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## Lithuanian gays and lesbians' coming out in the public/private divide: sexual citizenship, secrecy and heteronormative public

**Abstract.** *The paper focuses on the relationship between Lithuanian gays and lesbians' coming out experiences and sexual citizenship. Analyzing Lithuanian homosexuals' view of public/private divide, it asks how they perform their identities in public and private settings and how they align themselves with being public. What anxieties over citizenship and sexual boundaries are reflected in their life histories?*

*The paper starts from the premise that "sexual citizenship" can be considered a fourth aspect of citizenship in addition to the traditional model of political, social and civic rights. Plummer (1995) conceptualizes it as rights to choose what people do with their bodies, emotions, relationships, gender identities and desires. This citizenship is related to the plurality of multiple and overlapping public discourses on intimacies. Diane Richardson (2000a) emphasizes the "right of identity" as a part of sexual citizenship. This right to have a public identity is particularly relevant when we speak of wider issues of secrecy and disclosure, discrimination and tolerance, and the private and public.*

*Examining 32 interviews with gays and lesbians, in this paper, we argue that their life stories comprise the context for the emergence of the sexual citizen because these stories tell of exclusion based on sexuality, gender, body, and publicity in the post-Soviet Lithuania. Since the public is still exclusive of homosexuality, most interviewed homosexuals attempt to pass as heterosexual in the public sphere. In a society in which heteronormativity is a powerful principle of social and cultural order and heterosexuality, an essential aspect of human nature and intelligibility, the majority of homosexual people hide their sexual orientation from their relatives, colleagues and even friends. The informants' lives oscillate between pleasure to be open and danger to be stigmatized. On one hand, they strive for greater integration of their sexual experiences into cultural narratives of citizenship; on the other hand, absorbing normative sexual and gender disciplines they succumb to conservative appeals to privatized sexual identities.*

**Keywords:** *homosexuality, sexual citizenship, heteronormativity, privacy, self-disclosure*

**Esminiai žodžiai:** *homoseksualumas, seksualinė pilietybė, heteronormatyvumas, privatumas, seksualinės orientacijos atvėrimas*

Periodic public opinion polls confirm that Lithuania is still one of the most homophobic societies in Europe (*Sexual Orientation Discrimination 2002; Homofobija 2003*). Repeated public attacks against gays and lesbians in both everyday life and mass media also point to this fact. For many, homosexuality is tolerable as long as it remains in the private. Sexuality and sexual orientation are considered matters of the private sphere. Therefore, in Lithuania, as elsewhere, many gay and lesbian individuals continue to live in a state of continuous anxiety because of the way that their lives divide into an outwardly “straight” persona and privately gay existence.

In my paper, I will attempt to grasp how Lithuanian gays and lesbians define, in most cases implicitly, their sense of belonging and citizenship in their coming out processes when they cross this private/public divide. What anxieties over citizenship and sexual boundaries are reflected in their life histories? How do Lithuanian gays and lesbians align themselves with being “public” homosexuals at work?

In the first part of my paper, I will briefly summarize the main arguments about the relationship between citizenship, sexuality and heteronormativity. The second part based on 32 semi-structured interviews with Lithuanian homosexuals will focus on the experiences of Lithuanian gays and lesbians’ coming out in different life spaces including their workplace.

### **Sexual citizenship: sexuality and the “right of identity”**

Discourses related to citizenship are becoming increasingly important within gay, lesbian and queer movements. These discourses define gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transgender as an oppressed minority seeking access to such institutions as marriage, family and the military. The concept of equality is central to those political discourses.

Yet it is difficult to describe citizenship as a concept. Citizenship is usually conceptualized as a collection of rights and duties determining socio-political membership and providing access to resources and benefits (Turner and Hamilton 1994). However, citizenship is much more than a set of legal stipulations and a manifestation of social and political circumstances; it encompasses a wide variety of practices, institutions, and ideas (Branzel 2005: 173). Most current scholarship on citizenship oscillates between the understanding of citizenship as a legal status and a political identity and as a kind of national membership, incorporating feelings of belonging to a nation and a community (Branzel 2005: 174).

