RSF
RIEK STIENSTRA FONDS

WOMEN-LOVING-WOMEN IN AFRICA AND ASIA

TRANS/SIGN
REPORT OF RESEARCH FINDINGS
EDITED BY SASKIA E. WIERINGA

Hivos people unlimited

FORDFOUNDATION

mamacash (she changes the world)

kartini asia

WOMEN-LOVING-WOMEN IN AFRICA AND ASIA

TRANS/SIGN

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AMSTERDAM/DEN HAAG 2011

RIEK STIENSTRA FUND
KARTINI ASIA NETWORK
HIVOS
MAMA CASH
THE FORD FOUNDATION

Preface

This report is the result of the work of an amazing group of women from Asia and Africa who came together to research into the conditions of women in same-sex relations in their countries. With great determination and courage they set about revealing the many obstacles, humiliations and indignities these women face. They uncovered not only pain, invisibility and silence, but also the pleasures of bonding and the beauty of love.

As a team we learnt from each other by sharing our experiences, hopes and frustrations. We all grew in this process, personally, and in the work all of us are doing to make the planet a safer and more welcoming space for women living a life with same-sex desires and love. We, the coordinators of this project, dedicate this report in the first place to all the brave researchers who carried out the painstaking work of documenting the often invisible lives of women in same-sex relations. Thank you all for your courage, your skills and the dedication you brought to this project. Secondly the report is dedicated to all the narrators with whom our researchers worked, who shared their experiences with us and from who we learnt the enormous diversity of the world of women- loving-women.

This report is also a testimony to the vision of Riek Stienstra. Not only was she a pioneer in the struggle for lesbian and gay rights in The Netherlands, she also realised that there was a deep need for research on the lives of lesbian women elsewhere in the world. She actively supported the chair on Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations at the University of Amsterdam, the first chair on the topic worldwide. Since 2006 Saskia Wieringa is the holder of this chair. Riek bequeathed her estate to partly fund this project. We regret it deeply that she is no longer with us and is unable to read the results of this research. We also thank Paul Jansen from Hivos and Esther Vonk from Mama Cash who shared Riek's vision and made it possible to release the funds to the Kartini Asia Network, which is co-ordinated by Nursyahbani Katjasungkana. This Network provided the other half of the research funds, supported by the research work carried out with the help of funding from Hivos (again!) and the Ford Foundation. Barbara Klugman has to be especially mentioned for her unwavering faith in the Kartini Asia Network. For this project we set up the Trans/sign network in which apart from those who are already mentioned above also Evelyn Blackwood participates. We are also indebted to the co-ordinators of the sexuality theme of the Kartini Asia Network, Abha Bhaiya and Tesa de Vela. Further we thank Manda Gryba, who managed to edit the different final reports into a coherent whole. Above all we, as co-ordinators of the research process, thank each other for our mutual support and dedication to the principle that research and advocacy together, if implemented with due respect for the specificities of each can work towards eliminating the many injustices women and particularly women with same-sex desires, experience.

This report only details the research process and summarizes the findings. As such it deals only with the first phase of the process. The researchers of this project all have ambitions to produce more products, such as books, brochures, articles, films, or other audiovisual items, to continue the fight for sexual justice.

Nursyahbani Katjasungkana
Saskia Wieringa

Riek Stienstra (1942–2007)

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Chapter 1

TRANS/SIGN: An introduction

Prepared by:
Prof. Dr Saskia E. Wieringa
Coordinator TRANS/SIGN

Executive Summary

The call for this research resulted in 27 applications, of which 11 projects were selected, three in Southern Africa, one in Central Asia and seven in other Asian countries. The funds for this project came from the Riek Stienstra fund (jointly managed by Hivos and MamaCash) and the Kartini Asia Network (KAN), the sexuality theme of which was funded by the Ford Foundation and Hivos. The research was academically coordinated by Saskia Wieringa, who holds the chair of Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Crossculturally at the University of Amsterdam and managed by Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, the coordinator of KAN. As the funds were very limited for such an ambitious project, from the start the groups managed their work carefully. Much research was done voluntarily, the money being spent only on expenses, such as travelling to remote parts of the country to collect interviews.

Some researchers had already received some training on sexuality studies and oral history, for instance, through the three training courses the KAN network conducted in India and Indonesia. For most this was the first research experience on women's same-sex relations, and for all oral history was a novel technique. The research team first came together in Hanoi, April 2009, in the framework of the biannual conference of the International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Society and Culture, in which the coordinators of the sexuality theme of the KAN (Abha Bhaiya, Tesa de Vela and the TRANS/SIGN research coordinator) participate in various functions (the TRANS/SIGN research coordinator is a past president).

In Hanoi the researchers received preliminary training on theories of sexuality and fieldwork techniques, such as oral history and participant observation. The outlines of the research plans were drafted based on the unique needs of each group. Thereafter, the coordinator and the researchers maintained contact through email. First, the research designs were completed, halfway a progress report was produced, and throughout the year experiences were shared.

