such a way that it is safe for all, including gays and lesbians. But here one is again caught in a vicious circle: gays and lesbians do not come out because they assess the environment as not sufficiently safe, so the environment continues to be homophobic because of heteronormative assumptions. This reproduces the social institution of the closet.

The results of our research confirmed our hypothesis that the percentage of individuals who conceal their sexual orientation in the workplace is relatively high.[25] As is clear from the chart below, almost one in two respondents conceals his/her sexual orientation from colleagues at work, or allows only few colleagues to know about it. There are no statistically significant gender differences in this respect.[26] Somewhat more than one third of respondents disclosed their sexual orientation to colleagues at work.

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[25] In analyzing answers relating to the workplace, we took into account only those respondents who were employed at the time of survey and did not say that questions about the workplace were not applicable to them. This sample included 296 respondents, 72% male and 28% female.

[26] sig=0,160.

Most or all
34%

No one or just a few
49%

Few
17%
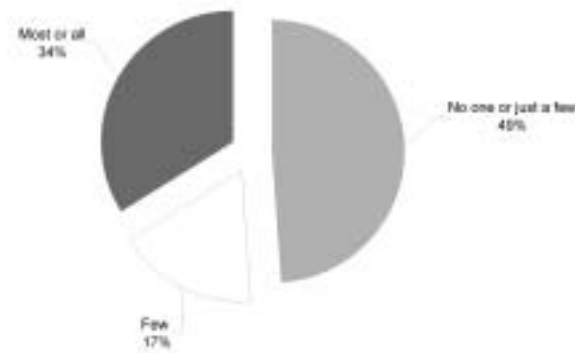
FIGURE 28: COMING OUT IN THE WORKPLACE

Most of the respondents who came out in the workplace, if only partly, did not have problems with their colleagues. Almost 84% reported no change in relations after coming out; 13% noted a certain coldness after coming out, while only two respondents (1%) experienced a negative reaction and are now avoided by their colleagues. Working environments themselves differ. Lesbians and gays come out only after careful consideration, and to people from whom they expect a positive reaction, that is to say, colleagues with whom they already have good or friendly relations.

Some respondents stated a reluctance to mix private and professional life as a reason for not coming out in the workplace. Other reasons stated were the fear of losing a job or other negative consequences, for example, obstruction or prevention of promotion or similar. One focus group member experienced this obstruction in the military:

"Initially I was very obedient, I was even the first assistant to a commanding officer. I helped him. But when the news spread, he suddenly dismissed me. After that things only became worse. But towards the end of my service, the situation eased off and the scene was somehow relaxed." (Andrej, 25)

Our data analysis shows that explicit discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation is rare. Ninety-four percent of respondents asserted that they did not experience violence and were not discriminated against in the workplace.

Yes, explicit
1%

Yes, hidden
5%

No
94%

FIGURE 29: DISCRIMINATION IN THE CURRENT WORKPLACE

We should stress, however, that our findings are based on respondents' own assessments, and individual notions of the boundary between violence and non-violence are subjective. For example, some see jokes about homosexuals as a hidden or open form of violence, while others do not identify this as (verbal) violence. In the latter case, the reason may be that persons who have not disclosed their sexual orientation do not see these jokes as attacks on their integrity. Therefore, if we want to be more accurate, we should say that the majority of respondents have not *identified* violence or discrimination in the workplace provoked by their sexual orientation. Although the findings of our research suggest that homosexuals who come out in the workplace do not face discrimination or violence, the workplace is still a potentially risky environment for individuals who want to come out. The fact is that many gays and lesbians experience it precisely as such, so they do not come out or they come out only to a few of their closest colleagues who inspire trust.

Respondents who experienced discrimination or were victims of violence in the workplace reported that it took the forms of insult, ridicule, teasing, undervaluing, harassment (e.g. obstruction of promotion), blackmail (e.g. saying that one is going to spill the news about someone's homosexuality to others), ignoring or dismissal from work. In most cases, explicit forms of discrimination were practiced by superiors (75%), and in the case of hidden discrimination, the perpetrators were colleagues (57%). Somewhat more than 3% of respondents suspected that their sexual orientation was responsible for their dismissal, while 0.4% of respondents said that after they came out their contract was not renewed.

The 2002 Labor Relations Act protects gays and lesbians in Slovenia from discrimination in the workplace.[27] Article 6 prohibits employers from placing an individual in an unequal position on the basis of his/her sexual orientation. Also prohibited is direct and indirect discrimination in the workplace based on sexual orientation, and in the case of a breach of this provision, the burden of proof is on the employer. However, it is interesting that sexual orientation is not listed as an unacceptable reason for dismissing a person, along with race, skin color, gender, age and other similar reasons. Here we should emphasize that, similar to discrimination against women, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is very difficult to prove, so legal prosecution of the perpetrator can be achieved only with difficulty. Accordingly, lesbians and gays prefer to avoid situations or moves that could make them victims of discrimination on account of sexual orientation, since that could lead to an even greater stigma.

Public space and violence

The "Survey on Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation" conducted in 2001 by NGOs ŠKUC LL in collaboration with ILGA Europe pointed to a high level of violence against the homosexual population in Slovenia. One in two respondents stated that he/she had been a victim of violence or harassment on the basis of sexual orientation (Velikonja, Greif, 2001). Our research confirmed these findings.

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[27] See Labor Relations Act, UL RS, No. 42/2002, p. 4075. Also available at http://objave. uradni-list.si/bazeul/URED/2002/042/B/5220062270.htm (April 26, 2004)

When asking respondents about violence, we first explained to them that we distinguished between three types of violence: psychological, physical and sexual. Research in fact showed that violence is usually identified with physical violence, while the other two forms of violence, above all psychological violence, are usually not perceived as such. In our research, violence was not understood as physical violence only, but we were also interested in psychological violence.

FIGURE 30: HAVE YOU EVER BEEN THE VICTIM OF VIOLENCE PROVOKED BY YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

Fifty-three percent of respondents answered affirmatively. There were no statistically significant differences between genders in the group who stated that they were the victims of violence and who recognized a particular type of behavior as violence.[28] Fifty-two percent of men and 56% of women in our sample stated that their sexual orientation was the cause of at least one of the three types of violence mentioned above. Their assessments, especially as regards psychological violence, should be viewed primarily as their feelings that they were threatened in some way because of their sexual orientation, and they perceived that threat as violence. The most common form of violence experienced by gays and lesbians (in 91% of cases) is psychological violence, followed by physical violence (24%) and sexual violence (6%). A look at the perception of violence shows that more women than men identified psychological violence, and that more men than women were the victims of physical violence.