Moreover, citizenship is also “a feature of culture, operative as a dimension of individual and collective identity” (Dahlgren 1995: 35). It is a form of identity associated with public participation, inclusion and belonging. Therefore, the notion of citizenship dramatically shapes identity politics; it influences the ways people perceive themselves and “others”, their national identity and participation in the public life.

Although citizenship is usually thought of as including many people under its umbrella, not all citizens are constructed or treated equally. Serving as a source of political organizing and national belonging, it excludes and erases those who do not conform to its universalizing and normative claims. Since heterosexuality is constructed as a prerequisite to citizenship and the “unspoken norm of membership and national belonging” (Branzel 2005: 172), homosexualities are one of the main targets for exclusion and moral condemnation.

Hence, citizenship is closely related to the institutionalization of heterosexuality. Citizens are normatively constructed as heterosexual subjects. The dominant notions of citizenship are based on heteronormativity and normalization of the idealized heterosexual family. Consequently, citizenship is predicated on the demarcation of homosexual bodies outside the bounds of citizenship (Alexander 1994: 5-23). Along with these bodies, even so-called “‘scary’ heterosexualities and practices – such as fetishism, prostitution, pornography, masturbation, voyeurism and sado-masochism” are condemned and excluded from proper citizenship (Hubbard 2001: 57). Good citizens (married, heterosexual and reproductive) are usually defined in direct opposition to a wide array of non-citizens (non-heterosexual, non-reproductive and engaging in sex for pleasure).

The issue of these “sexualized” non-citizens is closely related to the importance of sexuality in constructing and defining a sense of belonging and participation. The term

“sexual citizenship” has recently come to a forefront of discussions on citizenship, inclusion and identity. It describes the sexual rights of groups, as well as access to general rights and the impact of this on sexuality (Richardson 2000).

There is a range of approaches to sexual citizenship. David Evans analyzes the connection between the state and the market and its impact on sexualities (Evans 1993). David Bell and Jon Binnie speak of the queering of citizenship that is regarded as bringing the erotic and embodiment into citizenship. They argue for the recognition of dissident sexualities (Bell and Binnie 2000). Kenneth Plummer uses the term “intimate citizenship,” considering it as a fourth aspect of citizenship, in addition to the traditional Marshallian model of political, social and civic rights. He conceptualizes intimate citizenship as rights to choose what people do with their bodies, emotions, relationships, gender identities and desires. According to him, sexual citizenship is about

the control (or not) over one’s body, feelings, relationships: access (or not) to representations, relationships, public spaces, etc.; and socially grounded choices (or not) about identities, gender experiences (Plummer 1995: 151).

This citizenship is related to the plurality of multiple and overlapping public discourses on intimacies. Jeffrey Weeks discusses the broader preconditions for sexual citizenship by identifying three themes related to it: the democratization of relationships, the emergence of new sexual subjectivities, and the

development of new sexual stories (Weeks 1998: 35–52). According to him, the sexual citizen is a “hybrid being, breaching the public/private divide” and connecting the “experiences of our most intimate personal life with our involvement in a wider society” (Weeks 1998: 36). In Weeks’s words,

the sexual citizen then makes a claim to transcend the limits of the personal sphere by going public, but the going public is, in a necessary but nevertheless paradoxical move, about protecting the possibilities of private life and private choice in a more inclusive society (Weeks 1998: 37).

The notion of sexual citizenship points to new concerns, interests and preoccupations that increasingly become public: concerns about bodies, their possibilities, needs and pleasures; interests in new sexualized identities; and preoccupations with the forces that inhibit their free development in polities committed to full and equal citizenship (Weeks 1998: 37–38).