Major themes in the research were female masculinity, the silencing and invisibility of Women-Loving-Women (WLW), and attempts at organizing on the basis of non-normative sexualities. An overriding research theme was violence. More than 300 participants were interviewed in 14 different languages. In the course of this project, one lesbian women's organization was set up (Surabaya). In Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Central Asia, the focus of the investigation was on organizing WLW. In three countries, Bangladesh, Botswana and Sri Lanka, this was the first research done on lesbian women. The projects in Jakarta and Johannesburg focused on women who in various ways identified as masculine, whereas the Mumbai project focused on the multiple gendered realities of people born female. The researcher in the Pretoria project collected stories of lesbian women who faced mental distress.

In September 2010 the final workshop was held in Pretoria. Research results and the methodology used were shared. A three year advocacy plan on the basis of the research findings was drafted.

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Background of TRANS/SIGN

TRANS/SIGN, a global network for the study of trans/sexualities crossculturally, was set up in 2008 to promote the study of trans/sexualities. Its coordinators are Prof. Dr Saskia E. Wieringa, chair (University of Amsterdam and Kartini Asia Network), Prof. Dr Evelyn Blackwood (Purdue University, USA), Nursyahbani Katjasungkana (Kartini Asia Network, Indonesia), Esther Vonk (Mama Cash, the Netherlands), and Paul Jansen (Hivos, the Netherlands).

TRANS/SIGN is a network of academic scholars, policy advocates and research-minded activists. The composition of its steering committee reflects these three streams. Its two major institutional partners are the Kartini Asia Network, which has its secretariat in Jakarta, and the Riek Stienstra Foundation, which is located in The Netherlands and which in turn is a cooperation between the Hivos Foundation and MamaCash. The secretariat of TRANS/SIGN is located in Jakarta, in the Kartini office. The present chair of TRANS/SIGN is also the present secretary of the Board of the Kartini Asia Network.

The mission of TRANS/SIGN is to stimulate and implement social science research linked to advocacy on same-sex (lesbian), transgender and queer sexualities and genders (female-bodied or female-born), working from a women's/human/sexual rights perspective. It also aims to build an international community of researchers and research-minded activists around these issues with the objectives of stimulating the exchange of information on research and advocacy and of encouraging high quality research through enhancing the research capacities of all involved.

1. Introduction

1.1. Justification

The past decades have seen the development of a women's human/sexual rights discourse, as well as an increasing struggle by same-sex or transgender/transsexual communities for their rights. Scholarship on these issues is growing, but in many instances it is still marginalized, particularly for female-bodied persons. Even as a global gay movement has brought increased visibility and attention to gays, lesbians, and transgendered people, it has erased the multiplicity of same-sex and queer identities and subjectivities across the world. This erasure is even more detrimental to women/female-bodied individuals because the expectation of a homogeneous gay culture neglects the differences that operate on female bodies to produce their identities and subjectivities.

The Chair on Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Crossculturally at the University of Amsterdam, the first of its kind globally, was created in 2006 to address the erasure and invisibility of female-bodied sexualities and genders. It is occupied by the present chair of TRANS/SIGN.

TRANS/SIGN interrogates the construction of sexual normalcy or heteronormative orthodoxy in a global world and promotes advocacy to increase the agency of those who oppose compulsory and normative heterosexuality. Heteronormativity works in a double-edged way. It disciplines those inside and it marginalizes and stigmatizes those outside of its borders. Non-heteronormative persons see themselves in relation to the heteronormative society that excludes them, but rarely do they analyze the commonalities in the strategies by which they are 'othered', both from a crosscultual perspective and from the perspective of other sexually marginalized people.

TRANS/SIGN supports research that addresses the ways same-sex (lesbian), transgender, and queer sexualities and genders (female-bodied or female-born, hereafter trans) identities and subjectivities are constructed; their social, economic, sexual, and religious agency; and the embodiment of that agency, as well as the role of the state, religion, and NGOs in its production. The power of 'normalcy', or heteronomative orthodoxy, and the symbolic violence this entails for these marginalized persons needs to be analytically deconstructed in order for effective actions to be built. Relatedly, the possibilities of social and sexual agency will be explored, particularly as it concerns resistance that exceeds the bounds of the socio-cultural context in which heteronormativity is lived. Ultimately the research done through TRANS/SIGN will contribute to the struggle for sexual rights for marginalized groups, as well as for those living within the norm.

The title of the present research project: Researching Women-Loving Women in Africa and Asia. This report covers the first activity of TRANS/SIGN: a research/advocacy project in Asia and Africa with groups working on women's/sexual rights issues. The research phase of this project was carried out in the years 2009-2010. As an outcome of this project a three years advocacy phase is proposed which is outlined below.