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[28]p=0,476.

The most unsafe space for both lesbians and gays is the public space (the street, bars and the like), and in most cases attackers are strangers. Our research also suggests that the geography of homophobic acts is gendered; lesbians are more often than gays the victims of violence in private life.[29] While gays frequently mentioned their school mates as perpetrators of violent acts (in 30.3% of cases), lesbians were probably less visible in this context. Violence in school usually involves *peer group pressure*, where the designation "faggot" is frequently used to disqualify individuals who cannot, or do not want to, follow the standards (e.g. social gender matrix) inside a group, or whose behavior is constructed as such. On the other hand, lesbians more frequently than gays experience various forms of violence inside the immediate or extended family. While violence against men is more transparent (public), violence against women is frequently hidden or hushed up. Nevertheless, both gays and lesbians are most frequently the victims of violence in public spaces.

			Gender		Total
			male	female	
Who was the perpetrator of a violent act?	Strangers (e.g. on the street, in bars etc.)	%	63.2	57.1	61.0
	Parents or relatives	%	19.1	38.1	25.8
	Friends or acquaintances	%	21.1	26.2	22.9
	Colleagues at work	%	12.5	9.5	11.4
	Schoolmates	%	30.3	8.3	22.5
	Neighbours	%	7.9	3.6	6.4
	Police	%	3.3	1.2	2.5
	Doctors	%	2.6	4.8	3.4
	Partner	%	3.3	1.2	2.5
	Other	%	6.6	8.3	7.2
Total		%	100	100	100

FIGURE 31: PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENT ACTS

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[29]Let us stress here that this difference may perhaps be attributed to the sensitivity to the issue of violence; lesbians more frequently reported violence against privacy, because they perceive this type of violence as violence.

As already mentioned above, public spaces are suffused with heteronormativity; no one will ever take notice of a heterosexual couple holding hands, but a homosexual couple holding hands "stands out."

"I expected more negative responses [when I walked with my boyfriend holding hands], but in fact that didn't happen. Someone yelled across Prešern Square 'Damned faggot!' so everybody heard it, and everybody looked. But I thought to myself 'well, they cannot do anything to me, not in broad daylight.' But, then it haunts you. I start to think why he said that. I want to understand why people react in such a way. How much I will dare depends on how intense is my relationship with my boyfriend. I do not have any explicit desire to demonstrate my love in the streets. Although, I would like to do it, in a way, but then I say to myself, I'd rather not, we can be together at home, or when we hike in the mountains, or wherever." (Patrick, 20)

The public space cannot be understood as sexually neutral or non-defined by specific assumptions about sexuality; the street is heterosexualized. Every attack on lesbians and gays reproduces and reconstitutes the public space as a heterosexual space.

It is possible to claim that most focus group participants adjusted to the heterosexuality of the street or public spaces by using a degree of mimicry. While in privacy or in the narrow circles of friends they dare to express their intimate relations with their partners, these relationships are translated in the street into "mere friendships." This image is dropped only in exceptional moments when there is no special threat around. It seems that spontaneous expressions of intimacy in public spaces are much less characteristic of gays and lesbians than of heterosexual couples, since gays and lesbians are generally always aware of the environment and the heteronormativity underpinning it. Another reason why expressions of intimacy are rare is the fact that homosexual couples begin to doubt that, given the circumstances, these gestures can be spontaneous.

"There was a wish in the beginning, but since you always experience fear, it blocks you. It blocks everything [...] You think about holding hands so intensely that everything loses its basic purpose of some spontaneous expression of love, and in the end it seems absurd. So even when I take him by the hand, I feel as if I was holding a piece of wood. We hold hands like two … I don't know what. We are not relaxed. We hold hands and walk along the street like two paraplegics, and we just wait for that remark. [...] Whenever I have a wish to take him by the hand I ask myself. 'Well, what is this now? An activist gesture? Will it be spontaneous?' And in the meantime we have reached the end of the pedestrian mall." (Borut, 30)

Mimicry is frequently a result of conformity. Some focus group participants stated, for example, that the norms of the society in which one lives had to be respected and that it would not be sensible to challenge them. At the same time they know that it is social pressure itself that makes them convinced that they would feel uncomfortable expressing their feelings. Although statements like the one above can be interpreted as a form of protection against homophobic reactions, they are also a sign of internalized homophobia and social control over identities, i.e. being aware of which identities are socially acceptable and rewarded and which are marginalized. Boštjan, for example, concluded that you must first present yourself to people as a human being worthy of respect, instead of allowing them to judge you by your sexual identity.

> "It's not good if that [homosexuality] is the first thing they learn about you. That is the first impression. Will you go to a job interview unshaven and untidy, or will you take care to appear smart?" (Boštjan, 31)

Public expression of feelings is not an individual matter but is always related to the other. Therefore, it depends on whether both partners are ready to "challenge" social norms, and on their attitude to other people in the streets.

> "Sometimes I want it and I take my partner by the hand, but he shakes me off. I understand that this fear is present, but I'm afraid too. For example, I wouldn't walk around Fužine [a part of Ljubljana with large immigrant population] holding hands with him. That would be pushing it too far, wouldn't it. But otherwise, if circumstances are such, during the night, why not?" (Andrej, 25)

For some youth peer groups, verbal or physical score-settling with (presumed) lesbians and gays is a way to prove and confirm their own "real masculinity." Wayne D. Myslik (1996, 161) established that violence against gays and lesbians is frequently a form of proving one's status inside a youth group, or the status of the group as a whole inside the community. Individuals assert their commitment to social gender roles by venting rage on marginalized groups identified by society as "acceptable victims." This violence against homosexuals is not only an expression of individual intolerance, but above all a result of the social intolerance and cultural heterosexism that makes possible such conduct and largely mitigates its consequences.

