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Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Bother: Homophobia and the Heteronorm in Hungary

JUDIT TAKÁCS, TAMÁS DOMBOS, GYÖRGY MÉSZÁROS AND
TAMÁS P TÓTH

1. Introduction

'Homophobia is a characteristic feature of the majority identity'—stated a gay interviewee in the early 2000s, when describing reasons why it was not good to be gay in Hungary (Takács 2007). Keeping this in mind, we will use the term homophobia in an interpretational framework, which is more intimately connected to heteronormativity, constituting a major part of a fictional 'truly Hungarian' majority identity, rather than to the concept of homosexuality carrying several denotations and connotations of behaviour, identity, performance and history. In the context of the present study, examining the social functioning of homophobia is interpreted as an awareness-raising tool about heterosexist, heteronormative oppression operating in Hungary and elsewhere—rather than focusing on one's irrational fear of homosexuals, seen as a specific, individual level feature, being largely disconnected from its specific socio-cultural surroundings.

Heteronormative oppression implies that lesbians and gays suffer disadvantage and injustice because of everyday practices resulting from unquestioned norms and assumptions underlying institutional rules (Young 1990). The *heteronorm,* a cultural ideology perpetuating sexual stigma (Plummer 1975; Herek 2004; 2011), can be expressed in systemic violence directed against lesbians and gays, such as the violent attacks in many Eastern European cities witnessed during recent Gay Pride events. The occurrence of these violent attacks can be explained by the fact that in many Eastern European societies, including Hungary, institutionalised social practices encourage, tolerate, and enable the perpetration of violence against lesbian and gay citizens.

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Several studies conducted with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) respondents point to the problems deriving from their social invisibility: if disadvantages are not made socially recognisable, it is very hard to articulate interests and defend rights. However, as has been emphasised by previous studies (Rivers and Carragher 2003; Švab and Kuhar 2005; Takács 2006), discrimination against LGBT people can remain hidden in a lot of instances because coming out of invisibility is a very critical process for most LGBT people, involving the risk of being ostracised in a heteronormative social environment. Thus when we encounter figures referring to half of Hungarian LGBT respondents experiencing discrimination and prejudice in secondary school, and one third of them suffering disadvantages at their workplace (Takács, Mocsonaki and P Tóth 2008), it must be remembered that most people are afraid to come out as LGBT at school or at work, and that equal treatment practices, recognising sexual and gender diversity among other forms of diversity as enriching features that can positively affect the school environment or the productivity level of work, are still very rare in Hungary.

Although same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults was decriminalised in Hungary in 1961, there have been several manifestations of institutionalised discrimination and 'structural stigma' (Herek 2011) against lesbian and gay citizens, including the different age of consent for same-sex and different-sex partners before 2002, and the present absence of legal institutions such as same-sex marriage or joint adoption by same-sex couples. After the change in the political system of 1989–90 that ended state socialism, social attitudes towards homosexuality became slightly more permissive (Takács 2007). However, in the present European context, Hungary still belongs to those homophobic societies where the acceptance of the freedom of lesbian and gay lifestyles is not at all well developed, an aspect which plays an important role in the functioning of social exclusion mechanisms affecting lesbians and gays. Findings of a recent study (Takács and Szalma 2011), based on large scale European Social Survey data, indicates that among 26 European societies, the greatest level of social acceptance of lesbians and gays was found in Denmark, the Netherlands, France, Sweden and Belgium, while the lowest level of acceptance was found in the Ukraine, Russia, Romania, Croatia, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia and Hungary. This study also provided empirical evidence that levels of homophobia do not depend only on characteristics of individuals, such as age, gender, education, religion and so on. Certain country level predictors can also be identified: satisfaction with democracy, the introduction of same-sex partnership legislation and the weakening of traditional gender beliefs were shown to have a positive correlation with social acceptance of lesbians and gays in Europe.

According to LGBT respondents, prejudice and discrimination are rooted in ignorance and reinforced by distorted stereotypical representations of what it means to live as an LGBT person (Takács 2006; Takács, Mocsonaki and P Tóth 2008). Consequently, meanings attached to homosexuality can vary to a large extent as has been shown by a recent survey, commissioned by the Hungarian

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Equal Treatment Authority, which highlighted major differences between a representative population sample (N=1,000) and an LGBT community sample (N=200) concerning the social categorisation of homosexuality.[1] In the representative sample the highest level of agreement was found with the view that homosexuality is a 'private matter', closely followed by the definition of homosexuality as a 'form of behaviour deviating from social norms and rules'. Defining homosexuality as a 'form of sickness' and the view that 'having a same-sex partner is a basic human right' reflected the same, moderately high, level of agreement, while the definition of homosexuality being a 'sin' had the lowest level of agreement. On the other hand, LGBT respondents expressed the highest level of agreement with the statement that 'having a same-sex partner is a basic human right', followed by a similarly high level of agreement in defining homosexuality as a 'private matter'. Defining homosexuality as a 'form of behaviour deviating from social norms and rules' was received with a medium level of agreement, while definitions of homosexuality as a form of 'sickness' or 'sin' received widespread rejection. The differing categorisation preferences among the LGBT and the representative samples reflect different sets of interpretational frameworks related to homosexuality: while the human rights based approach becomes a very relevant one in the LGBT responses; among non-LGBT respondents the medicalisation approach remains influential, despite the decades old arguments of the World Health Organization and other professional bodies, emphasising that homosexuality is not an illness.

This survey also indicated that about half of the LGBT sample (49%) experienced discrimination—mainly on the ground of sexual orientation (72%), 25% mentioned 'other grounds', 24% referred to their gender, while 17% mentioned their age being the potential cause of discrimination.[2] The most often mentioned forms of discrimination included verbal harassment (63%), followed by humiliation (49%), threats of violence (28%) and public humiliation (24%). Reports of being threatened by violence, harassed by offensive graffiti, being pelted, assaulted and raped were significantly more widespread among LGBT respondents than in the representative sample.

According to Tamás Dombos, who made an overview of over 60 survey-based quantitative studies on homophobia that were conducted in Hungary in the 30 years between 1982 and 2010,[3] homophobia can be interpreted broadly as a phenomenon that includes prejudice, discrimination, violence and other forms

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[1] See Equal Treatment Authority (2011) *Az egyenlő bánásmóddal kapcsolatos jogtudatosság növekedésének mértéke—fókuszban a nők, a romák, a fogyatékos és az LMBT emberek. Kutatási zárójelentés* (Research report available at www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA_1hullam.pdf).

[2] Respondents could choose more than one option when answering this question.

[3] Homofób társadalom? (Homophobic society?), presentation given at the 'A homofóbia és a transzfóbia elleni küzdelem lehetőségei a mai Magyarországon' (Struggling against homophobia and transphobia in Hungary), 'Citizens in Diversity' dissemination conference organised by IS-HAS, 17 May 2011, Budapest.

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of hostile behaviour towards LGBT people, as well as the general notion that homosexuality and bisexuality are inferior to heterosexuality and that gender identities differing from those given at birth are problematic. Homophobia was thus understood not only at the individual, interpersonal level; but is also discussed on the level of deeply held cultural views and institutional norms and practices. Social attitudes towards homosexuality, reflected in the examined surveys, can be categorised into five main models or frames, entailing both the basic understanding of what homosexuality is, and how individuals and social institutions should relate to homosexual and bisexual people. Even though the five frames are representative of certain historic periods, these basic attitudes are also observable at any given time in a cross-section of the population.