A second activity is the bringing out of a book on Female Masculinities. Some of the researchers of the present project will contribute chapters to this book. Another outcome of this research, in line with the objectives of TRANS/SIGN, is increasing the visibility of

transpeople and Women-loving-Women by organizing panels in international conferences or international symposia on topics related to female non-normative sexualities. In 2011 and 2012 panels will be proposed in which TRANS/SIGN researchers will participate for two international conferences, the upcoming International Association for the Study of Sexuality, Culture and Society (IASSCS) conference in July 2011 in Madrid, and the conference of Discursive Contestations on transgender/intersex persons in Amsterdam, Winter 2011/2012, as well as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) conference in 2012..

1.2. Objectives

1. To bring together a group of Asian and African researchers who are linked to women's/sexual rights groups and who want to do research to support their advocacy on women's/sexual rights.

2. To train them at the VIIth IASSCS congress (April 2009, Hanoi) in theories and methodologies of research on sexualities;

3. To assist them in developing a research design based on their own context;

4. To assist them during their fieldwork;

5. To assist them in analyzing and presenting their data in order to help build a campaign on women's/sexual rights.

6. To produce various advocacy tools to advance women's sexual rights.

1.3. List of accepted proposals

1. Region: Botswana

   Researcher: Lorraine Setuke

   Group: LEGABIBO

   Topic: Factors Contributing to the Marginalization of the Lesbian, Bisexual and WSW Community in Botswana

2. Region: Central Asia

   Primary researcher: Anna Kirey

   Group: Labrys

   Topic: Organizing WLW in Central Asia

3. Region: India

   Primary researcher: Subhagata Ghosh

   Group: Sappho for Equality

   Topic: Mapping Violence in the Lives of sexually marginalized women in India.

4. Region: India

   Group: Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA)

   Primary researcher: Shalini Mahajan

   Topic: Breaking the Binary.

5. Region: Indonesia

   Primary researcher: Siti Mazfadiah

   Group: Gender and Health Study Club (GHSC), University of Surabaya

   Topic: Organizing lesbians in Surabaya

6. Region: Indonesia

   Primary researcher: Sri Agustine

   Group: Ardhanary Institute

   Topic: Transgender Females in Jakarta

7. Region: The Philippines

   Primary researcher: Tesa de Vela

   Group: Isis International

   Topic: Surfacing Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Women's Issues in the Philippines.

8. Region: Bangladesh

   Researcher: Hasna Hena

   Group: Shawprova

   Topic: Women Loving Women in Bangladesh: Issues and Concerns.

9. Region: South Africa

   Researcher: Delene van Dyk

   Group: OUT (LGBT) Wellbeing

   Topic: The psycho-social-sexual Experiences of Lesbian Women in Tshwane (Pretoria)

10. Region: South Africa

    Researcher: Nomancotsho Pakade

    Group: Behind the Mask

    Topic: Township Perceptions of the Black Butch Lesbian Identity

11. Region: Sri Lanka

    Researcher: Kaushalya Perera

    Group: Women's Support Group

    Topic: Queering Women's Oral History in Sri Lanka.

1.4. Schedule of activities

- Call for proposals drafted and distributed to interested groups (December 2008)
- Selection of the proposals (January 2009)
- Training workshop following the IASSCS conference (April 2009)
- Assist the researchers in their fieldwork (May 2009 to August 2010)
- Half yearly report (Dec 2009-Jan 2010)

- Final workshop to help analyze the data, September 2010, in Pretoria.

- An advocacy campaign on the basis of the research results, 2011-2013

1.5. Hanoi workshop

In April 2009 a training workshop was organized jointly with the IASSCS, following the seventh biannual conference in Hanoi. Besides the TRANS/SIGN researchers, other fellows selected by the IASSCS participated in this 10 days' training. The topics included general sexuality studies and research methods on sexuality. Time was set aside to draft the research plans of the 11 selected TRANS/SIGN proposals.

The training was generally positively assessed. However, in the final evaluation of the present project, it was felt that given the short time, it would have been better to focus specifically on issues directly related to the TRANS/SIGN research topics and oral history. After returning home the drafts of the research plans were discussed with the other members of the research teams or with the coordinators of the groups to which the TRANS/SIGN researchers belonged. In an email exchange they were finalized with the TRANS/SIGN academic project coordinator and after approval the first installment was disbursed.

1.6. Research process

Email contact continued during the research phase. By December, when the half yearly report was due, it became clear that a few projects were lagging behind, but that the others were on schedule and producing interesting results. Due to the delays and the World Cup of soccer in June 2010 in Africa it was decided to postpone the final workshop to September 2010. This also ensured that the projects that got on steam late were able to show good results.

Though some important issues were discussed in the email exchange, such as ethics, the structure of the report, coding and analysis, overall it was found that the long period in which there was no face to face contact between the researchers and with the project coordinator was too long. It would have been better if a midterm workshop could have been held, or a series of smaller regional workshops with the coordinator. However, due to financial and time constraints this was not possible. The final workshop proved to be a valuable venue for the exchange of research results and for the bonding of the group.