For this article, the approach of Diane Richardson (2005), Davina Cooper (1994) and others who discuss sexual citizenship in terms of rights, namely “sexual rights” is also very useful. To demonstrate the limitations and potential of the notion of sexual citizenship, Richardson (2005: 69) interprets “sexual rights” in three main sub-themes: “conduct-based, identity-based, and relationship-based rights claims.” In this article, I will focus on the second sub-theme of “sexual

rights,” namely a right to have a public identity. Diane Richardson (2000a) herself emphasizes the “right of identity” as a part of sexual citizenship. This right is particularly relevant when we speak of wider issues of secrecy and disclosure, discrimination and tolerance, and the private and public. It is possible to discuss the sexual citizenship in terms of individuals’ right to be visible vs. marginalized, open vs. stigmatized in various environments including the workplace. This citizenship involves “the right to be ‘different’, to re-value stigmatized identities, to embrace openly and legitimately hitherto marginalized lifestyles and to propagate them without hindrance” (Pakulski 1997: 83). How do gays and lesbians construct themselves as public subjects in private and public spaces dominated by institutionalized heterosexuality?

### **Between secrecy and the politics of passing**

#### *1. The closet and the experiences of self-disclosure*

This paper is based on 32 semi-structured interviews with gay men and lesbians (20 gay men and 12 lesbians). The age of informants ranges from 17 to 55 years. All informants live in the larger cities of Lithuania, Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Alytus.<sup>1</sup> The informants were mainly recruited through the so-called snowball method. The interviews focused on

<sup>1</sup> 8 interviews were conducted by my M.A. student Lina Šumskaitė during the period of February-April, 2005. I and the Lithuanian research team of the EQUAL project conducted the rest 22 interviews during January-June, 2006.

the broad issues of homophobia, working life, discrimination at work, the coming out, being public and private. The risks and reactions related to coming out processes and experiences of hiding one's homosexuality were also discussed.

As citizens, lesbians and gays have always been marginalized in the Lithuanian national imaginary. It can also be argued that they have been privatized or relegated to the private sphere. Although with the emergence of new sexual narratives and bodily pleasures, to use Plummer's words, the division between private life and public life is being constantly rethought, the public/private binary still holds an immense normative power over us.

Analyzing the public/private division, it is necessary to consider the historical context of post-socialist era since it is permeated by "subtle and hidden continuities" (Gal and Kligman 2000) with socialism. Although public spheres have been developing in Lithuania, their apparent plurality is often only alleged. Socialism was marked by the difference in what was done, said and experienced. However, as scholars of post-socialism argue, the disjuncture between public discourses and ordinary practices of citizens has not disappeared in post-socialist countries including Lithuania. It is possible to notice that the state, influential political actors and citizens in their everyday manipulate the categories of public and private to justify their activities as well as to express their power or powerlessness.

The public/private binary "has been central to how both sexuality and citizenship have

being defined as belonging to the private and the public spheres respectively" (Richardson 2000a: 106). As people's "private" practices increasingly become the bases for discussing citizenship, lesbians and gay men's claim to public recognition and visibility seem incapable and "natural."

Moreover, challenging the presumption of heterosexuality in the public sphere through coming out of the closet, lesbians and gay men exemplify a broader shift in understanding citizenship in contemporary societies. Indeed, the coming out process can be considered as one of the sites of the production of sexual citizenship: it not only confirms the importance attached to sexual identities but also imparts on the understanding of the public/private divide.

The interviews conducted with the Lithuanian lesbians and gay men reveal curious stories about being in a closet and coming out as homosexuals. These are stories of difference, identity, relationship, self and sexuality. All of them comprise the context for the emergence of the sexual citizen because these stories tell of exclusion based on sexuality, gender, body, fear, publicity and publicness. These stories emerge in a peculiar post-Soviet Lithuania context insightfully described by some informants:

There exists a strange situation in Lithuania that I can feel, of course... I mean it is not completely bad as it was during the Soviet time when you could not even open your mouth and say anything to anyone... but it is not good since essentially there is no tolerance [towards lesbians and gay men] in society.... And it is difficult when you see on



TV, for instance, how the Lithuanian elite and intellectuals etc. talk, how they swear at us and call us sick (Ramunė, 26 y. o.).