The *morality frame* considers homosexuality as an individual choice that can be evaluated in moral terms. According to this frame homosexuality is a sin, because it violates the religious or social laws of a society. Since homosexuality is a sin, it should be punished or at least condemned. The *sickness frame* considers homosexuality as a medical condition usually resulting from a childhood trauma or bad socialisation, something that is beyond the control of the individual. Since the individual does not decide to become homosexual, s/he should not be punished or condemned, but rather helped and cured; people should treat homosexuals with sympathy and pity. The *deviance frame* considers homosexuality as a form of behaviour divergent from widely accepted social norm and rules, which usually implies choice on behalf of the individual, although it does not necessarily imply moral condemnation: it might consist of a value-free, 'cold and factual' attitude towards homosexuality. The *privacy frame* brackets the question of what causes homosexuality and focuses on the fact that the state and society should not intervene in activities that do not cause harm to others, thus homosexuals should do freely whatever they want, as long as it is in private. The public affirmation of homosexuality, however, is problematic as it widens the circle of people affected by it and might cause harm to others, such as impressionable minors. The *human rights frame* starts from the claim that sexual orientation is an integral aspect of personality, usually seen to be the result of a genetic, or other non-alterable biological, non-pathological predisposition (a 'variant of human sexuality'). Since, as with other integral aspects of personality, such as gender, ethnicity, religion and so on homosexuality is also morally arbitrary, the state should protect homosexuals from discrimination and promote their equality.

Between 1996 and 2007 the data shows the slightly growing prominence of the privacy frame and a slight decline in support for the human rights frame. One of the problems with the polling question is the uncertain interpretation of the privacy frame: while it can imply a liberal attitude (this is none of my business, people are free to do whatever they want), it can also imply a refusal to engage with the issue, a support for keeping homosexuality in the closet (they can do whatever they want, as long as I don't have to see them). The options in both types of studies can be further regrouped to two categories: those frames that see

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homosexuality as some kind of a problem (sin, sickness, deviance) or those that do not (private matter, human right). This regrouping is confirmed by analysing data from a 2010 study of the Hungarian Equal Treatment Authority, in which rather than being given options from which one can be chosen, approval rate of individual items were polled: the factor analysis showed that 67% of variance was explained by these two components.[4]

When focusing on the social embeddedness of homophobia, a functional theory of attitudes can be applied (Herek 1984), identifying three major needs that appear to be met by attitudes towards lesbians and gays. *Experience-based* attitudes derive from past interactions with lesbians and gays, and can be generalised to all lesbians and gays; *defensive* attitudes can help to cope with one's anxieties, especially in the form of externalising inner conflicts; while *symbolic* attitudes, closely related to socialisation experiences, express important values in the process of (publicly) identifying with important reference groups. In this context one can easily see a paradox: on the one hand, because of the perceived hostility of the social environment, lesbians and gays won't come out, while on the other hand, these camouflage-strategies will keep them locked into distant 'mysterious others' categories, and will not provide opportunities for direct everyday interaction between heterosexuals and lesbians and gays. Thus it can be assumed that in present day Hungarian society homophobic attitudes are more likely to have symbolic and defensive functions than be based on actual experiences of interacting with lesbians and gays in everyday life.

This assumption can also be tested in the qualitative empirical findings, gained within the international research project 'Citizens in Diversity: A Four-Nation Study on Homophobia and Fundamental Rights', to be presented in this chapter. The empirical base of the Hungarian part of this research includes 11 focus group interviews which were collected in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary during 2010. Focus group methodology was applied for several reasons, including its focus on socially produced knowledge and performative group dynamics, as well as the opportunity to study sexuality and gender-related issues on the basis of a more egalitarian relationship between researchers and those being researched:

> In a group, if even one person expresses an idea it can prompt a response from the others, and the information that is produced is more likely to be framed by the categories and understandings of the interviewees rather than those of the interviewer. Participants can help each other figure out what the questions mean to them, and the researcher can examine how different participants hear possibly vague or ambiguous questions. This is important in studying sex and gender because these issues are

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[4] See Equal Treatment Authority (2011) Az egyenlö bánásmóddal kapcsolatos jogtudatosság növekedésének mértéke—fókuszban a nök, a romák, a fogyatékos és az LMBT emberek. Kutatási zárójelentés (Report available at www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA_1hullam.pdf).

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'naturalised' to such an extent that it is very difficult to recognise one's own preconceived notions, much less challenge others' taken-for-granted assumptions. (Montell 1999:49)

There were four focus group sessions conducted with self-identified heterosexual trainee teachers and students of education (N=20), comprising 16 women and four men. Within these four focus groups there were two sessions, which included only female participants, while the other two sessions also included male participants. The age range of the heterosexual respondents was 20 to 29, and their average age was 23.5. All of them studied in Budapest, but about half of them grew up in a city or a town outside Budapest. Seven focus group interviews were conducted with self-identified non-activist LGBT people (N=33), including eight lesbians, 19 gays and six transsexuals.

Within the LGBT sample no-one identified exclusively as bisexual, which might also imply the rejection of bisexuality as an identity category (as opposed to the understanding of bisexuality as a specific form of behaviour). However, some participants reported on bisexual episodes from their past and present, so we decided to keep the 'B' in the name of the LGBT sample. The LGBT focus group interviews were conducted in specialised sessions: two sessions with only lesbian participants (average age: 32), two sessions with only religious gay men (average age: 28), one session with gay teachers (average age: 36), one session with gay men (average age: 35) and one session with only transsexuals (average age: 40).[5] The age range of the LGBT participants was 19 to 83, all of them living in Budapest. Most of the LGBT participants had completed higher education; five of them had only secondary education.

Heterosexual participants were recruited through the education departments of Hungarian universities, while LGBT participants were recruited through LGBT internet portals and with the help of LGBT NGOs. There were a few participants recruited by a snowball method with the help of those who had already participated in a previous focus group session. The focus group interviews were 1.5 to 2.5 hours long. Following the focus group interviewing procedures, a standard topic guide was applied with open-ended questions around the main themes including the definitions and manifestations of homophobia; inclusion of topics related to homosexuality and homophobia in school activities; fighting homophobia in schools; and resisting homophobia in everyday life. All would-be respondents were provided with an explanation of the study, and willing participants provided written informed consent. All focus group interviews were conducted by two experienced interviewers: one leading the interview, the other observing and providing assistance when necessary. Each respondent chose an assumed name, which was used for their identification in the course of the focus group sessions. The interviews were tape-recorded with the agreement that all

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[5] The average age would have been only 31 in the trans group without the oldest (83 years old) participant.

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audio-material would be destroyed after transcribing. The recorded material was first transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were transformed into a Hungarian code book. The present study is produced by the qualitative analysis of this code book's contents.

2. Contextualising Homophobia as an LGBT Issue

Gay movements have been criticised, especially in North America, for claiming equal rights on the basis of a normalising politics presenting non-heterosexuals as normal, gender conventional, good citizens (Seidman 2002), while, at least since the 1990s, queer activists keep wondering what is happening to the right to be different. A similar argument is presented by Wilchins, when referring to a kind of 'new gay' deal, characterised by 'internalised genderphobia', that is strategic avoidance of non-normative gender issues and norms:

> Gay rights activists have responded to conservatives' attacks by stressing the normality of homosexuals. *We are just like straight people, we just sleep with the same sex.* This strategy has been enormously successful. (Wilchins 2004:17)

Since the extensive overlaps and interrelations between homophobia, transphobia, and genderphobia are hard to deny, homophobia will be contextualised here not as a 'homosexual only' but as a broader issue, which can affect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and (even) straight people.