2. Methodology

Most projects used extensive oral history interviews. These interviews were held in 14 languages: English, Afrikaans, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Sinhala, Russian, Indonesian, Setswana, Tagalog; in very few cases translators were used.

Most projects used the snowballing method to contact interviewees. In the Pretoria project it proved very difficult to find women able to talk about their mental health (also as the clients of the researcher could not be used, for issues of confidentiality). Focus group discussions were held in most projects. In a few cases participant observation was used (Johannesburg, Surabaya, Jakarta). The Sri Lankan project aimed at building a database on issues related to queer women which will be accessible by internet.

Particularly the Mumbai-based team engaged in intensive theoretical discussions on gender and sexual identity prior to fieldwork. In most other cases, only limited use was made of existing scholarly material. The material collected in Botswana and by the Mumbai and Kolkata-based teams can be used for quantification. In most other cases life stories are the core of the material.

The teams in Central Asia, the Philippines and Surabaya focused on organizing women on the basis of non-normative sexuality. Here, activists were interviewed, including those from feminist organizations. The Surabaya team actually organized activities for and with lesbians, which was so successful that they ultimately set up their own organization for lesbians as the original university-based group felt it impossible to cater to all their needs.

In most cases the transcribed interviews were returned to the respondents for final consent, sometimes resulting in extensive rewriting of parts of the original interview.

National contexts played an important role. In Sri Lanka, militarized as a result of the war with the Tamils which was only ended last year (after a lot of bloodshed), lesbians and gays are singled out for surveillance. In Central Asia, several countries such as Uzbekistan are characterized by heavy repression by state agencies. Even in South Africa, with its progressive constitution, lesbian women are faced with hostility (the rate of population that is considered homophobic is 85%).

Buddhist (Sri Lanka), Hindu (India), Catholic (the Philippines), and Muslim (Indonesia) fundamentalisms are on the rise and result in increasing hostility against gays and lesbians; for instance, pressurizing women to abide by traditional dress codes (saris, veils). The attack on the organizers and participants of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intesex Association (ILGA) Asia conference in Surabaya in March 2010 resulted in decreased interest in the activities organized for and by lesbian women in that city.

In most cases the researchers were part of the community they researched. That meant that they had already built confidence and had access to interviewees. In Bangladesh and Surabaya lesbian groups were set up in the wake of this research. Yet, in both South African studies, it was found that it was difficult to recruit narrators. This was partly attributed to the rise of ‘corrective’ (or rather punitive) rapes in the townships and the silence surrounding lesbians facing psychological issues.

Many researchers worked in teams (Mumbai, Kolkata, Jakarta, the Philippines, Central Asia, Surabaya), while in other cases research was carried out by lone researchers (both projects in South Africa, Botswana, Bangladesh). The Sri Lankan researcher was part of a team but carried out the research mostly on her own. The support of the team members was highly appreciated; single researchers found it difficult to get the support they needed. Email contact with the other project members was not considered sufficient to help them solve the many problems they faced adequately.

The projects focusing on female-to-male's (FTM) (such as in Jakarta, Johannesburg) had to contend with the invisibility of FTM issues in 'politically correct' feminist –lesbian groups. In Bangladesh, Botswana, and some of the Central Asian countries, this research project recorded for the first time the lives and issues of lesbian (and bisexual) women. The pioneering work of the researchers is amongst others intended to 'prove' that lesbians exist, and to create a baseline, inventarizing the (internalized) homophobia they face.

In most cases the interviewees consented to have their stories recorded. However, in Botswana only five narrators agreed to a taped interview. In most cases the respondents understood fully the implications of their shared stories 'becoming public'. Only in some cases the researchers felt they had to protect the respondents and withhold names or other information. In the training workshop in Hanoi a discussion was held on 'how informed is informed consent?' This topic was again discussed in the Pretoria final workshop.

The Botswana and Johannesburg researchers excluded transmen from their work, as they wanted to focus on same-sex identified women. They found, however, that this made their research more difficult, as butches were more and more adopting a trans identity.

The issue of 'sex in the field' was also discussed in the Hanoi workshop. It was agreed that this was unethical, just as it is for people engaged in medical or psychological services. Only one researcher reported that some of her narrators came on to her.

Most studies used an interview guide and held free flowing conversations on the topics listed. Only the Botswana researcher drew up an extensive questionnaire, which provided ample room for extensive answers to open questions. Some teams had already completed the coding before the Pretoria workshop. Others were assisted in doing so during the workshop.

Almost all researchers working on violence were deeply affected by the stories they collected, some of them doubly so as they had faced violence themselves. In the Indian projects the members of the teams gave each other intervision after sharing particular violent narrations. Yet more counseling may be needed in the future.