The coming out process, as it emerges in the conducted interviews, is a gradual and perhaps never-ending process. In this process, the acceptance or rejection of first people to whom gay men or lesbians come out plays very important role in self-disclosed persons' identity and identification. Therefore, it is not surprising that for their coming out informants usually choose the closest people. Most frequently it is a friend to whom informants reveal their sexual orientation:

I told my classmate that I had a crush on another classmate and that perhaps I had even fallen in love with him" (Tadas, 21 y. o.).

I fell in love with my teacher ... and told about it to my friends (Urtė, 24 y. o.).

It was very difficult for most informants to decide to reveal their sexual orientation because they were afraid of negative reactions: "I was very afraid that [my friend] would react badly..." (Marta, 20 y. o.). The informant Marius (20 y. o.) did not dare to come out to his male classmate; instead he told about his homosexuality to his classmate's girlfriend.

Most friends of informants reacted to their self-disclosure calmly. Only a friend of one informant Marta was shocked: "... she reacted terribly ... she did not talk to me at all for two weeks." However, after two weeks, this friend accepted the fact and said: "... It doesn't matter to me... you are who you are..."

The closest friends' acceptance prompted the informants to come out to other people.

However, the coming-out to their relatives appeared to be more difficult and complex process that it was with friends. 15 of 32 informants told their parents about their homosexuality; the rest did not. One of the respondents was not sure whether his parents understood that he was homosexual because his self-disclosure was not direct. Thus, it is possible to argue that the majority of the informants still are in the closet with regard to their parents.

As it could be expected, the coming out to their parents triggered rather violent reactions. Martynas's (17 y. o.) mother "had hysterics;" Urtė's (24 y. o.) mother "cried, begged, threatened and shouted..." and 26 y. o. Ramunė's mother literally fainted. Since one of the respondents revealed her orientation by sending a letter to her parents she did not see their primary reaction.

In time some parents successfully accepted their children's homosexuality; others still could not come to terms with it. In one case, the respondent's mother tried to change her son's identity by hiring a psychologist. Only after a psychologist told her that her son was not ill, she resigned. It may be that her attitude to her son's homosexuality changed because of her husband's (the informant's stepfather) positive reaction to Martynas's homosexuality.

The mother of one female respondent also put a lot of efforts into accepting her lesbianism; she communicated with her daughter's friends. The mother and daughter are very close and this also helps the acceptance process. Both share their personal experiences

about their partners and lovers. The similarity of their feelings in similar life situations proved to Urtė's mother that her love to people of different gender did not differ much from her daughter's same-sex love. However, according to this informant, her mother has not yet fully accepted her homosexuality.

More than a half of the respondents did not come out to their parents or persons that take their place. Ramūnas's (21 y. o.) father is deceased and he does not have any relations with his mother. He was raised by his aunt who is like a mother to him. Regardless, he is afraid of coming out to her since he assumes that she will not understand his self-disclosure because of her age: she is of a different generation, "she was raised differently in a different period." Similarly, Inga's mother is deceased and she does not communicate with her father. She lives with his grandmother who is "an old person; she has never thought of it... Perhaps she even doesn't understand the phenomenon of [homosexuality]." (Inga is 23 y. o.). Marius deliberately does not come out to his parents and brother since he is extremely afraid of their reaction: "I would like to tell them [about myself] but I know what their reaction will be; I am almost 90% sure how my father, mother and brother will react [to this news]..." This informant decided to reveal his sexual orientation only in a few years. He intended to get a job abroad and to announce his homosexuality by phone, thereby avoiding their parents and brother's negative reactions. For the same reason, several informants have decided not to reveal their sexual orientation to their parents.

For most informants, joining a gay and lesbian community was an important part of their coming-out process. According to Marta (20 y. o.), after finding homosexual friends, she became happier and accepted her lesbian identity: "Some time ago I still thought what was happening with me and that I was sick... But now ... I am all right." Another lesbian Inga spends most of her spare time with her lesbian friends. Ramunė (26 y. o.) and Tadas (21 y. o.) are happy that the circle of their homosexual acquaintances has widened and that they gained a lot of experience by communicating with them. In Tadas's words, "... I am happy... that I had an opportunity to know such interesting people...; I could learn from some people... I could compare how they and I live..." Although Ramūnas (21 y. o.) remarked that he had found a lot of friends in the gay community, he also stated that he did not like some people because of immense differences between him and them. He argues that "some gay people are friends [to me], some I don't like as persons because we differ so much as individuals."