At the beginning of each focus group session we asked our respondents to tell us who LGBT people are and in which context they encountered this term.[6] This seemed to be an easy exercise for most of them, at least until they tried to decipher the meaning of the 'T'. 'T as in transvestite? Men who dress as women?' asked, for example, Dávid (28 years old), one gay participant. Another gay man thought that transsexuality is a synonym of intersexuality. A female student[7] used a distancing style when referring to LGBT as 'those people' and then added: 'people with ambiguous gender' (Réka, 24 years old). Janka, a 24-year-old female student brought to life a nineteenth-century notion when saying that:

> Homosexuals or lesbians are people who feel different, that is they are men who feel like women or women who feel like men but it's kept deep inside, while transsexuals, I think, will change the outside too.

Apart from the group of transsexuals, there were uncertainties concerning the different meanings of transsexual and transgender, while the trans participants agreed that they would refer to people who wish(ed) to change their official

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[6] The question was about the meaning of the LGBT acronym.
[7] Student refers to a heterosexual participant, being either a trainee teacher or a student of education.

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gender assignment as transsexuals, and those who do not have this wish but do not (want to) fit into the dualistic gender order would be referred to as transgender people.

The lack of clarity around the 'T' in LGBT points to the fact that trans issues are the least socially visible among the socially less visible LGBT issues in Hungary, and thus are often seen as irrelevant as 'there are so few of them'. The ambiguity of trans issues can be rooted in a perception, according to which trans people are some kind of in-betweeners characterised by different degrees of gender transitionality, being an incomprehensible or at least unsettling concept for both the heterosexual and the LGBT respondents. According to the view of Lilla, a 24-years-old female student:

> It's easier for people to accept a person who's attracted to a same-sex partner than a transsexual, well, at least, it's easier for me.

Another female student (Petra, 24 years old) mentioned that even lesbians, at least those she knew, do not want to have anything to do with trans women, who are not 'real women'.[8]

Bisexuality seemed to be a much better-known concept, but the situation of bisexual people was not discussed at all in any of the focus groups, as if they did not exist. In the LGBT groups there was a gay man who admitted that at the age of 18 he was not even aware of the meaning of bisexuality. In the heterosexual groups one participant described bisexuals as 'being excluded by both sides' (Kyra, 24 years old), while others disagreed with her by saying that 'society has the least problem with bisexuals [among LGBT]' (Alma, 20 years old). Previous Hungarian research showed that among gays the definition of bisexuality includes that it is a 'manageable problem' or a 'form of self-deception', a fictional identity strategy 'applied by those who do not dare to come out as gay' (Takács 2004). The silence around bisexuality in our focus groups can also indicate that bisexuality is seen as a 'manageable problem' with not too much social importance, but it can also be interpreted as a sign of rejection of an ambiguous situation.

Heterosexual respondents encountered LGBT topics mainly in the media, especially the tabloid media, but also through friends and family. They also mentioned a few university courses, where they could learn or at least hear about lesbians and gays. LGBT issues were therefore not perceived as being taboo, as one female student pointed out:

> Nowadays you can hear about them … quite a lot. They're on the news programmes, especially when the Gay Pride march is on, so I think there are no people in Hungary who haven't encountered these people either in person or in a news item. (Janka, 24 years old)

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[8] Similar arguments were presented, about trans women not being real women, by Janice Raymond in *The Transsexual Empire*, published originally in 1979 (Raymond 2006).

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However, this perception might also reflect a somewhat naive projection of personal openness regarding LGBT people to society at large. For example, heterosexual respondents were probably unaware of the very low average number of homosexual friends or acquaintances reported in Hungary.[9]

Besides references to the potentially positive, social visibility-increasing, effect of the media, another female student emphasised the dangers associated with distorted media representations, which can:

> Play a great part in the negative perception of LGBT people. If you watch the Gay Pride on TV, surely they won't be shown in the normal way, even though it would be the goal of the march … but they will show … I don't know … the much more extreme side. (Anna, 25 years old)

However, making a distinction between the favourable 'normal way' and 'the extreme side' of things implies that the rules of norm setting remain the privilege of the speaker-outsider. While the speaker's intention is to point out the distorting effects of the media, the measurement of distortion is a presumably universal code of appropriate behaviour.

Similar distinctions were made by LGBT respondents between normal and extreme behaviour, when the need for Pride marches was contested especially within the group of gay teachers and transsexuals: for some the presence of openly lesbian and gay people on the streets, seen as an act of invading public space with the most public form of coming out, constituted unnecessary extremeness or even provocation, reinforcing the view that homosexuality is a private matter and should be kept that way. In this context, normal behaviour was equated with keeping the expression of sexual preferences mostly hidden, creating a new division between 'extreme activists' and ordinary people, replacing the conventional heterosexual–homosexual divide. This view was reflected in a female student's somewhat paternalistic warning:

> The most useful strategy is to come out in your own little local circles … and not the militant activist thing … that can only arouse revulsion. (Nyolc, 23 years old)

Individualised notions of homosexuality, focusing on specific features of individuals to be kept private, which dominated all focus group sessions, seemed to foster the notion that social acceptance of LGBT people is in inverse proportion to their social visibility. In this context social acceptance was interpreted as being tolerated, and equal rights claims were often overshadowed by the convenient application of a 'don't ask, don't tell, don't bother' strategy. These could be seen as rather disappointing results, in view of the fact that most heterosexual participants were young intellectuals with a higher than average level of openness towards LGBT issues, which made them willing to participate in our research—

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[9] According to 2009 Eurobarometer data, only 11% of Hungarian respondents reported having homosexual friends or acquaintances, while the EU27 average was 38%; see ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_317_en.pdf.

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not to mention the LGBT participants, most of whom revealed a certain degree of *externalised heteronormativity* at this point.

However, when respondents were asked whether LGBT people might be at a disadvantage in comparison to others, they presented more nuanced explanations. A female student, for example, explained that:

> Lesbians, gays or transgender people aren't at a disadvantage by definition. They can become disadvantaged, if they suffer discrimination, when society doesn't accept them. (Sári, 23 years old)

Rejecting the essentialising definition of disadvantage implies that the situation of LGBT people should be approached in context-specific ways, by mapping their socio-cultural relations. Students were more likely to think of disadvantage in general terms, manifested, for example, in personal discomfort caused by the conservative, religious mentality of one's family or close community, while at least some LGBT respondents, especially lesbians, interpreted disadvantage in more practical terms, manifested, for example, in the lack of joint adoption rights.

Nevertheless the recognition of disadvantage as being socially constructed was widespread in all focus group sessions: participants listed several elements, potentially contributing to the development of underprivileged situations, which can be different in large cities and in the countryside, among young people and older ones, or in Hungary and outside Hungary. Additionally, the gendered nature of disadvantage was emphasised mainly by the lesbian participants, especially in the case of lesbian women who might easily suffer multiple forms of discrimination in a patriarchal society. At the same time, lesbians were seen as being, at least ostensibly, more easily tolerated, because of the commodification of their bodies.[10] A male student described the power of the heterosexual male gaze:

> A whole industry is built on it … it's perfectly normal if two women are together so you can see this formation more often … and obviously if one woman is beautiful, two women must be even more beautiful. (Cheega, 29 years old)

2.1. Meanings of Homophobia

Several layers and different understandings of homophobia, highlighted by previous research (Roffman 2000; Herek 2004), were also reflected in our findings to be presented here. Homophobia was a familiar concept in the focus groups: all LGBT participants knew the term, and there were only two heterosexual students who had never heard the word. In accordance with criticism about homophobia being a misnomer, which focuses mainly on individual traits,

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[10] However, according to Tamás Dombos, Hungarian survey findings do not support this view (see Homofób társadalom? above n 3).