3. Major findings

The final research reports are contained in this final report. Overriding concerns were the invisibility of lesbians, FTMs and male-identified women and the violence they experienced from a young age onwards. Particularly, family violence and marginalization at schools came out in the majority of reports. Many narrators told stories of how they left home at a young age as they received various forms of abuse. Others dropped out of school early and entered a hostile labour market without sufficient qualifications. Due to internalized homophobia, self-denial, and other ways in which lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered women are ignored or publicly minimizes their concerns, it was often hard to organize them. State repression and mounting fundamentalisms of various sorts added to their invisibility.

The projects that focused on organizing WLW or transmen found that different tools and methods must be used for these two categories. Both in Surabaya and Central Asia it was clear that the interviewees preferred informal organizations to formal ones, partly due to the high risk of formal organizing. But those activists engaged in formal LBT organizations were on the whole more vocal on their rights and needs than women in non-formal organizations.

As their identities earned our narrators so much pain and scorn, the issue of 'naming' came up in all individual research projects. The researchers, too, had to come to terms with this issue. There was no unanimity on definitions or self-identifications. Some were happy with the term 'lesbian', others found it a derogatory term. Again, others thought their 'native' terms for women's same-sex practices were derogatory. Women-loving Women (WLW) was often used and was much preferred to the term Women having Sex with Women (WSW), which popped up in the wake of the concerns of gay men in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Only few women identified as 'queer' (notably the LABIA research team). Male-identified women who have studied abroad or who have been exposed to western debates on transgender issues tend to shift their identities from 'butch' (or whatever other term they might use) to trans. Female-bodied persons in butch-femme relationships might define their relationships as heterosexual. Transmen are often invisible. In several countries it was reported that the term 'trans' usually refers to transwomen, or male-to-female (MTF) persons, only.

Health concerns were also discussed. In several cases it was clear that a HIV infection was caused by same-sex practices. Mental health was a major issue. Many narrators were traumatized by the violence and social hostility they faced. Religious intolerance of LBT issues often resulted in guilt feelings. The self hate caused by the violence with which they were confronted in many cases led to abusive relationship patterns. Many narrators reported having attempted or contemplated suicide (for example, in the LABIA study 50% of the interviewees).

Other forms of abuse reported were humiliation at school, abuse within the community or on the streets, blackmail, accusations of 'kidnapping', and forced marriages. The Sappho project carried out a mapping exercise of violence against WLW in India which yielded a staggering number of forms of violence and abuse and violations. In South Africa and the Philippines the researchers reported a rise in the number of rapes of tomboys or butch lesbians. In the Philippines these systematic rapes yield no outcry in the community.

In several countries women's same-sex relations were penalized (Botswana, Sri Lanka) or articles in the penal code were stretched to harass women in same-sex relations. Of the countries in which research took place, only South Africa allows gay marriage. In all other countries, women in same-sex partnerships have no legal protection and do not get the same benefits heterosexually married couples receive. Lack of money and resources, particularly medical services, were other concerns voiced. In Central Asia reports were produced to feed into the shadow reports for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) committee. This helped call attention to the discrimination lesbians face in these countries. A session on the importance of using international advocacy tools given during the workshop alerted other researchers to the value of these instruments.

4. Advocacy plans

1. LEGAGIBO, Botswana

- Two day book launch and seminar in 2011
- Litigation campaign to legalize homosexuality in Botswana
- Yearly seminars
- Brochures for dissemination in schools and universities

Estimated costs: €22.000

2. Labrys, Central Asia

- Three different publications for a non-academic public: stories of lesbian activists, on the history of Labrys, on LBT organizing in several Central Asian languages
- Needs assessment in rural areas
- Four dissemination meetings per year
- Lobbying governments and training officials

Estimated costs: €41.000

3. Sappho for Equality, India

- Dissemination of research findings to various groups (lesbians, families and friends, NGOs, and greater society) in the form of advocacy kits in Bangla and English
- Publication of Bangla book
- Conference on violence against LBT women in South Asia
- Developing a software on advocacy strategies vis-à-vis the violations and violence on LBT persons that had been found out during the current research project

Estimated costs: €60.000

4. LABIA, India

- Academic book on 'Breaking the Binary' will be published in two languages (English and Hindi)
- Advocacy on the report, by working with the local communities in which the research was done

Estimated costs: €30.000

5. GHSC, University of Surabaya, Indonesia

- Program on empowering lesbian community
- Advocacy: publishing a book on research finings and book launch
- Documentation of violence on lesbians in Surabaya
- Materials for dissemination campaign
- Training for lesbian counsellors
- Organizational costs for Dipayoni

Estimated costs: €46.000

6. Ardhanary Institute, Indonesia

- Internal discussion groups
- Printing book on stories of FTMs
- Book launch
- School visits
- Documentary film

Estimated costs: €16.000

7. ISIS, the Phillipines

- Affinity Building for the Advancement of Sexual Rights: A series of inter-movement dialogues