Most informants noted that they communicated with gay men and lesbians because of their common interests and a possibility to be completely open. According to all informants, those people understand each other better.

Being a part of homosexual community helped the informants to embrace their identities. They acquired a possibility to share experiences with similar people, and the circle of friends accepting them increased significantly. According to most informants,

currently they spend most of their free time in homosexual community: there they found not only friends and fellows but also lovers.

Asked about the advantages of coming out, the informants mentioned, above all, their ability to socialize with other people freely and openly. Now they don't have to pretend, lie or think about the ways to hide their sexual orientation:

Nothing bad [about coming out] ... absolutely. Only good... Because by not coming out you're lying and pretending, and a lie can never be good (24 y. o. Urtė).

For some, coming out was a kind of therapeutic experience: they were able to tell their stories to close people and gained confidence about themselves. After this experience "I became braver in the face of other people and in acknowledging [my homosexuality] myself" (23 y. o. Inga). As other informants emphasized, it was important to share your life with others since "in keeping it only to yourself, you can become ill with depression" (20 y. o. Marius).

Some respondents remarked that by coming out to their friends and acquaintances, they might foster the tolerance of homosexuals in society. According to Ramunė (26 y. o.), people to whom you tell about yourself did not turn away from you if they really cared about you. Furthermore, their coming out made them rethink their attitudes towards homosexual people: "... perhaps they rethink their opinions, their prejudices and become more tolerant."

Understanding that their own public activities could increase the Lithuanian society's

tolerance towards them, some interviewed gay men and lesbians attempted to create an organization and unite homosexual people but their efforts were unsuccessful. Eventually they saw that their activities targeted a rather narrow circle of people and did not produce expected results in society. In the words of one informant:

[There exists] a vicious circle since we do nothing about it ourselves, we do not come out and do not bring any revolutions.... On the other hand, of course, it is very difficult because you know that most probably you will encounter a strong resistance. Such is the situation in Lithuania (26 y. o. Ramunė).

Asked what he would wish most with regard to himself and society, one respondent responded:

What would I like most? I would like to depolarize the heterosexual and homosexual societies because all of us are people after all. And neither side is negative. ... Really, psychologically all of us are human and we can cooperate. Thus, I would like us to cooperate and live together in accord as much as we can (21 y. o. Ramūnas).

Another gay man emphasized similar things although in a more pessimistic way:

I would like to increase tolerance... and I would like to hide my orientation less but ... I cannot change it. I mean I can but it will take a rather long time (17 y. o. Martynas).

## **2. Coming out at a workplace: passing as a heterosexual**

The range of the respondents' professional occupations in the sample were very



broad: from a hairstylist to a university teacher, a shop owner, a lawyer, an interior designer, a music teacher, a researcher, a waiter, a bartender, a computer salesman, a post-office worker, a journalist, a businessman and a businesswoman, a croupier, a manager of cultural projects, a physician, a worker at the Lithuanian AIDS centre and a head of the department of the Secret Investigation Service of Lithuania (STT). It should be emphasized, at the outset, that the 2005 Lithuanian Labor Code protects gays and lesbians from discrimination in the workplace ([http://www.gay.lt/lgl/diskriminacija\\_darbe.pdf](http://www.gay.lt/lgl/diskriminacija_darbe.pdf)).