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and neglecting socio-cultural contexts where hostility towards homosexuality can be deeply embedded (Plummer 1975; 1981; Kitzinger 1987), there was a general agreement that the term can indeed be somewhat misleading, emphasising a specific kind of phobia, the irrational fear of homosexuals, while its central component is not necessarily just fear as it also conveys hostility, rejection, prejudice and readiness to discriminate. A heterosexual female student reported on these interpretational difficulties in the following way:

> In my view, those contra-demonstrators [against the Gay Pride] aren't homophobic. They can't be called homophobic because homophobes would try to avoid homosexuals. They're simply … well, racist … perhaps it's not the right word … but I don't know. So I've some conceptual problems here. Because phobic implies that one is afraid of something. That they try to avoid something as you would avoid plague … It shouldn't be this! And this is more like aggression. (Piroska, 22 years old)

Respondents registered the difference between homophobic views and discrimination, though it was difficult to define exactly where discrimination starts. For example, according to one gay man:

> Everyone's free to hate certain things, and it's not a problem until this hate is expressed in a formal and public way. (Hajtipajti, 29 years old)

Another gay respondent added:

> It's your right not to like gays or others, but you can't conclude from this that their reason for existence should be questioned. (Gyuri, 32 years old)

The deeply rooted social and cultural embeddedness of homophobia in Hungarian society was illustrated by the anti-faggot jokes and swear words, which were seen as ordinary socialisation experiences from an early age:

> Homophobia is so much culturally embedded in society that even elementary school kids make jokes about it … they don't know what it's all about exactly … but through traditional education they can already decode as much that there's a group that's repugnant, obnoxious and repulsive. (Benő, 32 years old)

Anti-gay jokes as elements of a generally homophobic socio-cultural discourse can contribute to the development of 'properly gendered behaviour' prescribed by heteronormative socialisation, not only during childhood but also later at school or in the workplace. These jokes can play an important role in maintaining the illusory assumptions of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990), and especially in reinforcing heterosexual masculinity: by pointing to the female-like inferiority of the norm-breaking gay males. Thus some LGBT participants suggested that jokes that make fun of, for example, gays, can be tolerated only if these are told by gays to gays.

In one of the lesbian focus group sessions participants discussed the possible reasons for there not being very many anti-lesbian jokes in the context of patriarchal society:

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Alice (33 years old): This is also a sign that lesbians aren't taken seriously in society even at this level, because oh, it [being lesbian] is only a whim, which will pass.

Ivett (29): For men lesbianism is totally unintelligible, I think … it's such an insult for them that they can't [make sense of it].

Conny (24): And here comes into the picture the only so-called joke about lesbians that 'She needs a good screw to stop her being a lesbian', well, how wrong they can be …

Participants vacillated between two main understandings of phobia: expressing fear, which can lead to avoidance as in the case of claustrophobia; or expressing hatred, which can lead to aggression as in the case of xenophobia. Most participants saw homophobia reflecting an intention to intervene in another person's life, mostly on the basis of moral and especially religious arguments, when 'religion can be used as a weapon' (Zoli, 29 years old). On the other hand, silence and reticence were also seen as a means of expressing homophobic rejection. LGBT respondents mentioned that homophobia is value judgmental and closely connected to pathologising views of homosexuality, which define same-sex attraction as sickness, sin or a sign of (moral) inferiority. Heterosexual participants argued that 'what you don't know can become frightful' and referred to ignorance and lack of information as the main causes of homophobia.

Hungary was seen as a generally homophobic country, characterised by different levels of rejection in different socio-economic strata of society. It was also emphasised that similarly to anti-Roma and xenophobic feelings, homophobia can appear in more hidden and coded forms in some segments of the population than in others: among more educated people living in more urbanised environments it is trendier to be tolerant at least at the level of rhetoric. These seem to be realistic perceptions supported by empirical findings (Enyedi, Fábián and Sik 2004; Takács and Szalma 2011).[11] However, since an extreme right-wing party came into the Hungarian Parliament in 2010, directly racist and homophobic forms of public communication started to increase. This was seen, especially by LGBT respondents, as a dangerous tendency:

Alice (33 years old): [The political] system keeps radicalising. It's increasingly tough … I feel increasingly threatened.

Ivett (29): The present mix of right wing politics plus Christianity is the worst possible combination for me, being an atheist lesbian. The change of government swept away women rights and gay rights from the table; this is totally catastrophic, and frightening. The abortion plans [to stiffen abortion regulations] are also frightening … What will happen here? It's really frightening. I started to think about leaving the country.

Respondents also referred to the different degrees of acceptance and rejection of LGBT people by society. According to both LGBT and heterosexual participants,

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[11] See also Tausz, K (2011) 'Kitöl tartunk jobban: a romáktól vagy az adóhatóságtól? Az ELTE Társadalomtudományi Karának közleménye' Report of the Faculty of Social Sciences of ELTE University, available at www.tatk.elte.hu.

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individual lesbians or gay men are easier to accept than a same-sex couple or a larger number of representatives of a social group, for example, at the Pride marches. The functioning of selective acceptance was reported by a gay man in the following way:

> There are these stages: for example, there are those who just don't want to know about it, they say that everyone can do whatever they like but please, I don't want to see any of it. Or they say that you can do it but only at home, others say that they don't mind but they very much hope not to have any gays in their family. These are in fact all homophobic views, representing different degrees of homophobia … I know certain homophobes who can accept me as a homosexual individual without any problem, but they can't accept that there are more others. (Cassus, 23 years old)

Selective acceptance processes can also reflect gender normalising tendencies inside and outside the LGBT group(s): gender-conventional lesbians and gays seemed to cause less trouble and be easier to integrate not only into society at large but also into a Gay Pride march. For example, a trans man referred to the constant debate as to whether transvestites should be encouraged or allowed to take part in the march in Budapest, especially given the violent attacks against the marchers since 2007. Here the historical role played by transvestites in gay social resistance is countered by their intentionally provoking gender non-conformity:

> Well, a transvestite is a transvestite if he goes out on to the streets as a man dressed like a woman. And yes, it's provoking, and some people think that it's tasteless. But how can one imagine banning transvestites from a Gay Pride March, when they played such a [historical role]? (Beni, 26 years old)

Lesbian participants reported on difficulties butch dykes sometimes have to face because they are seen as 'too masculine', while gay men referred to the masculinity cults generated and maintained in certain gay scenes or subcultures. One gay man brought up the example of gay online dating sites:

> There are these profiles … really full of passive aggression; you can often read about how disgusting or sickening feminine faggots are, and that they're interested only in straight acting guys. (Benö, 32 years old)

Problematisation of (perceived) gender non-conformity provided a linkage between homophobia and transphobia, though transphobia seemed to be a much less known concept among our heterosexual as well as non-heterosexual respondents than homophobia. To the question of whether or not Hungarian society is transphobic, a lesbian woman replied that 'surely it would be if only they knew what it was'. Participants of the trans focus group manifested the highest level of awareness concerning the functioning of transphobia in Hungary:

> Well, we're bracketed together with gays, anyway … The majority of society isn't transphobic, but most of them can't really follow what it's exactly. There are some who say that it's just delusion, and the only goal is to make sex between men more acceptable … they think it's only an alibi for indecent behaviour. (Gyöngyi, 83 years old)

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> They're not afraid of us … it's our existence in society what's frightening … the fact that we exist. (Beni, 26 years old)

> Every society of the world is transphobic to a certain extent—but not equally … [what happens at the] Gay Prides can be the measure of its extent. (Barbie, 19 years old)

However, perhaps surprisingly for some, trans participants stated that in their view, in certain respects it is more difficult to live as a lesbian or as a gay than as a transsexual person because lesbians and gays by definition are victims of institutional discrimination as they are denied the right of marriage and joint adoption. In the case of transsexual people institutional discrimination practices are perhaps less salient, legal aspects of gender transition being officially unregulated but following a more or less established legal practice. Still there are two main problem areas where transsexual people might encounter legally prescribed discrimination in Hungary: on the one hand when their rights as patients and their access to state health care might be denied; and on the other, when their rights as married partners and parents may not be respected (Solymár and Takács 2007).