- Say it Loud, Say it Proud: Social mainstreaming of LBT issues and concerns through information, education and communication (IEC) materials
- Transforming research findings into multi-media campaign plans
- Collaborative LBT research projects

Estimated costs: €40.000

8. Shawprova, Bangladesh

- The book of life stories in Bangla and English and articles will be used for both internal discussion and for seminars in colleges on non-normative sexualities
- Organizing 12 workshops
- Dissemination via radio and national newspapers
- Provide input into shadow report on CEDAW
- Follow up studies on vies of homosexuality in NGOs

Estimated costs: €17.000

9. OUT, South Africa

- Brochure on mental health concerns of lesbians to be used for seminars with counselors
- Three trainings per year
- Attending international academic conferences

Estimated costs: €33.000

10. Behind the Mask (BTM), South Africa

Behind the Mask will identify high schools in townships where hate crimes and violence towards LGBTI individuals are rife. We will ask for permission from school principals and the school governing bodies (SGB) to visit their schools on set days to deliver talks against bullying and abuse towards LGBTI learners, and also try to sensitize issues of homosexuality in schools.

For the long term goals, in order to avoid the high numbers of illiteracy and unemployment amongst lesbians, BTM will also attempt to identify lesbians in senior high school (Grade 11-12) through a human rights and diversity programme. This programme will be implemented via the Life Skills Course.

Estimated costs: €22.000

11. Women's Support Group, Sri Lanka

- Translate the report or Tamil
- Building a database
- Producing a book with life stories

Estimated costs: €15.000

5. TRANS/SIGN as a research group

It was felt that the TRANS/SIGN research team functioned well as a research-oriented group aimed at producing knowledge on all kinds of trans- processes and WLW. Among the positive points mentioned were the following:

- The freedom of choice on research topic; funding groups often direct the course of research. This method must be used in follow up research and advocacy
- Working with groups makes the research process more comforting.
- The connection between Africa and Asia was experienced as valuable. All the research associates agreed that there is an important connection in learning from each other in the context of intercontinental exchange.
- More regular exchanged is needed, some researchers felt alone in the middle of the process.

Online discussions of relevant articles are proposed to stimulate participation. The Kartini website can contain a blog on this. Agustine commits to working with Nur on putting up a blog on the Kartini website.

5.1. Ethical conditions and concerns

As TRANS/SIGN seeks to share their research findings, ethical concerns are a high priority. Throughout the research process, the ethical conditions pertaining to all participants in the project were discussed. Included in this discussion was:

- Advocacy product sharing must have the consent of author/publisher of original work.
- Proper citation/referencing.
- Only utilize a product with the expressed permission of author/publisher.
- Refer interested persons outside of the research to the author of the study. Do not share documents not yet made public when there is no expressed consent by the author.
- On website uploads. Put in the link to the other researchers' studies.
- If in doubt, ASK.
- As already discussed in Hanoi, romantic attachments with narrators should be avoided.

- Confidentiality in each of the individual interviews must be maintained. In case of interviews with couples researchers should not intervene and remain objective.

- Always protect respondents. Receivers of letters from deceased have ownership of letters (as inherited right).

5.2. Academics

IASSC panels, Madrid July 2011

TRANS/SIGN is committed to disseminating knowledge in a variety of forms, including within the academic field. Below are some venues where TRANS/SIGN research will be shared:

- To be coordinated by Saskia. Saskia, as convenor, will send out proposal for a Kartini TRANS/SIGN slot and inform the group.

- Proposals can either be individual and panel.

- The areas identified for discussion are: (1) Violence, (2) Organizing, (3) Education, (4) Pleasures and desires

Book on Female Masculinities co-edited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia Wieringa

- Saskia to send call for papers.

AWID conference, 2010

Kaushalya to send details to the group Kaushalya mentions AWID forum. She cites this as a site for sharing the research output. Kaushalya commits to updating on AWID and informing the group of updates.

The group meets after two years in AWID. A session after AWID is to be set for the research associates. Those who are not members can apply for membership online.

Further Studies (PhD) in Sexuality

- Seven expressed they wanted to do further studies in sexuality

5.3. Other collective proposals

To store materials collected during the research process training is needed on techniques of digitalization, and the storing of oral history materials. This could possibly be done in collaboration with Aletta experts.