"Fifteen brats started to run after me, kicking against me and yelling: 'Faggot, faggot, faggot.!' This happened twice…. It's not pleasant when you know that you can expect something like that to happen." (Marjan, 22)

"I haven't experienced physical violence, but there was some damage done to my car, broken glass. That's the environment. People from the south. The news spread that I lived with a boyfriend and then there were things such as a broken car window, and remarks and so on." (Tomaž, 31)

When discussing peer pressure and violence against groups identified as acceptable victims or scapegoats, focus group participants frequently mentioned immigrants from ex-Yugoslav republics as perpetrators of violent acts. This is very symptomatic. It is possible that Fužine served as some phantasmagoric place onto which the respondents projected their own fear of violence, and although they themselves were not necessarily the victims of that violence, they stereotypically ascribed it to immigrants. Although the expression "people from the south" was a kind of metaphorical designation, used on a symbolic level, these statements are symptomatic of stereotypes and prejudices against particular ethnic groups. They also undermine a rather monolithic image of the gay and lesbian community as invariably understanding and tolerant towards others and the different. This image is automatically constructed on the basis of a priori inference that lesbians and gays, owing to their own stigmatized position, are more sensitive to prejudices against other stigmatized communities.

These alleged homophobic acts on the part of the second generation of immigrants may also be interpreted as a phenomenon where some members of ethnic groups adopt traditional patriarchal values and macho culture as a form of self-protection. Being excluded from and stigmatized by the majority society because of their ethnic origin, they fall back upon disqualification of certain other social groups as a protective mechanism and as a way of managing their own stigmatized identity. In other words, as scapegoats they seek other groups ranking even below them in the social hierarchy. And homosexuals are definitely one such group. Despite everything, it is possible to infer from the statements of our respondents that attacks carried out by underage youths were probably cases of peer pressure rather than managing one's own stigmatized identity. And this

peer pressure cannot be ascribed solely to the members of other ethnic groups.

Violence and shame

Lesbians and gays are the victims of violence on various levels. Among the forms of violence mentioned when answering an open-type question in the survey were primarily various forms of insult, in the street as well as at home and in school. "My neighbors dropped pictures of naked men into my mailbox;" "they threw eggs onto my balcony;" "they wrote my phone number in the school toilet with the postscript 'I offer my anus;'" "they took off their trousers and yelled 'suck my cock, faggot.'" Insults (e.g. calling someone a faggot, or a dyke) are frequently coupled with threats of physical violence. Some respondents mentioned that their parents expelled them from the house or beat them. One respondent said that his acquaintance refused to share a room with him in the student boarding house. Some said that their parents or other public persons (e.g. doctors) wanted them to visit a psychiatrist. Public expressions of emotion (e.g. holding hands, kissing) also provoke violent reactions. Some recounted that people threw stones at them, shouted insults like "damned faggot" or "dyke," threw them out of bars or the like.

Gays and lesbians are frequently reduced to sexual objects. This sexual image serves as a screen onto which is projected a whole range of stereotypes, simplified "scientific" findings about homosexuality (e.g. homosexuality is a mental disease), images of perversity or sin or of homosexuals as sexual perverts, or, to borrow from Warner (1999), of sexual shame. The reduction of a homosexual to a sexual object produces reservations in interpersonal relations that did not exist before someone's coming out. It involves an irrational fear of a person who is in contact with a homosexual that he/she has become an objects of his/her sexual desire. So lesbians and gays are seen solely as sexual beings, and their sexual orientation becomes the only defining element of their subjectivity:

> "For me the most painful thing is the fact that they look at me in this, sexual way. This renders me powerless. [...] To be a lesbian, that's as if you had sex written across your face." (Ksenja, 30)

Stigmatized images of and ideas about homosexuality influence not only the (homophobic) reactions of people responding to the presence of gays and lesbians in their environment, but also gays and lesbians themselves. Socialization in circumstances in which socializing agents do not supply information about homosexuality, or where this information comes with a stigma attached to it, creates fertile ground for the internalization of homophobia. It is a fear of oneself, of one's sexual desires, conduct and identity, and it leads to various forms of self-violence. Some respondents described violence they inflicted upon themselves because of social pressure towards "normality" as not comparable with violence practiced by others. If society continually sends a message that you are sick, deranged, and not *normal*, you start to believe that that is true, and it becomes realistic, particularly in terms of its consequences. This led some gays and lesbians, primarily during the initial stages of recognizing their homosexuality, to use various forms of self-violence in an attempt to become "normal" and socially acceptable. In so doing they did not question (homophobic) social norms and expectations, while at the same time, their environment did not offer support or understanding, or so they assumed. Finally, self-violence is fostered, apparently with increasing frequency, by various groups with religious or some such background, which promise to eradicate and suppress unacceptable homosexual desires and feelings. These are (empty) promises of normality at any price.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The everyday life of gays and lesbians is locked in an interesting paradox. On the one hand, homosexual "practices," comprising same-sex partnerships, same-sex family arrangements, elective families and so on, are important generators of changes in the post modern era. These include changes in the area of intimacy, relationships between intimate partners and in lifestyles as such. Our research, for example, showed that same-sex partners share work equally, usually based on preferences or abilities. Moreover, some respondents refused to interpret their relations with same-sex partners in terms of narrow and binding traditional categories of partnership relations. Our respondents also stated that they would be willing to register their partnership for entirely practical reasons rather than because of social pressure, romantic notions of love or similar. Indeed, one could say that in this case social pressure is non-existent, as are non-existent social expectations regarding the division of labor in same-sex partnerships (in short, all that still has importance or has some influence on heterosexual partnerships). Yet by claiming so we would consciously neglect an important aspect of heteronormativity, i.e. that it is a defining principle of modern society. Although same-sex partnerships are the generators of changes in late modernity, they are also hopelessly trapped in the heteronormative social framework. And heteronormativity 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. This is where queer theorists see the greatest threat ensuing from homosexual marriage, arguing that instead of being the agents of alternative forms of co-habitation, gays and lesbians would take over traditional heterosexual patterns. This, in turn, would delimit the boundary between those who are worthy of respect (close to the heterosexual ideal) and those who would be even more

heavily stigmatized and marginalized because of their resistance to entering marriage.

In our research, the pressure of heteronormativity, in the sense of adopting traditional patterns, came through most clearly in answers to the questions relating to children. Some gays and lesbians consciously chose to relinquish any idea of having a child and, consequently, of forming a family, precisely because they are not able to live up to traditional patterns. Being exposed to (heteronormative) social pressure, they understand the heteronormative family model as the only possible one, or at least the best one.