Legal manifestations of homophobia were much more clearly seen by LGBT participants, and especially by lesbians, than by the heterosexual students. A lesbian participant voiced the opinion shared by others:

> The present day legal background doesn't provide us with any support if we want to have children. We could have a child [officially] only if we lied through the whole system. (Alice, 33 years old)

Gay participants seemed to be less interested in society at large and the legal norms, which were pictured as distant frameworks, not being relevant (yet or any more) in their everyday life activities. They were more concerned with what they referred to as ordinary manifestations of homophobia, including incidents of verbal and physical aggression, and strategies to avoid these. In fact, one of the most widely used coping strategies seemed to be, especially in the gay teachers' group, not attributing too much importance to the 'problematic situations' they have encountered. One gay teacher explained:

> These are mainly just tiny annoying things but I don't think that they would cause big problems in everyday life. If you want to be open [about your gayness] at the workplace … in theory you can't encounter any disadvantage. In practice, on the other hand, things are different. But it doesn't bother me personally, there are certain techniques developed for this and by the time you become middle aged you are well-trained … so if you speak with someone you can size up the situation whether you can speak with that person openly or not … (Ödön, 58 years old)

Gay participants agreed that it is easy to avoid discrimination if one's sexual orientation and related issues are kept secret. However, it was also recognised by them that this self-constrained silencing itself constitutes discriminating disadvantage. Some participants reported on experiences of LGBT people internalising the majority's (hetero)normative perspectives, including ideas that 'perhaps it is

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better not to come out at all', 'well, other minority groups are also socially excluded', and 'look at other countries where lesbians and gays are in an even worse situation'. These views were accentuated in the religious gay groups, where participants reported on various forms of discrimination they experienced within their religious community, including hostility or even being ostracised, homophobic messages of certain religious doctrines, and prayers said for their cure (that is curing their homosexuality).

Heterosexual students had a more narrow understanding of the legal aspects of homophobia. Most of them concentrated on individuals' rights not to be discriminated against, and did not necessarily equate the lack of legislation concerning same-sex marriage and child-rearing with homophobia. In fact, same-sex family issues seemed to constitute the borderline of the 'normal functioning of society', which should be protected:

Janka (24 years old): This [same-sex marriage] isn't the most important question.

Hold (25): I don't think that this is what needed … and I surely wouldn't advocate childbearing either. Marriage, perhaps … but rather not.

It also turned out that for most of our heterosexual respondents the understanding of having children was limited to adoption related issues, and the possibility that LGBT people can have their own children was missing from their mental map. Thus they haven't considered other options including second parent adoption, having children from previous heterosexual relationships, or artificial insemination either.

3.   Building Citizenship through Education

Previous European research findings indicated that young LGBT people face several challenges related to the lack of recognition and full participation opportunities in schools, where heteronormativity seemed to be a precondition for acceptance and appreciation (Takács 2006; 2009). Heteronormative school practices can have serious disempowering effects on young LGBT people: the general practice of silencing LGBT experiences and lifestyles increases their feelings of isolation and invisibility, while potentially contributing to the decrease of their physical and emotional well-being (Quinlivan and Town 1999).

According to a recent survey, half of Hungarian LGBT respondents (N=1,122) suffered from discrimination and prejudice in school: more than 90% of these cases involved bullying by fellow students (94% in elementary and secondary schools and 89% in higher educational settings), while around half of the cases involved mistreatment by teachers (48% in elementary schools, 50% in secondary schools and 57% in higher education), and one-third of respondents reported distorted or totally missing representation of LGBT issues in the school curriculum (Takács, Mocsonaki and P Tóth 2008). Results of a survey carried out by the

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Hungarian Equal Treatment Authority, revealed that lesbians and gays in the sample (N=200) tended to be increasingly open about their sexual orientation from elementary school to higher education: the proportion of respondents who did not want or dare to come out among fellow students in elementary school was 39%, it was 32% in secondary school, and 21% at university.[12] At the same time 39% of respondents kept their sexual orientation concealed from their teachers, and 68% reported that discrimination of LGBT people (often or sometimes) happens at school.

It was the general experience of our respondents that while homosexuality and homophobia-related topics are not part of the school curricula, pupils and students frequently discuss these topics at school. Young people were provided with scattered and sometimes distorted information about lesbians, gays or trans people by the media, mainly through television programmes and the internet—but these pieces of information could have been reviewed and structured at school with the help of teachers, some participants thought. The silencing of LGBT issues at school was seen by the LGBT participants as a serious disadvantage, which could threaten one's developing identity and self-esteem. As a gay man explained:

> There was total silence … in my case it wasn't a real problem … in fact my life was made quite easy because I heard about gays quite a lot at home, but if that hadn't been the case then I would have felt in school that I got there from God knows where, that there were no gays here before me, and that there are no gays around me, so there must be something very wrong with me. (Gáspár, 43 years old)

Contents of school books were seen as reflecting a white men-centred heteronormative world, for example, they did not include representations of Gypsies or single-parent families, not to mention non-heterosexuals. The only exceptions were certain university classes, where they could encounter LGBT issues, including courses on cultural diversity, social problems (among topics related to deviant youth and drug users), literary theory or American studies.

3.1. When and How to Talk about Homosexuality and Homophobia?

There was a general agreement among our participants that homosexuality and homophobia-related issues should be discussed in schools as these topics are already there—if not officially in the classrooms then informally in the corridors. However, there were very different views about the ways these issues could be or should be presented according to the different interpretational frameworks of homosexuality, which can be identified in present-day Hungarian society as it was described earlier in this chapter. Obviously, presenting homosexuality as a

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[12] www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA_1hullam.pdf.

moral or medical issue might imply very different personal convictions and beliefs than interpreting non-heterosexual lifestyles as deviant or private matters, not to mention the approach that sees same-sex partner choice as a basic human right. Even though democratic educational principles would require recognising competing conceptions of what can be defined as a good and respectful life (Gutmann 1987), according to our respondents this requirement is rarely put into practice in Hungarian schools.

In theory a basic rule of presenting potentially controversial issues in school is avoiding value-judgements. A female student used the example of drug prevention to illustrate the difficulties one can encounter:

> Drug prevention came to my mind … similarly if we invite someone to give a lecture about homosexuality it implies that we want to know about it more, but possibly not too much … so the borderline between talking one into it or out of it is very thin. (Lili, 22 years old)

Students of education reported that their teacher training programmes hardly provided any guidelines or help to develop skills and competence on how to tackle sensitive issues related to ethnic, religious or sexual minorities in their future teaching practice. Consequently, in accordance with previous findings (Roffman 2000), they did not find it surprising that in many cases teachers could not separate their own moral or religious beliefs from the topics to be taught. It has also emerged from their accounts that their professional training, similarly to most university training programmes in Hungary, had been concentrated mainly on the acquirement of factual knowledge, and when practical or potentially problematic issues were discussed at all, psychological explanations exceeded social scientific approaches. This individualised model of epistemology could have long-lasting consequences in actual teaching practice, too.

Most of the teacher trainee participants agreed that one of the best ways to introduce LGBT issues at school would be to invite guest lecturers who had a certain level of expertise or experience related to these topics, which would provide an external solution to the lack of knowledge and competence as well as the potential personal aversion of the teacher. Inviting someone from outside the school was also perceived as providing some sort of protection against potentially indignant parents, most of whom should also be targeted, at least according to some students, by awareness-raising trainings.