6. Evaluation

The evaluation was overwhelmingly positive. The following comments were made:

- A valuable learning process. Good to see correlations with third world countries to findings in South Africa.
- Amazing accommodation in South Africa. Looking forward to what happens in the completion of studies and advocacy plan.
- Good to work in smaller group. Felt closer and more interested in the things that are happening than in Hanoi. Looking forward to keeping in touch.
- Grateful to everyone for coming in and felt the gladness in having been drawn in. Comforting to know that she has done something.
- Enthusiastic to do future work.
- Research results far overstep expectations. Hopes everyone continues the work.
- Feels like a big family. Great learning from each other. Small groups helped in making sense of the data.
- Glad that the work will continue and that the support system will continue. Felt much more bonding as a group than in Hanoi.
- Feel like she is at "home" in the group. Was once bewildered about what to do with her findings in violence, now has more structure on what to do with her findings. Likes the smaller group to know people and relate with people
- Anna: Good timing. Knows we are a group who do research, but more importantly people who will do something more with the research. Happy about own project. Learned a lot from the group, not a typical activist group. Felt the experience was much deeper. Appreciated the possibility of writing in an academic way, beside the material produced for the activists. Hopes for future interactions and meeting.
- Coordinators were thanked for taking the group through this process.

Appendix 1: Chair of Gender and Women's Same Sex Relations Crossculturally

The installation of the Chair on Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Crossculturally at the University of Amsterdam is the first of its kind globally. The Chair was established in 2006 by the Foundation for Gay and Lesbian Studies and is financed by the Hivos Foundation. It covers one day a week.

Riek Stienstra was one of the major driving forces behind the installation of the Chair on Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations Crossculturally at the University of Amsterdam. She was a member of the Foundation for Lesbian and Gay Studies in The Netherlands which established this chair. The chair is funded by Hivos.

The field of study in which the Chair by special appointment of Gender and Women's Same-Sex Relations at the University of Amsterdam moves incorporates both historical analyses of traditional and contemporary forms of women's same sex relations and cross cultural analysis of those relations within a context of globalization, hybridization and syncretization. These analyses include traditional forms such as women marriages in Africa, two-spirit people among North American Indigenous people, various forms of transgendered priests related to ancestor cults, traditional and contemporary art forms in which transgendered people play an important role, such as *reog*, a traditional dance form in East Java, and the Takarazuka Revue in Japan and various forms of sex work. These particular cultural locations are analyzed both in their local and historical contexts and in the national and transnational processes in which they are embedded. The issues dealt with include gender diversity and multiplicity, agency and women's empowerment, heteronormativity and normative heterosexuality, sexual politics in the national and international arenas, women's and sexual rights and identity formation. The research programme is located within scientific work that foregrounds processes of postcolonial nation building, globalization and hybridization, religious fundamentalism, and the implications of these processes for local communities.

The inaugural address was held in 2007. In September 2008 an international inaugural symposium was organized at the University of Amsterdam on Female Masculinities. The rationale for this conference was that gender and sexual ambiguity in female-bodied individuals has hardly been studied in a cross cultural, cross historical and transdisciplinary perspective. Most studies concern particular cultural or historical formations of female masculinity in its various manifestations (including passing women and FTM transgender identities). Female masculinity poses pertinent questions on identity, subjectivity, the body and gender, particularly the dominant forms of gender binarism. In this symposium some 20 scholars explored gender and sexual ambiguity from a crosscultural, historical and interdisciplinary perspective. Questions in relation to the mechanisms by which gender binarisms are being produced and reproduced were debated. Another set of issues related to the construction of femininity in relation to gender transgressive individuals and their negotiation of both masculinity and femininity in diverse cultural formations.

Appendix 2: Description of partners

1. Kartini, the Asian Network for Women's and Gender Studies

This all-Asian network was set up in 2000 and formally established in 2003 in Manila. The Kartini Asia Network (KAN) aims to promote women's/gender studies and gender advocacy in Asia, bringing together academics and activists working in this field. It has a feminist perspective focusing on the intersectionality of gender with other axes of difference (religion, caste, class, ethnicity and race) and promoting gender justice and economic justice. It fosters cooperation between academics and activists i.e. between women's/gender studies, women's movements and development organizations within the Asian region and with a few selected strategic partners in non-Asian countries. The philosophy is that the impact of women's/gender studies is increased if it is based on women's realities and that gender advocates can work more effectively if they are grounded in the relevant theoretical perspectives. When that synergy is created the so-called 'Triangle of Women's Empowerment' can function more effectively (Vargas and Wieringa 1998). The three corners of the Triangle of Women's Empowerment are academics, activists and the state. With academics and activists forming the base, which in constant interaction push for reform and more gender sensitive policies to be enacted by the state.

KAN aims to strengthen south-south cooperation, including at the sub-regional level, building on the available regional expertise, both within academia, research institutes and gender-based NGOs.

After the founding meeting in Manila, the first all-Asia KAN conference was held in Dalian, China, in September 2004. The conference was attended by over 100 participants from 19 countries. The significance and relevance of the network was affirmed through the exchange of experiences between academics and activists and the rich inter-Asian sharing of knowledge. In December 2004 the Indonesian chapter of the network was established in Jakarta and in 2006 the Rokeya network was set up in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Rokeya and Kartini are feminists from the same generation, the late nineteenth century, from Bengal and Indonesia respectively.