Through these contradictory processes – new forms of co-habitation, new division of roles, democratization of interpersonal relations and the like, at one end of the spectrum, and disqualifying of new lifestyles and pressures to adopt traditional roles, at the other – a new society is becoming crystallized. Despite all frictions, it seem that the "old" is retreating in the face of the "new." At all stages of our study we were able to identify important differences between the younger and the older generations of gays and lesbians. Young homosexuals more frequently organize their lives outside the closet; they come out at an earlier age, and they are more uncompromising in defending their lifestyles. In contrast, the older generation seems to have had no choice: they had to live as heterosexuals publicly, and as homosexuals privately. For them, coming out of the closet was possible only in narrow, usually very intimate social circles. But for younger generations, the closet is just a transitional phase during which they privately destigmatize their homosexual identity, although this does not imply that younger gays and lesbians are free from the pressures of heteronormativity.

In Slovenia, as elsewhere, gays and lesbians form a very heterogeneous group that seems to share one important trait – they have all been the victims of homophobic violence at some point in time. Our study revealed a high level of violence and the continual fear of violence experienced by gays and lesbians. In connection with this, it is possible to claim that homosexuality is being *privatized*, or in other words, it is accepted among friends but rejected by society at large. This makes narrow social circles an extremely important social milieu where most initial coming outs take place and where it is possible, at least to a degree, to live an open "homosexual life" in the

widest sense of this expression. The privatization of homosexuality means that gays and lesbians are pushed back to private spaces, and that various signs of homosexuality in public spaces (e.g. gay or lesbian couples holding hands) are quickly stamped out, sometimes through violent acts. The public space actually functions as a panopticon. The threat of violence, even if manifested only in the form of subtle regulating processes, for example, meaningful looks, stares or whistles, contributes to self-control. This compels gays and lesbians, younger ones included, to use a degree of mimicry when in public spaces. These practices are indirectly encouraged by the discriminatory state policies.

Gays and lesbians cannot organize their lives outside the closet on all levels of social life. The public space, including the workplace, is still underpinned by heteronormative expectations. For gays and lesbians, changes in late modernity observed by social scientists take place primarily in the sphere of privacy, which cannot be completely screened off from influences that structure the public space. A typical example is family relations. Although the degree of integration of same-sex partnerships and gays and lesbians into the immediate family or wider networks of kin varies from case to case, all of our respondents' narratives pointed to the phenomenon of the transparent closet. When an individual comes out in the family, the information is noted but pushed aside. This involves the implicit expectation that "this subject" will not be discussed in the family and that the homosexual partner will not be brought to family celebrations, so the homosexual partnership is not integrated into the wider family network. The family therefore remains one social institution that accepts homosexuality only with difficulty and with some denial. In this area, too, a form of privatization of homosexuality takes place, given that a homosexual is expected not only to avoid bringing up the subject of homosexuality in the immediate family circle, but also to keep it from the wider social environment of the family. And once again, younger gays and lesbians slightly modify this image of the family as a fortress of heteronormativity, by coming out at an earlier age and by successfully organizing their lives beyond the closet.

Our study is the first sociological research of this scope into the everyday life of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. Accordingly, it is

important both from the perspective of the development of gay and lesbian studies, and from the perspective of the politics of homosexuality. Being pioneers in this field of research, we had to deal with many contentious issues. One among these, perhaps the most important, was how to locate this hidden social minority about which we knew practically nothing apart from the fact that it copes with a number of difficulties perpetuated by an expressly homophobic society.[30] Precisely for this reason, the politics of homosexuality should urgently include measures aimed at reducing homophobia, providing information and creating an open debate on homosexuality among the wider public and within various professional circles, including school. It would be necessary to ensure access to relevant information on sexuality in schools, and to make school a safe place for gays and lesbians (as well). In order to achieve this, teachers and other education specialists and counselors should receive relevant training and information. The same applies to employers, since the workplace is still not a safe environment for gays and lesbians, despite anti-discriminatory laws. Raising the awareness of parents is another necessary measure, since they are frequently, intentionally or unintentionally, the agents of psychological violence against their homosexual children. Homosexual children as well as their parents need infrastructure (self-help groups, brochures, information sources etc.) that would help them rise above social stigma. The needs of parents emerged as one area that calls for additional attention. Our study could not answer all the questions that were raised, but our findings at least point to new topics deserving scholarly attention.

Finally, let us stress another important dimension of our research. Although it was quite unplanned, our study proved to be an important form of "policy" implementation. It fulfilled a socializing and emancipatory role for many participating gays and lesbians. Many respondents emphasized how important it was for them to take part in this study, because they saw it as their contribution to the improvement of the situation of gays and lesbians in Slovenia. Another

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[30]In 1992 42.5% of respondents said that they did not want to have homosexuals as their neighbors. The following year, this percentage rose to 61.6%, in 1994 it was 56.2%, in 1995 61.2%, in 1998 60.3%, in 1999 44.3%, in 2000 55.1%, and in 2002 50.7%. See Toš et al. 1999 and 2002.

important aspect seems to be the fact that gays and lesbians had the opportunity to speak out – about their personal experiences, about oppression on account of their sexual orientation, and about their purely personal problems.

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APPENDICES

Policy proposals

On the basis of the analysis of qualitative and quantitative results of our study, we formulated proposals for the direction of the politics of homosexuality.

A. GENERAL DOCUMENT. It would be necessary to prepare a general document that would form a basis for the politics of homosexuality (a resolution or a national program). Such a document should lay out a plan for the concerted operation in the field of legal protection and promotion of social integration of homosexuality of all relevant ministries and other institutions.

B. ADOPTION OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY LEGISLATION;

C. PROPOSALS FOR THE GUIDELINES FOR THE POLITICS OF HOMO-SEXUALITY

School, educational process

Problem:

Non-existent discussion on homosexuality in schools and family, and consequently, non-existent socialization in this respect. The family and school are not safe places for coming out.

1. Homosexuality should be a theme integrated into the curriculum. It should become a theme discussed within various courses (e.g. in literature, arts, sociology, philosophy, foreign languages, psychology and the like), because this would remove homosexuality from biological contexts, that is to say, sexual identity would no longer be reduced to the sexual drive only, and this sexual orientation would no longer be explained as a deviation with respect to heterosexuality. The designers of the curriculum should take care that heterosexuality is no longer presented (favored) as the only sexual identity and should raise awareness about the diversity in this area.