Some of them knew about the 'Getting to Know Gays and Lesbians' educational programme, which was originally introduced for secondary school students and teachers by the Labrisz Lesbian Association in 2000, with the support of the Phare democracy micro-projects programme of the European Union (Borgos 2007). The main goals of this programme included the creation of a safe and unbiased environment in schools for all students, helping students learn to respect each other, increasing teachers' awareness that their students might be lesbian or gay, and providing teachers with guidelines to help their students. In 2003, its scope was expanded to offer a training course on LGBT issues for

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prospective teachers, psychologists and social workers. Developing a manual for teachers on LGBT issues was also part of this project.

Another frequently mentioned strategy to bring LGBT topics into school was to include them in sex education classes, even though sex education itself is not a very well-developed field in Hungarian public education. The main problem of presenting LGBT issues in the context of sex education derived from the possibility of concentrating too much on sexual aspects at too young an age. Designating the 'right age' for pupils or students to 'get to know (about) lesbians and gays' was another problem, on which no agreement was reached.

The fact that none of the students referred to more institutionalised solutions, such as extending the pedagogical programme of the school to include LGBT issues, or introducing 'safe school environment for all' type of official school policies was probably not a coincidence. These initiatives are not at all widespread in the present Hungarian school system, and considering the recent trends in public education their introduction is not very likely in the near future either.

In the LGBT focus groups there was also a certain level of agreement that these topics should be discussed in school. However, LGBT respondents' views reflected a certain level of caution or conservatism concerning its practical realisation. Gay teachers particularly, might be reluctant to discuss the issues: in case talking about homosexuality makes the teacher suspicious that he or she personally might have something to do with it? This cautiousness might be interpreted as part of a self-justifying ego-protection strategy, especially in the case of those LGBT people who cannot or don't want to be out, for example, in their work environment. In our gay teacher focus group, for instance, out of the six members only one is openly gay at his workplace, and he works at a university. For the others who chose the closeted option, it seemed to be harder to introduce the topic of homosexuality at school. One of them pointed to the danger that pupils' curiosity might be aroused this way:

> *Kornél* (58 years old): The other side of the coin is that we know it all too well what happens if there's one such talk or guest lecture organised. Then there's the blasting choir that it's gay propaganda! Of course we reject this view and consider it stupid but if you think more deeply about it, when a teacher comes in and starts talking about gliding, there will be a few children who never heard anything about it before but now they would like to try it. So perhaps it's not so stupid after all [what they say], and we have to take this argument seriously.

> *Ödön* (58): We accept it [our homosexuality] and live with it, and process it completely, but we wouldn't unconditionally wish it for others, if it's avoidable, that they also follow the same path.

A similar debate took place within one of the religious gay men's focus groups when one participant stated that in order to avoid the suspicion of pursuing gay propaganda or being too provocative, LGBT issues should be presented in a neutral way. However, in the course of the discussion neutrality was placed into an unexpected context of presenting gay sex as a potential source of pleasure:

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Káleb (29 years old): There should be a neutral way to talk about this.

Researcher: What do you mean by neutral?

Káleb: Just informing them that there is homosexuality and there are gay and lesbian people in a non-value-judgemental way. … I mean that we shouldn't aim for too much [for example] that it should be included into the National Core Curriculum, and it should be talked about in X number of classes in such and such a way. I just wouldn't like to force thousands of teachers to promote homosexuality in the classroom.

Researcher: In this context references to promoting homosexuality or gay propaganda often occur. You have just mentioned it. What do you mean exactly?

Káleb: I mean that if I am a 15 to 16 year old student I should have a chance to encounter this topic in a neutral way and receive information about it … I wouldn't say that it's so crucial in someone's personality development as gay but I wouldn't think either that it should be propagated by taking a positive stance …

Researcher: What would a positive stance be?

Káleb: If a teacher openly celebrates that it's really very much OK to be gay, and would extinguish all homophobes in the class that it's not allowed… I am saying this from the standpoint of someone who is still unsure, who doesn't know anything about it at all.

Becalél (32 years old): This is why I told you my story in such a detailed way to highlight that it was the interest of the pupils that sparked a discussion, they wanted an explanation [in the course of a HIV/AIDS prevention session within a sex education class], they were the ones who wanted to know why gay men get into anal sex practices and what is the physiological reason that makes these acts enjoyable for them … So where is value judgement in this situation? And where is gay propaganda? They [pupils] were just presented with a piece of neutral information that this can be a source of pleasure. It's a fact, isn't it? So actually the question is how much information you want to keep concealed from them.

Researcher: So how should it be done in your view?

Becalél: In the secondary school … [because] in the elementary school it would easily become a laughing matter. In the secondary school year students already have some experiences, especially nowadays, and especially if it's about sexuality because as far as I know it's mandatory to cover the topic of sexuality somehow in one way or another. And it shouldn't be a separate class [about homosexuality] but it should be integrated into sex education. And perhaps the extent of the time devoted to this topic shouldn't exactly reflect the 7% proportion of homosexuals in the general population. But it should be integrated somehow … in a smooth way that we human beings are capable of having a diverse sex life.

Káleb: I agree completely. Actually I had exactly the same thing in mind: in secondary school you have sex education anyway so there should be space to talk about human sexuality, including gayness and transsexuality, and everything that belongs to it …

This debate can also illustrate that inclusion of homosexuality-related topics in sex education classes was a widespread idea among not only the heterosexual

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students but also the LGBT respondents although the content and quality of sex education that our participants encountered during their school years seemed to be far from satisfactory. A religious gay man reported on his sex education class experience in the following way:

> In the last year of the [religious] secondary school we had one such class. They thought that at the age of 18 we were not aware of how these things work, but the religious nurse who gave the class didn't really dare to be more explicit than saying that masturbation is no good, and instead we should run two circles (Lapulevél, 25 years old).

A lesbian respondent interpreted sexual education in a broader context, including diversity issues but she also emphasised the role of the educators. Much can depend on whether they are sensitive, open-minded and well prepared:

> This issue should be addressed within sex education … but it should be taught as part of a broader approach that it doesn't matter what the skin colour, the religion, the sexual orientation of people are, they are, we are, all human beings. I remember an interesting case: one of my relatives works as an educational consultant who studied a lot of psychology and pedagogy, and once when I was still in the closet we had a talk. She mentioned that there was a parent who turned to her for advice because the parent thought that perhaps the child might be attracted to same-sex partners. My relative was absolutely outraged about this; she said that there was no such thing as being gay, there are only those who cannot let this phase pass. I asked her: is it like having the flu? It will pass, huh! I was shocked about this narrow-minded approach … and what made it even worse is that she was a specialist in the educational field with a lot of degrees and distinction, not to mention the fact the she was a relative of mine. (Kriszta, 35 years old)

Concerning the right age to introduce these topics to students, most LGBT respondents expressed the opinion that it would be good to start speaking about these issues during the elementary school years and then returning to them from time to time in ways that are appropriate for the specific age groups and circumstances of the students. This can be seen as a novel approach in two respects. On the one hand, according to previous European findings (Takács 2006) a one-off discussion is the dominant model of addressing homosexuality at school, which can reinforce the idea that it is a marginal and controversial issue, a problem in need of a solution. On the other hand, it can also reflect a need felt by our LGBT respondents to break with the monolithically heteronormative presentation of everyday life in school during adolescence. In fact, in one of our lesbian focus groups' participants discussed the idea that children can encounter these issues from a very early age:

> *Szabi* (43 years old): I know about cases when a boy asked the teacher what to do because he thinks he's gay, but he was sent away that there is no need to go anywhere, you will grow out of it, and if you won't, it isn't a problem either.