Despite their coming out to their friends and family, most homosexuals still hide their identity at a workplace. It is a context in which they most often conceal their sexual orientation. Only 10 of all the respondents were open at work. 2 were relatively open, i. e. one or several co-workers knew about their sexual orientation. One respondent said that she was not open but would tell about herself if her co-workers asked. Most respondents decided not to come out at work because they were afraid of losing their jobs or other possible troubles. For instance, most of Tadas's (21 y. o.) co-workers were older, and he was not particularly fond of the younger ones. The lesbian Urtė (24 y. o.) also did not reveal her orientation because of the older age of her co-workers and her rather formal relations to them. According to her, heterosexuals at work are more privileged since they can reveal their private lives: "... they know about each other's wives and children... but I cannot tell about myself ... they would not understand."

It should be emphasized that the male respondents of "feminized" professions such as stylists, designers, hairstylists, shop assistants were most willing to disclose their orientation. It was easier for homosexual men to affirm their identity in female-dominated areas since women were less homophobic and more accepting of gays and lesbians than men (Tereškinas 2004: 26–30). On the other hand, more gay men were closeted and described anticipated discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation in typically male-dominated organizations which promoted traditional masculinity such as the Secret Investigation Service of Lithuania (STT) or private business enterprises. People who worked in smaller organizations were also more open about themselves than those from larger companies.

The respondents' answers indicate that the issues of sexuality and gender are important in the workplace constructed according to heterosexual norms. Most respondents attempt to enact the accepted norms of masculinity and femininity at work by controlling their appearance, dress, gestures and informal communication. In Egidijus's (24 y. o.) words, "you must constantly play the role in your family and at work..." According to another respondent, "I accepted myself but I had to pretend sometimes... For instance, to invent stories about my adventures with women [at work], etc." (28 y. o. Marius). In Ramūnas's (21 y. o.) words,

Of course, I would like not to hide [my orientation] on the street, from other people... but I already know that I have al-

ready adapted to this hiding, I have already developed some kind of mechanism: when you go to the street you must hide [your true self] and you must do the same in front of some people.

Putting a mask was the most common strategy of coping with the challenges of work and public life:

... and when I found that that [sexual orientation] could not be public, I understood that I didn't have to think hard about it. ... I will put the mask on, and that's it (30 y. o. Giedrius).

Most informants mentioned the limitations of self-disclosure at work. Tadas (21 y. o.) and Marta (20 y. o.) were unhappy about ridicule they sometimes encountered and continued to encounter in their environment. Tadas thought that his current coming out might have a negative influence on his future career although in the meantime he did not experience any negative impact on it. Furthermore, one lesbian has changed her job after coming out at her workplace. She worked as a waitress in a cafe but when her clients found out about her orientation, they started to sneer at her:

I don't walk on the street with the sign on my forehead that I am a lesbian, look at me... but I don't hide. Well, only at my work, I guess, you shouldn't tell since I learned my lesson once... now I have changed my job (laughing) (Marta).

Thus, the respondents most frequently encountered various forms of indirect or informal discrimination, for instance, derisive jokes about gays and lesbians. Several men and women mentioned the growing distance

among them and colleagues after their coming out. In Rima's (36 y. o.) words,

This communication [at work] took place as if I didn't exist, as if I did not participate in this party [of my co-workers]. And you felt some kind of silent, passive but nonetheless rejection...

Direct or formal discrimination was infrequent. However, some instances of this discrimination, namely obstruction of promotion and firing from their jobs, occurred among the respondents. 28-year old Aurimas who currently works at the Lithuanian AIDS centre had to leave a couple of previous jobs because his co-workers found out that he was gay. According to him, the atmosphere at the previous jobs was oppressive and unbearable. Some gays and lesbians experienced constant verbal violence, insults and ridicule directed towards them. However, it should also be mentioned that a large part of the respondents did not consider indirect discrimination such as jokes about gays and lesbians as "discriminatory."

Most respondents argued that their coming out would only worsen their relationships with the co-workers since a large part of them might be intolerant and bigoted. According to (Ramūnas, 21 y. o.), being in the closet was rather tiring but he has already learned to hide his features that could reveal his orientation to unfriendly people. Martynas (17 y. o.) also thought that possible hostility and anticipated discrimination at work and in society prevented him from coming out to most people. In his words,

... when I am writing a project, I need help from ministries and ... universities. I get their full help... but if they knew ... about me, I think I would not get their help ... since ... older people work there, and their attitude [to homosexuality] is different.