2. Access to relevant information on sexuality in school libraries.

3. Making school a safe place for gays and lesbians (as well), through various actions and projects designed to send a message that homophobia and other forms of intolerance are not welcome in school etc.

4. Destigmatization of homosexuality inside the educational process (education for non-violence and acceptance of diversity among people, including same-sex orientation).

5. Education and information for teachers and other school staff and counselors. An example of this is a GLEE program for education specialists supported by the EU (http://glee.oulu.fi/);

6. Education and information for parents offered by schools (e.g. School for Parents). The aim is to sensitize parents to the existence of various sexual identities and teach them that a heterosexual identity is not the only existing one. Starting from heteronormative assumptions, parents prevent non-heterosexual children from opening discussion on their sexuality, thus causing frustration. Through adequate education, parents would become aware that homophobic remarks, comments, or ridiculing of homosexuals in everyday life causes harm to their children, regardless of whether the child is same-sex oriented, in which case we can speak of internalized homophobia, or heterosexual, in which case negative notions about homosexuality are passed on to the child (projected homophobia).

7. Preparing children for discussion of sexuality with two objectives in mind. First, general information about sexual practices (safe sex, various forms of sexuality etc.). Second, establishment of a safe space for discussion – disclosure of sexual orientation. In this respect it would be necessary to encourage various children's and youth magazines to present same-sex partnership as one possible form of co-habitation, as well as various forms of family units, including same-sex families.

The coming out process

Problem 1:

An individual confronting his/her homosexual identity has no infrastructure that would help him/her rise above social stigma. This is especially true of the areas outside Ljubljana.

1. The state should undertake a commitment to enable the foundation and operation of (NGOs and other) institutions (through various forms of funding) that will help gays and lesbians to overcome social isolation and exclusion based on their sexual orientation (self-help groups, gathering places and the like).

2. Support for gay and lesbian subculture as a secondary socializing agent (specialized media for the gay and lesbian population, film festivals, artistic production and the like).

3. Support for and introduction of gay/lesbian web sites that have become an important and increasingly relevant form of assistance, supporting and disseminating information on homosexuality. The Internet enables a high level of anonymity that is important during the process of coming out for many gays and lesbians.

4. Promotion of destigmatization of homosexuality (funding projects that educate, provide information, encourage tolerance and reduce homophobia).

Problem 2:

Parents of gays and lesbians have very limited choice of information and support when they have to confront the homosexuality of their children.

1. Support for (self)organization and formation of groups (self-help groups) for the parents of gay and lesbian children.

2. Dissemination of relevant information for the parents of gays and lesbians (e.g. in schools and other public places, through the media etc.)

PARTNERSHIP

Problem:

The lack of legal protection for homosexual partnerships and the absence of legal regulation of the status of same-sex families.

1. Inclusion of same-sex families in the definition of the subject of family politics (changes in the Resolution on the basis for formulating family politics in Slovenia);

2. Legal equality of homosexual and heterosexual partnerships (in addition to legalizing the registration of same-sex partnerships, it would also be necessary to introduce the institution of unregistered co-habitation, as applied to heterosexual partnerships).

3. Non-discriminatory politics of reproduction (adoption of children, access to artificial insemination and the like).

4. Promotion of various forms of partnerships as a form of the politics of destigmatization of same-sex partnerships and families.

VIOLENCE

Problem:

A high level of violence against gays and lesbians, in public spaces and in privacy.

1. Encouragement to report violent acts and legal aid in this area.

2. Relevant education and information for police officers and other civil servants who come in contact with the victims of homophobic violence.

3. Encouragement for NGOs and other organizations offering help to the victims of violence.

4. Promotion of tolerance and introduction of mechanisms for the reduction of homophobia in society.

WORKPLACE, EMPLOYMENT

Problem:

Anti-discriminatory legislation is in place, but our study found that lesbians and gays frequently hide their sexual orientation from their colleagues at work because of the fear of potentially negative consequences (psychological violence, e.g. harassment, ridiculing, personal devaluation, social isolation and so on, obstruction of promotion, dismissal etc.).

1. Making the workplace safe for gays and lesbians (as well), through various actions, projects conveying the message that homophobia and other forms of intolerance are not welcome within the company/organization etc.

2. Some companies have codes of conduct in which it is explicitly said that discrimination, different treatment or the like based on various personal circumstances, including homosexuality, is prohibited. This policy should be encouraged on the national level as well.

3. Education for and sensitization of managing cadres.

4. Promotion of the labor legislation in this context (prohibition of discrimination based on sexual orientation).

5. Providing information for gays and lesbians on relevant issues in labor legislation and legal aid for those who report cases of discrimination based on same-sex orientation.

D. OTHER PROPOSALS

This study presented a general review traversing various areas of the everyday life of gays and lesbians. The formulation of national politics in this area demands further analysis of individual areas or topics.

Among other things, it would be necessary to make an analysis of "good practices" in the area of politics of homosexuality in other countries and to encourage further research in the area of gay and lesbian studies.

Selected questions from the questionnaire

Realization: N=443

The percentages given below are *valid percents* unless specified otherwise. If there were two or more possible answers to the question, we give the sum of all percentages for all choices, so the percentage may exceed 100. The list below is a selection of questions from the questionnaire.

DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Gender

Male   65.9
Female   34.1

2. Age

16 to 20 years   9.0
21 to 25 years   34.1
26 to 30 years   25.5
31 to 40 years   25.5
41 years and over   5.9

3. Where do you currently live?

Urban center (Ljubljana, Maribor)   62.3
Town (Celje, Kranj, Nova Gorica)   12.6
Smaller place   10.8
Countryside, village   14.2

4. Have you moved to the place you currently live in?

Yes   47.3
No. I've always lived here   52.7

5. What was the main reason for moving? (Please, circle only one answer.)

School/university   35.6
Job   15.8
(New) apartment   15.8
Partnership   11.4

Problems in the family caused by other reasons   5.0
Problems in the family caused by my homosexuality   3.5
New environment offers better opportunities   2.0
Problems in the social environment caused by my homosexuality   1.0
Problems in the social environment caused by other reasons   0.5
Other   16.8

6. What is your status?

Secondary school student   8.4
University student   36.1
Employed   41.6
Unemployed   6.6
Free-lance   3.0
Entrepreneur/self-employed   4.1
Pensioner   0.2

7. What is your level of education?

Primary school   8.7
Vocational school   5.3
Secondary school   54.8
Upper technical secondary school   7.5
High school, university, academy   20.1
Master's degree, specialization   3.0
Doctoral degree   0.7

8. Can you tell us whether you are religious?

I am religious   30.2
I can't say if I am religious or not   16.7
I'm not religious   47.0
I don't know, can't answer   4.3
(I don't want to answer)   1.8

9. Of which religious congregation are you a member?

Roman Catholic   50.7
Evangelical   3.0
Orthodox Christian   1.5
Other non-Christian   0.7
Not a member of any religious congregation   35.8
Other   4.5
(I don't want to answer)   3.7

10. What is your nationality?

Slovene	90.2
Croatian	1.6
Muslim, Bosniak	0.5
Serb	1.6
Macedonian	0.5
Albanian	0.2
Montenegrin	0.7
Hungarian	0.2
German	0.2
Austrian	0.2
Other	4.1

HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY

1. Please assess on the 5-point scale how much your parents talked to you about sexuality during your adolescence and schooling.

1	2	3	4	5	Never
(Very little)				(A lot)	
20.3	20.1	22.8	11.5	4.5	20.8

2. Please assess on the 5-point scale how much your parents talked to you about homosexuality during your adolescence and schooling.

1	2	3	4	5	Never
(Very little)				(A lot)	
24.2	14.4	7.0	2.3	0.2	51.9

3. What occasions led them to discuss homosexuality with you (you may circle several answers)

Reports in the mass media	45.7
Rumors that someone is a gay/lesbian	45.7
Movies	40.4
My coming out	30.8
Reports of debates on AIDS	22.6
I myself asked them about it	12.5
Jokes about homosexuals	9.6
Other	6.3

4. When did you first begin to think that you were potentially a homosexual?

Before the age of 15	56.9
Between the age of 15 and 17	23.5
Between the age of 18 and 20	12.2
After the age of 20	6.8
After the age of 30	0.7

5. At what age did you make your first coming out?

Between 12 and 15	9.5
Between 6 and 18	36.1
Between 19 and 21	31.8
Between 22 and 30	20.3
31 and later	2.3

6. To whom did you first come out?

Female friend	42.7
Male friend	34.2
Mother	6.6
Sister, brother	4.8
Acquaintance	3.4
Father	3.4
Partner	2.7
Other	2.1

7. How did you first come out?

Through conversation, in a personal conversation	92.0
By writing a letter, e-mail or similar	4.5
Other	3.4

8. Have you planned your coming out?

I planned it, and I initiated it	42.0
I planned it, but I did not initiate it	9.5
I did not plan it, but the situation led to it	45.2
Other	3.2

9. What was the reaction of the person to whom you came out?

Positive, supportive	74.6
Negative, I was rejected	3.6
Neutral, neither supportive not rejecting	17.7
Other	4.1

10. Have you asked that person not to tell others that you are a gay/lesbian?

Yes	41.0
No	53.3
I don't know, don't remember	5.7

11. Who of the persons listed below know that you're a gay/lesbian?

	Yes	I suppose they know	I suppose they don't know	No	Don't know
Mother	67.1	14.5	6.1	10.3	2.1
Father	45.7	15.3	9.5	26.1	3.3
Close friends	94.1	2.7	0.7	2.5	-
Narrow circle of schoolmates	51.6	12.0	5.8	26.7	4.0
Narrow circle of colleagues at work	47.8	11.9	9.4	29.5	1.4

12. When did you come out in your family? Please specify how old you were when you came out to individual family members. (Results are in years)

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Mother	21.15	12	48
Father	21.42	12	35
First brother	21.89	15	44
Second brother	21.42	16	30
Third brother	22.00	16	29
First sister	21.05	15	35
Second sister	21.50	15	33
Third sister	20.00	15	25
Ex-husband/wife	27.91	22	35
Children	25.00	20	32

13. Please assess their first reactions to your coming out on the 5-point scale, where 1 denotes a very negative reaction (rejection) and 5 a very positive reaction (support). If reactions were mixed (e.g. in a circle of friends), try to give an overall impression.

	1	2	3	4	5	Other (I haven't come out yet/ I don't have)
Mother	16.4	10.0	18.9	13.0	8.4	33.3
Father	7.6	9.6	10.3	8.0	6.4	58.1
Close friends	0.7	0.7	6.6	28.0	59.2	4.8
Narrow circle of schoolmates	0.2	0.9	5.5	10.5	16.4	66.5
Narrow circle of colleagues at work	-	0.5	5.7	9.6	17.2	67.0

14. How would you assess your relations with the persons to whom you disclosed your homosexuality? Please assess on the 5-point scale whether your relations following coming out improved, worsened or did not change (1 means "worsened/became alienated" and 5 means "improved very much/became deeper").

	1	2	3	4	5	Other (I haven't come out yet/ I don't have)
Mother	3.0	5.0	26.4	16.9	16.9	31.9
Father	1.4	3.4	21.0	8.4	8.4	57.3
Close friends	0.5	0.5	43.1	23.9	26.4	5.7
Narrow circle of schoolmates	-	0.9	16.6	8.4	6.4	67.7
Narrow circle of colleagues at work	0.5	0.2	21.2	5.9	5.9	66.2

15. Did your relationship with some person come to an end because of it?

No	81.8
Yes	18.2

16. With whom?

Friend	55.7
Acquaintance	12.7
Schoolmates	7.6
Mother	5.1
Relatives	5.1
Former partner	3.8

Father	2.5
Sister	2.5
Colleague at work	2.5
Parents	2.5

17. Are you sorry that you have come out to any particular person?

No	86.3
Yes	13.7

PARTNERSHIPS

1. Are you in a same-sex relationship?

Yes	59.5
No	40.5

2. What kind of same-sex relationship is it?

Two-persons partnership	90.1
Threesome partnership	1.5
Open relationship	8.4

3. Who of those listed below knows that you have a same-sex relationship?

	Yes	I suppose they know	I suppose they don't know	No	Don't know	Other
Mother	57.3	11.1	2.7	22.1	1.5	5.3
Father	34.5	13.0	3.8	33.3	1.9	13.4
Close friends	91.5	3.5	0.4	2.3	1.2	1.2
Narrow circle of schoolmates	25.7	4.6	2.7	16.9	1.1	49.0
Narrow circle of colleagues at work	27.5	5.0	4.2	21.8	3.1	38.5

4. How do these persons see your relationship? (Give answers only for persons who you are sure know about your relationship.)