> *Borbála* (45): I think it's an important point, because in the schools there are school nurses and psychologists, but there isn't anyone there who would help in the secondary school if one thinks that he or she is gay or lesbian … I even had the idea to start a school for only gay pupils and teachers …

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> *Szabi*: It's already a topic of discussion among kindergarten kids. In the case of my son, who was brought up by two women, I pretended that he cannot grasp anything from it. [Then he went to kindergarten] and after a few weeks he asked me: you are surely not a faggot, are you? It must have a very pejorative meaning already in the kindergarten. And it's becoming ingrained into children, and especially those who are somehow personally involved, they have to struggle for years to be able to cope with the negative images, indoctrinated into them … they don't even know what it's exactly but it's already clear that it must be something very wrong.

Parental resistance in the context of introducing LGBT topics at school was not discussed in a very detailed way among LGBT respondents. Mainly the gay teacher group members referred to the role parents can play in keeping homosexuality out of school, especially by voting with their feet and taking their child to another school, while the maintenance costs of most Hungarian public schools are covered by normative state contribution, which is determined by the number of students enrolled in a school. In one of the lesbian focus groups, which included one lesbian teacher, participants pointed out that a certain level of parents' awareness-raising might be achieved through the children. Additionally, the importance of including LGBT issues into the official curriculum was emphasised:

> *Borbála* (45 years old): Children can also shape parents' views. Children can learn a certain approach, and then they can influence their parents. And if parents don't want to be shaped then children will leave, when they are 18–20, they will say, thanks a lot, I have had enough now …

> *Dinnye* (21): I think it would lead to a scandal, if children go home and tell their mum that today at school we had a discussion about how nice it can be if two gay people adopt a child, fancy that! And the parent asks immediately, which one [teacher] was it? I will go to see him and tip the table over him.

> *Borbála*: Out of ten how many parents would go into the school to complain? What do you think? Perhaps two. And if it's part of the curricula, parents can't do anything.

3.2. Coming out at School

None of our teacher trainee respondents considered the possibility that LGBT topics could be brought to school by one or some of their students coming out as lesbian or gay. However, when they were asked what they would do in such a situation, after an initial phase of astonishment (this possibility has never occurred to me!), they started to consider it as a realistic option for which they should be prepared, even if it did not seem to be part of their professional training.

Heterosexual students had divided opinions about openly lesbian or gay teachers, where openness always had a sexual connotation. For example, talking about the fact that one has a same-sex partner was interpreted as a somewhat indecent way to disclose intimate matters, while references to one's marital status

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or having a different-sex partner was not seen as a private matter to be kept secret. This double standard was best illustrated by the view that equated the mention of a teacher's non-heterosexual orientation with reports on a heterosexual teacher's sexual acts:

> It's like I wouldn't talk about how it [sex] went last night, either … if I as a heterosexual would be asked, how was it last night with your husband, teacher? I wouldn't answer because it belongs to my private sphere. (Janka, 22 years old)

> It's not a problem until it doesn't turn out, well, from a professional point of view. It doesn't matter what they do in their private lives, if they're able to leave these aspects outside the school. … And in some cases it can even be seen as an advantage, in the case of encountering a student of the same [gay] type. But it shouldn't be like advertising. (Alma, 23 years old)

Another female student explained that she wouldn't disclose her lesbian orientation because this would put her in a 'queer fish' position, where similar to stigmatising processes (Goffman 1963), one 'peculiar' aspect of her life would overshadow all other aspects of being a teacher. The unwanted distinctiveness of a 'minority person' entails, in her view, that in the eyes of others she becomes the representative of a whole social minority who should be ready face extensive inquiry into her whole life. Nevertheless, she could not decide whether facing never-ending questions about lesbians or hiding one's lesbianism is the more unpleasant experience.

In general, students were not very familiar with the details of the existing equal treatment legislation regarding the rights of lesbian and gay teachers as employees, but they thought it was probably not very easy to fire teachers solely on the ground of their sexual orientation. No-one knew about cases of overt discrimination affecting LGBT teachers, but no-one knew any openly LGBT teachers, either. In this context religious schools were mentioned as exceptions, but even in a religious school there were many other possible excuses for getting rid of those teachers, including LGBT teachers, who are considered unfit to teach there.

LGBT respondents, most of whom faced the difficulties of coming out at school, see these issues from a different angle and point to the feelings of isolation they suffered at school because of the lack of representation of LGBT issues and potential role models. The knowledge that 'you are not alone, that there are many others like you', as one gay teacher stated, was seen to have very important potentially empowering effects for LGBT youth. They also shared negative coping experiences due to the ignorance and hostility of fellow students as well as teachers, often being connected to failing the expectations of behaving according to rigidly separated gender norms.

> I had a short hair cut and I was ridiculed by the others that in fact I must be a man … they threw paper bullets at me, and there were these kind of messages written on the scraps of paper: 'Did they operate you from a man? You must have a hairy chest!' (Adrien, 25 years old)

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> I can still remember when in the elementary school the form-master … wanted to teach me how to walk in a proper feminine way in front of the whole class. (Borbála, 45 years old)

LGBT participants did not know any openly LGBT teachers in elementary and secondary schools, although they could report knowing about a few openly lesbian or gay teachers in higher education, where the free choice of classes and the nature of student-teacher interactions can make it easier to 'survive' as a lesbian or gay professor. Coming out as a teacher in Hungarian schools was seen as a dangerous endeavour, by which one can risk losing moral credibility and the trust of students and parents alike. Most LGBT respondents were well aware of the protective environment created for them by the Equal Treatment Act, which was introduced in 2003, but they saw it as providing protection only at a theoretical level. They also knew about the Equal Treatment Authority, where victims of discrimination can turn for redress. One gay teacher reported that studying the homepage of the Equal Treatment Authority provided him with encouragement and hope that he could turn to them should something discriminatory happen to him. However, there was a general agreement that if they want to get rid of someone, they will do it anyway, and it was seen as very unlikely that victims of discrimination would want to return to the scene of their humiliation even in the case of a legal victory.

4. Combating Homophobia

According to a recent survey of the Hungarian Equal Treatment Authority,[13] 49% of the LGBT respondents (N=200) expressed the opinion that during the last 10 years there had been important improvements concerning the social acceptance of LGBT people in Hungary, while 23% saw not just a lack of improvement but also negative developments. The improvements included the introduction of same-sex registered partnership legislation in 2007, the establishment of the Equal Treatment Authority in 2005, and equalising the age of consent in same-sex and different-sex sexual relationships in 2002. Respondents also referred to the functioning of LGBT NGOs and informal communities as well as the annual organisation of the Gay Pride march as important positive features. On the other hand, the list of negative developments included references to the intensifying violence in society, including violent attacks against Gay Pride marches since 2007; the increasing levels of social intolerance, homophobia and xenophobia; lack of political support and the danger of reversal of those rights and legal protection that had been gained. There were also several determining factors identified, potentially contributing to the fight against social discrimination of

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[13] www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/tamop/data/MTA_1hullam.pdf.

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LGBT people, including more publicity and enlightening information on LGBT issues; the coming out of well-known people; increasing social acceptance by media, political, and educational means; rigour in applying the existing legislation, and active involvement of NGOs. Half of the respondents thought that it is primarily society that should change its mentality and behaviour in order to achieve a higher level of social integration of LGBT people, although 9% of the LGBT respondents stated that LGBT people should make more effort themselves to achieve social acceptance.

In our LGBT focus groups there was a mixture of these views, however, concerning practical ways to combat homophobia, the feeling of incapacity and powerlessness seemed to be the dominant one. For example, our religious respondents agreed that in traditional religious communities there is nothing that can be done to combat homophobia, other than leave the community. Others referred to equal treatment legislation as a nice theoretical framework, which can provide some encouragement but not much practical help in preventing discrimination.