Inga (23 y. o.) did not want to risk her future career:

Another thing is that I would never walk on the avenue with the sign [that I am a lesbian] because of my career and perhaps for other reasons. I am not ashamed but it is simply the instinct of self-preservation. Perhaps I have already told you, but you come out as long as it doesn't harm your social life...

It is possible to conclude, from all interviews, that most frequently respondents avoided to reveal their orientation at work because it involved two-fold risks: their coming out might not only worsen their relationships with their co-workers but also make them leave their jobs because of the increased tensions and discrimination. Most informants thought of a workplace as a risky environment for gays and lesbians.

Most respondents policed their most intimate feelings in order to pass as heterosexual: it was good to be gay as long as you passed as heterosexual in the spaces considered public, first of all, a work environment. The interviewed gays and lesbians drew the clear and rigorous lines between the private and public:

Private life is private... what I mean is that [sexual] orientation is not problematic. But the most important thing is not to show it publicly because Lithuania still remains

Lithuania, a country of villagers... (24 y. o. Albertas).

Another informant noted: "I would like to say that there is no need to publicize everything because even without it we have difficult lives..." (30 y. o. Giedrius). Paulius (25 y. o.) wanted to live quietly:

Essentially, I don't want to reveal what I am... I mean it is easier for me than to other gays because I am not campy or mannered. I am just a guy... And I live how I want to live. But I don't publicize [my orientation] because I don't need unnecessary problems... It is so good to live quietly...

Hence, most respondents preferred to remain in their "secret" privacy: "It is a pity that I can't show everything what and who I am in reality without being afraid of scorn and derision. But if I can't do it, I can't. I got used to it" (33 y. o. Viktoras). Thus, it can be argued that some gays and lesbians grew very accustomed to being duplicitous persons and, in a sense, experienced some pleasures in affirming this kind of multiple self-identities.

### **Conclusion: "limited" citizens in secrecy and silence**

First, I would like to quote Tim Edwards's skeptical passage about the coming out processes. In his opinion,

In its never-ending emphasis on the power of coming out, in its championing of the hard-won benefits of gay liberation, and in its promotion of the politics of pluralism for sexual minorities, all that remains is to metaphorically, and perhaps literally, throw one's leg in the air and enjoy it. Such an account never even conceives of the question "and

then what?," let alone offering any solution (Edwards 2005: 55).

Even if I generally agree with Tim Edward's skepticism towards self-disclosure, I still would argue that the coming out is significant in the current social climate of Lithuania: it is one of heterogeneous processes that constructs a sexual citizen. Lithuania is a society in which the notion of (hetero)sexual citizenship still holds a powerful grip on most citizens' imaginations, bodies and actions. The repression and policing of sexualities labeled as aberrant still play a significant role in nationalist identity politics in Lithuania.

The closet is still, to use Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's words, the "fundamental feature of social life" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 68) for most Lithuanian gays and lesbians. It still shapes their lives. Most informants stick to a model of citizenship based on a politics of tolerance and assimilation. However, this model is rather limited and constructed largely on the condition that lesbians and gay men remain in the private sphere and open to a very limited number of people. Citing Michael Warner, we can also say that the largest part of the discussed gays "embrace a politics of privatization that offers them both property value and an affirmation of identity in a language of respectability and mainstream acceptance" (Warner 1999: 164).

The public is still exclusive of homosexuality: it incorporates lesbians and gay men only in certain respects and contexts. Therefore, passing as heterosexual in the public sphere is still a way of life for the interviewed

gays and lesbians. This coping strategy is particularly characteristic of male respondents. Being outside the heteronormative constructions of masculinity, they still want to be a part of this masculinity and to learn it by heart. Heterosexualization of the physical space and social relations, particularly at work, encourages these overwhelming politics of passing. The dominance of heteronormativity forces gays and lesbians to adopt traditional heterosexual norms of behavior particularly in public spaces including their jobs. Heterosexual norms particularly strongly structure the space of the informants' work. Most of them feel that they do not have a right to disseminate their identity at work. The best strategy for them is to "assimilate," i. e. to look and act like heterosexuals. The informants' responses also reveal the power of normalizing discourse that encourages self-regulating behavior. Afraid of open discrimination, ridicule and violence, most interviewed gays and lesbians prefer to stay in the closet.