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	They don't know	Other
Mother	11.2	23.6	30.2	27.5	7.4
Father	4.7	18.8	16.8	43.4	16.4
Close friends	1.2	12.4	82.6	3.1	0.8
Narrow circle of schoolmates	-	8.6	20.6	19.1	51.8
Narrow circle of colleagues at work	-	8.2	21.4	28.4	42.0

5. Who performs the household tasks listed below (answer if you share household with a partner)

	Myself mainly	Partner mainly	Both equally
washing dishes	23.1	20.0	54.6
washing clothes	27.6	22.8	49.6
cleaning the apartment	20.8	13.8	63.1
ironing	33.6	32.0	34.4
everyday shopping	23.1	11.5	65.4
technical repairs in the apartment	26.9	25.4	46.2
cooking	31.5	28.5	39.2
care for children (if you have them)	25.0	25.0	50.0
playing with children (if you have them)	-	-	100.0
finances (paying bills...)	26.6	19.5	51.6
maintaining contacts with relatives (e.g. calling them, writing cards ...)	9.6	8.8	81.6

6. How long has your current partnership continued? (In years)

Average	Minimum	Maximum
2.46	0	13.08

7. How long did your past partnerships last? (List only past relationships that lasted more than two months). (In years)

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
First	1.6	0	20.0
Second	1.6	0	15.0
Third	1.3	0	10.0
Fourth	1.1	0	7.5
Fifth	1.1	0.2	5.0
Sixth	0.9	0.3	2.5
Seventh	2.2	0.5	5.0

8. How old were you when you first formed a same-sex relationship?

less than 15	6.2
16 to 18	26.6
19 to 21	35.1
22 to 24	18.1
25 to 27	7.9
28 or over	5.9

9. How did you meet your current or previous partner?

Through friends	27.8
In a disco/LGBT club/at a party	26.1
On the web (ads, chat...)	21.6
Through classifieds in the newspaper or marriage agency	2.0
In a gay/lesbian group (e.g. self-help group)	2.3
At school/in the workplace	7.1
Other	13.1

10. Would you register your partnership if it were possible (would you marry)?

Yes	61.5
No	17.6
Don't know	20.8

11. Please state to what extent you agree with the propositions below about same-sex marriages (1- don't agree at all, 5 – fully agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Marriage would strengthen my same-sex	44.9	16.0	16.0	11.3	7.2	4.5
If gays and lesbians are allowed to marry, the state would exert control over them more easily	29.6	14.4	14.4	17.2	19.0	5.4
Marriage would mean greater social value for my same-sex relationship	21.7	10.8	18.1	18.5	28.2	2.7
Society would be more accepting of gays and lesbians	14.3	12.2	24.7	24.5	22.0	2.3
I'd have better opportunities when competing for a council or non-profit apartment	8.6	5.0	12.9	23.7	42.4	7.4
Same-sex marriage means adjusting to the heterosexual way of life	36.6	18.1	14.0	12.9	12.2	6.3
It would improve relations with people around me	50.8	14.2	18.5	3.8	6.1	6.5
Marriage would bring greater social security	9.3	5.4	13.5	23.0	44.9	3.8
My parents would better accept my sexual orientation	48.5	14.1	13.9	7.5	7.1	8.9
Marriage is an expression of love	47.2	12.4	12.2	9.7	16.7	1.8

12. Do you want to have a child?

Yes	39.7
No	37.5
Don't know	17.4
Other	5.4

13. If you want, or intend, to have a child how likely it is that you will choose one of the options listed below? Please specify for each option separately (1 – not likely at all; 5 – very likely).

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
artificial insemination in Slovenia	35.7	8.0	11.3	12.2	26.5	6.3
artificial insemination abroad	45.4	10.1	12.2	9.7	14.7	8.0
"in agreement" with another gay/lesbian	28.3	12.2	19.7	19.7	15.0	5.1
"in agreement" with another heterosexual person	29.8	17.6	18.0	14.9	14.5	5.1
adoption, once/if it is possible	13.7	6.7	15.3	19.6	41.6	3.1
other	-	4.8	23.8	14.3	52.4	4.8

VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION

1. We distinguish between physical, sexual and psychological violence. Physical violence includes beating, blows and the like; sexual violence includes rape, sexual harassment and the like; psychological violence includes derision, blackmail, insults, ignoring etc. Have you ever been a victim of any kind of violence because of your sexual orientation?

Yes	53.3
No	46.7

2. What kind of violence was it? (You may circle more than one answer.)

Psychological violence	90.7
Physical violence	23.7
Sexual violence	5.5
Other	0.4

3. How many times have you been a victim of violence provoked by your sexual orientation?

Once	14.0
Several times	67.8
Frequently	10.6
Continually	6.8
Other	0.8

4. Who was the perpetrator? (You may circle more than one answer.)

Anonymous individuals (e.g. in the street, in a bar etc.)	61.0
Parents or other kin	25.8
Acquaintances or friends	23.3
Schoolmates	22.5
Colleagues at work	11.4
Neighbors	6.4
Doctor	3.4
Police	2.5
Partner	2.5
Other	7.2

SCHOOL AND WORKPLACE

1. Did you ever talk about homosexuality in classes in school?

Yes, rather a lot	9.0
Yes, but very little	45.8
No	33.6
Don't remember	11.5

2. What was the occasion that led to that discussion?

The topic was part of the curriculum	66.3
Some current event	13.6
Because someone in the class was teased about being homosexual	5.3
Other	14.0
Don't remember	0.8

3. How did you discuss homosexuality?

Discussions were mainly approving	16.9
Neutrally (neither positive nor negative)	63.6
Discussions were mainly disapproving	18.2
Other	1.2

4. How many of your current colleagues at work or schoolmates know about your sexual orientation?

	School	Workplace
None	26.5	31.3
One or two	13.0	18.7
Several	34.4	16.3
Most	20.9	14.7
All	5.1	19.0

5. Have you ever been discriminated against in school or in the workplace on account of your sexual orientation? Please specify for each period separately.