4.1. The Discreet Charm of Coming Out

Within the religious gay focus groups, participants emphasised the importance of presenting a personal 'good example' in order to be accepted. Presenting good individual models of 'normal gays' was an important theme in the other gay focus groups, and was seen as a distancing strategy from the 'ass shaking, promiscuous, stereotypical' (Gyuri, aged 32) non-normal gays, who get media attention all too often.

The presentation of good personal examples, however, had to happen in a fixed sequence: first one had to create a general good impression and only then could he admit that he was gay. This rather opportunistic approach, reflecting a majority-oriented minority position, also implies that not everyone deserves acceptance, only those who have first proved themselves to be 'good enough':

> *Orlando* (48 years old): If first they get to know me as a person and like me, and then they hear that I am gay, I will be accepted, but the other way around … I'm not sure.

> *BP* (33): I agree. First you're just a colleague, just a person, then a cool person, then a friend, and in half a year or two years time it turns out that you are gay, then it's OK. Otherwise if you start with it that you're gay, they will keep a distance and don't want to become your friends.

There were only a few gay men who reported that their coming out was not influenced by the above considerations:

> I don't like this approach that first I should be known and liked by people and then I can tell them that I'm gay … in my view, if they didn't know that I was gay, they didn't really know me … because knowing me includes that I'm gay … and of course, it doesn't start with an announcement like, a minute of silence, please, I want to make an

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announcement … but more like between the lines … and I'm over it the sooner the better. (Laci, 36 years old)

In this context coming out was interpreted as a form of self-protection from minority stress (Meyer 1995) and unnecessary loss of energy. This approach was based on the realisation that while secrecy can contribute to the maintenance of one's social integrity by helping to avoid stigmatisation, at the same time it can also have serious negative consequences, including stress deriving from information management and leading a double life.

Among lesbian respondents coming out issues were perhaps less emphasised than among gay men, as one of them explained:

This is how women in general are, they don't necessarily want to appear publicly, thus they can function very well even if they have a husband and children, and they can still have a girlfriend at the same time. (Szabi, 45 years old)

4.2. Legal and Political Fronts

Most of our respondents knew and acknowledged the advantages provided by the existing legislative framework, including same-sex registered partnership and equal treatment legislation. One gay man, for example, pointed out that he and his partner combat homophobia by demonstrating with their lifestyle:

We've been living together for many years, we've also registered when it became possible, and this way we were able to erode, at least a bit, the cliché that gays live by themselves for themselves (Becalél, 32 years old).

Lesbian respondents were, however, less satisfied with the existing legal framework, especially those who had or wanted to have children, and interpreted the lack of equality in the field of family law as a violation of children's rights. One of them explained:

We have registered partnership, but who knows for how long? On the other hand, by registering you exclude yourselves from the legal possibilities of raising children. Same-sex partners can't adopt the children of each other either … one would think that once registered partnership is introduced, it will be coherently followed by providing rights to be able to raise children together … but no, it won't happen. What can I do? I can sign petitions … so it will be easier for them to find me when they want to shoot us into the Danube … and as Hungarian society becomes increasingly impoverished things will get even worse. (Ivett, 29 years old)[14]

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[14] In 2007, the Gay Pride march, for the first time in 11 years, was violently attacked by extreme right wing supporters, who kept shouting 'Jews into the Danube, faggots to follow!' a reference to shooting Jewish people into the Danube by the Nazis in Budapest during the Second World War. Since 2007 the joint reference to 'dirty faggots, dirty Jews' became a kind of slogan of neo-Nazi anti-gay protestors.

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Another lesbian woman added:

> I don't know what can be done officially but I'd like to know, and I'd like to do something about it … increasing visibility at the political level that would be a good solution … but I'm afraid that the present situation is worse than it was a few years ago, and most probably it will get even worse. (Conny, 24 years old).

Many of our respondents agreed that one of the few things that can be done in the present situation is 'not voting for the extreme right' (Alice, aged 33).

5. Conclusion

'Properly' gendered behaviour was shown to be a core issue in an inherently homophobic socio-cultural discourse, prescribed by heteronormative socialisation, while (perceived) gender non-conformity and its social consequences provided a strong link between homophobia, transphobia, and genderphobia. Recognition of the socially constructed nature of gendered disadvantage can make it easy to detect multiple forms of discrimination in a patriarchal society such as present-day Hungary. Similarly, recognising the political interests invested in keeping certain segments of society in disadvantaged position can make it easy to identify intents to intervene in other people's lives, mostly on the basis of moral and/or religious arguments.

In a previous collection of empirical research on everyday life of LGBT people in Eastern Europe it was stated that 'the diverse manifestations of social and cultural homophobia still seems to be a unifying experience for the majority of LGBT people' (Takács and Kuhar 2007:12). Our present findings, especially those connected to the field of education, fit well into this framework. The school environment was pictured as part of a broader men-centred, white, heteronormative social space, which can have serious disempowering effects on young LGBT people. The silencing of LGBT issues at school, perceived as a general experience, was seen by the LGBT participants as contributing to potential disadvantages of LGBT people at a young age by threatening their developing identity and self-esteem. Thus breaking with the uniformly heteronormative presentation of everyday life in school was often mentioned as a desired option.

Accounts of heterosexual students reflected missing competences in their professional training which provides no practical guidelines and an individualised model of epistemology concerning homosexuality and homophobia. Consequently, solutions at the institutional level, such as safe school programmes, were not considered at all. Similarly, the possibility of having a gay student in one's class has never occurred to most students of education, either. They also seemed to apply a double standard, when references to having a same-sex partner were interpreted as a rather indecent way to disclose intimate matters, while references to one's (heterosexual) marital status or having a different-sex partner was not.

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Homophobia and the Heteronorm in Hungary

Even for the 'most tolerant' students same-sex family issues constituted the border of the 'normal functioning of society' to be protected, thus proving Gregory Herek's view on the intimate connection of sexual stigma with same-sex relationships (2011:414):

> Like sexual orientation, sexual stigma is also about relationships. Whereas enactments of sexual stigma (eg, antigay discrimination, violence) typically target individuals, they are based on those individuals' actual, imagined, or desired relationships with others of their same sex.

LGBT respondents were characterised by a certain level of caution or conservatism, reflecting perhaps a self-justifying ego-protection strategy, when emphasising the importance of presenting LGBT issues at the 'right age' and the 'right way', and referring to the danger that pupils' curiosity might be aroused by talking about homosexuality at school. Sex education seemed to be an appropriate context, favoured by heterosexual and non-heterosexual respondents alike, to present LGBT issues. However, here sex education was understood to cover not only biology of reproduction and/or pleasure but also human diversity issues.

One of the central themes recurring mostly in the gay focus group sessions was the distinction between the 'normal' and the 'extreme' ways to be gay, where normal behaviour was most often equated with hiding expressions of sexual preferences. Consequently, openly gay activists could be seen by definition as acting non-normally, leading to a new division between 'extreme activists' and ordinary people, overshadowing the conventional heterosexual-homosexual divide.

Individualised notions of homosexuality, focusing on specific features of individuals to be kept private, which dominated all focus group sessions, also seemed to foster the notion that social acceptance of LGBT people is in inverse proportion to their social visibility. Thus instead of concentrating on the achievement of full citizenship by claiming equal rights, a more convenient 'don't ask—don't tell—don't bother' strategy was used by many LGBT participants in a context where the legal or structural definitions of homophobia were replaced by an approach focusing on ordinary homophobia manifested mainly in *tiny annoying things* which one can quite easily get used to or avoid. These signs of internalised homophobia (or externalised heteronormativity?) clearly illustrate that at least for a while, gender-conventional lesbians and gays are likely 'to cause less trouble' and be easier to integrate not only into (Hungarian) society at large but also into certain segments of the LGBT population.