The interviewed gays and lesbians drew the clear and rigorous lines between the private and public. In private, they could behave as they wanted, but in public they had to pass as heterosexual. Here we can also notice the Soviet remnants of the public and private division in which the public was the world of official politics, censored communication and registered jobs (Gal and Kligman 2000). On the contrary, privacy was an overwhelming world of comfort and personal endeavors. Perhaps, the distinct division between the public and private that emerges in the respondents' interviews can be interpreted in the



mentioned way. Consequently, 'real' life for most gays and lesbians takes place in the private realm. It appears that privacy, in most cases, equals secrecy.

The informants' narratives reflect the mechanisms of citizenship based on exclusion and inclusion, repression and enabling. They also demonstrate how strongly sexualized notions of citizenship are related to the public/private opposition at personal level. It appears that the informants' lives oscillate between pleasure to be open and danger to be both stigmatized and marginalized. These are citizens whose desire to be open and visible conflicts with the public articulations of sexual identity. The elements of their subjectivities are not recognized; on the contrary, they are denigrated and excluded. These "limited citizens" feel a strong need, in

Lauren Berlant's words, "to preserve a boundary between what can be said and done in public, what can be done in private but not spoken of in public" (Berlant 1999: 60).

The contradictory choices of informants are characteristic of "limited" sexual citizenship (and citizenship in general) in Lithuania: on one hand, they strive for greater integration of their sexual and erotic experiences into cultural narratives of citizenship; on the other hand, absorbing normative sexual and gender disciplines they succumb to conservative appeals to privatized sexual identities, particularly in the workplace. Controlling their bodies, feelings and relationships, which are a part of sexual citizenship, the informants, at the same time, articulate the structures of understanding and practical orientations that thrust them back into secrecy and silence.

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## SANTRAUKA

### GĖJŲ IR LESBIEČIŲ ATSVĖRIMAS VIEŠUMO IR PRIVATUMO SANKIRTOJE: SEKSUALINĖ PILIETYBĖ, SLAPTUMAS IR HETERONORMATYVI PUBLIKA

Straipsnyje, remiantis 32 interviu su homoseksualiais asmenimis, analizuojamos jų atsivėrimo strategijos viešumo ir privatumo sankirtoje. Mėginama atsakyti, kaip Lietuvos gėjai ir lesbietės konstruoja savo tapatybes viešose ir privačiose erdvėse bei kokias įtampas jie jaučia tapdami „viešais“ homoseksualiais. Straipsnis remiasi prielaida, kad seksualinė pilietybė yra ketvirtasis pilietybės aspektas, papildantis tradicinį Marshallo politinių, socialinių ir pilietinių teisių modelį. Plummer (1995) konceptualizuoja seksualinę (intymią) pilietybę kaip asmenų teisę rinktis, ką daryti su savo kūnais, emocijomis, santykiais, lytinėmis tapatybėmis ir aistromis. Richardson (2000a) pabrėžia teisę turėti viešą tapatybę kaip seksualinės pilietybės dalį.

Straipsnyje teigiama, kad lytinės tapatybės atvėrimas yra vienas iš heterogeniškų procesų, kuriuo konstruojamas seksualinis pilietis. Kasdien susidurdami su heteronormatyvumu, nuolatiniu savo tapatybių ištrynimu iš viešos sferos bei reakcingų politinių jėgų isterija, homoseksualūs asmenys pateikia savo pretenzijas į seksualinę pilietybę ir artikuluoja diskursus, kuriais siekiama dekonstruoti viešumo ir privatumo takoskyrą.

Įteikta 2006 11 10

Pateikta spaudai 2007 06 29

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