	Yes, openly	Yes, secretly	No	I was not in school/work	Other
Primary school	3.2	4.6	89.0	-	3.2
Secondary school	5.0	9.9	81.2	0.7	3.2
University, high school	0.2	3.5	73.7	21.0	1.6
Previous workplace	1.4	6.5	54.9	36.9	0.2
Current workplace	1.0	3.6	66.0	28.8	0.7
The military	1.5	1.7	30.6	65.5	0.7

6. If you were discriminated against, please specify how (you may circle more than one answer).

Ridicule, teasing	66.7
Insults	40.0
Avoidance, ignoring	35.0
Undervaluing (hindering promotion, lower assessment)	33.3
Physical violence	10.0
Blackmail, threats that they will tell others about my homosexuality	5.0

I was fired	5.0
Other	9.2

7. Have you ever lost your job because of your homosexuality?

Yes, I suppose I lost job because of my sexual orientation	3.1
My contract was not renewed after they learnt that I was gay/lesbian	0.5
No, never	92.8
Other	3.6

GAY AND LESBIAN SUBCULTURE AND THE MEDIA

1. Where did you first look for information on homosexuality (when you started contemplating your potential homosexuality)? (You may circle more than one answer.)

Media (magazines, movies, TV broadcasts and the like)	66.2
Medical, psychological and similar literature	43.3
The Internet	35.1
Friends	32.2
Novels, stories, literary fiction	29.5
In school (social worker, teacher)	2.9
Parents	2.7
Brothers and sisters	2.0
Other relatives	1.1
Other	7.5

2. Have you ever participated in a gay pride parade abroad?

Yes	18.3
No	81.7

3. Have you ever participated in a gay pride parade in Ljubljana?

Yes	34.5
No	65.5

4. What do you think about these manifestations? Please specify to what extent you agree with each of the propositions listed below? (1- don't agree at all; 5 – fully agree)

	1	2	3	4	5	Don't know
Gay pride parades are a good way of alerting the public to gays' and lesbians' social status	6.3	6.3	17.4	25.1	44.2	0.7
Gay pride parades cause more damage than they bring benefits	49.4	22.8	16.0	5.6	3.8	2.3
Gay pride parades delude the public, because people think that gays and lesbians always dress as in gay pride parades	24.2	17.0	24.2	20.1	13.3	1.1
I see them as entertainment exclusively	31.4	24.2	20.5	12.0	9.9	2.0

5. Do you go to gay and lesbian bars/clubs, discos, saunas and the like?

Yes, in Slovenia	36.3
Yes, in Slovenia and abroad	50.1
Yes, only abroad	1.4
No	12.2

6. What is your purpose behind these visits (in Slovenia)? (Please choose one answer – the main reason why you go there.)

Socializing	39.2
Entertainment	37.1
Meeting new people	11.2
Looking for potential partners	5.5
Support for gay and lesbian movements and culture	2.1
Other	5.0

7. Please give your appraisal of each of the Slovene gay and lesbian media listed below (1 – very bad; 5 – very good)

	1	2	3	4	5	I'm not familiar/ don't read
Lesbo	2.0	3.8	13.5	12.4	11.3	56.9
Legebitrina oznanila	2.7	7.2	19.6	23.5	14.2	32.7
Radio show Lesbomanija	2.0	2.3	5.2	6.5	2.7	81.3
The Ljubljana gay and lesbian film festival	1.1	2.0	19.0	34.1	23.9	19.9
Web pages SIQRD	0.7	3.8	14.7	25.1	8.8	46.8
Web pages GayKokoška	1.4	7.0	16.7	15.8	9.3	49.9
Web pages SGS	1.6	4.5	12.6	12.9	7.4	60.9
Web pages Škuc LL	0.9	5.0	9.5	10.2	2.7	71.7
Web pages by Legebitra	2.0	2.5	14.3	19.7	9.0	52.5
Web pages Out in Slovenija	1.6	3.6	12.2	15.6	5.4	61.5

8. What is your overall assessment of gay and lesbian activism in Slovenia?

Very bad	1.8
Bad	3.8
Neither bad nor good	26.6
Good	45.6
Very good	9.0
I'm not familiar	13.1

CHILDREN

1. Do you have children?
(Fifteen respondents answered affirmatively. The answers below are by these 15 respondents.)

Yes, from a heterosexual relationship	3.1
Yes, through artificial insemination	0.2
Yes, through "agreement"	0.2
No, I don't have children	96.0
Other	0.5

2. How many children do you have?

One   62.5
Two   31.3
Three   6.3

3. Does your child know about your sexual orientation?

	First child	Second child	Third child
Yes, I myself told him/her	18.8	33.3	-
Yes, the other parent told him/her	18.8	16.7	-
No, not for the time being but I intend to tell him/her	18.8	33.3	-
I don't know if	25.0	16.7	100.0
Other	18.8	-	-

4. If your children know about your sexual orientation, what is their attitude towards it?

	First child	Second child	Third child
Yes, I myself told	18.8	33.3	-
They fully accept me, we talk openly about it	33.3	66.7	-
They are reserved and we do not talk about it	33.3	33.3	-
Other	33.3	-	-

5. Please answer whether or not you find the statements below truthful

	Yes	No	Don't know
Owing to my sexual orientation …			
My child lost a friend/several friends	7.1	78.6	14.3

My child was derided or insulted in school	7.1	78.6	14.3
My child was beaten by schoolmates	-	85.7	14.3
My child was discriminated against by some teachers (lower marks, derision, secret teasing etc.)	-	85.7	14.3
Neighbors deride or annoy my child	-	85.7	14.3
Relatives tell my child negative things about me (turn him/her against me)	-	85.7	14.3
Relatives ridicule my child	-	92.9	7.1
Other parent ridicules or insults my child	-	92.9	7.1
Other parent tell my child negative things about me (turn him/her against me)	-	85.7	14.3

6. If you don't live with your child, do you have contact with him/her?

Yes, I have regular, daily contact	11.1
Yes, I have regular, weekly contact	22.2
Yes, I have regular, monthly contact	22.2
Yes, I have occasional contact during holidays and similar	11.1
No, I don't have contact with my child	33.3