The second all-Asia KAN conference was held in Bali, from 2-5 November 2008. The theme of the conference was: the future of Asian feminisms, confronting fundamentalisms, conflict and neoliberalism. Some 200 scholars and activists from 22 countries attended this conference. A special issues of the Journal of Gender, Technology and Development on Sexualities in Asia, based on papers from the conference, appeared in the fall of 2010. An edited collection of papers on all five themes of KAN (co-edited by Nursyahbani Katgjasungkana and Saskia Wieringa) is being prepared.

The KAN has five themes:

- Women's Studies
- Fundamentalism
- Conflict resolution and VAW

- Livelihood
- Sexuality

These themes are interlinked in a shifting continuum of multiple oppressions. Major work has been going on in the sexuality theme, with a direct interface with the fundamentalism theme. The focus is on women's/human/sexual rights. A research project has been implemented on the workings of heteronormativity. This is seen to both police women and men within its boundaries (enforcing normative heterosexuality) and marginalizing those outside. This concerned a comparative research in India and Indonesia on three constituencies: widows/divorced women, sex workers, and young urban lesbians. A major theme was religion. The results are 35 in depth profiles (published in Indonesian), a media analysis, two TOT trainings and over 40 training activities at the NGO level, a manual on women's sexual rights that is available on the internet and there is a book in preparation.

2. Riek Stienstra Foundation

The Riek Stienstra Fund is committed to bringing about a world in which lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender people are guaranteed full human rights and are free to enjoy these rights. The fund supports organizations and initiatives around the world that are fighting to secure LBT rights, build communities, and gain public voice and visibility for LBT women.

The Riek Stienstra Fund is a joint initiative of Mama Cash and Hivos. The Riek Stienstra Fund is the only fund in the Netherlands – and one of the very few worldwide – devoted to granting money to groups fighting for the rights, freedom of expression, and well-being of lesbians, bisexual women and transgender people internationally. Hivos and Mama Cash developed the Riek Stienstra Fund in honour of the Dutch activist and movement leader of the same name. The Riek Stienstra Fund helps LBT rights organizations to:

- Provide safe spaces for LBT women to meet and organize without fear;
- Stand up in public for their human rights and organize to end violence against LBT women;
- Stop discrimination against LBT women in the labour market and workplace;
- Secure access to appropriate health care for LBT women;
- Ensure that LBT rights are included in the agendas of women's rights movements and LGBT movements internationally;
- Develop LBT movement leadership and regional and international networks;
- Advocate for better policies and legislation in areas such as parental rights, healthcare and equal opportunity and protection under the law; and
- Conduct research to support the above issues.

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Chapter 2

Report on the factors contributing to the marginalization of lesbian, bisexual and women who have sex with women (LBWSW) community in Botswana

Prepared by:
Lorraine Setuke
Vice Chair, Lesbians, Gays & Bisexuals of Botswana (LeGaBiBo)

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Finally, words alone cannot express the thanks I owe to my partner for encouragement, data analysis, and assistance through all the sleepless nights and shared thoughts.

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Biography

Lorraine Karabo Setuke is a progressive activist who works on issues related to lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual liberation; HIV/AIDS prevention and LBGTI's health; economic justice; and, poor children's access to education. Currently, Lorraine is studying software engineering and works as a researcher on factors contributing to the marginalization of the lesbian/bisexual/women who have sex with women (LBWSW) community in Botswana. Running parallel to the Kartini project, she is also conducting a study on raising visibility of HIV/AIDS among LBWSW in Southern Africa.

Setuke also sits on the board as the Vice Chair of Lesbians, Gays & Bisexuals of Botswana (LeGaBiBo), which organizes around the issue of sexual freedom as a fundamental human right. She is also a member of several Southern African-based feminist cultural productions and activist organizations.

Setuke is the author of this research project in Botswana, the first in many more.

Background of Legabibo

LEGABIBO: A Historical Overview

Year	Key Event/Highlight
1998	LEGABIBO started in the late 1990s under the auspices of the Ditshwanelo Centre for Human Rights. The organization began with a few individuals who met through a social network. These individuals were predominantly males. Some of the early activities of the organization included conducting workshops that focused on LGBTs and HIV/AIDS. A major outcome of this process was the formulation of the LGBT Human Rights Charter. Co-operation and lesson sharing with the Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) began during this period and has continued to present times. Through the assistance of Ditshwanelo, members of LEGABIBO met with the Attorney General (AG) of Botswana to discuss issues of registration. It is at this meeting that the AG made it clear that registration was not possible because of Section 164 of the Penal Code that criminalizes homosexuality.
Late 90's	Unfavourable conditions led to the demise of the organization. Some of the challenges that the organization experienced at this stage of development was the non-acceptance of bisexuals by members who were gays and lesbians.
2003	During this year, a case was put before the courts by a resident contesting the government of Botswana's anti homosexual stance. This case served to openly put issues of homosexuality into national focus and validated the need for organizations promoting LGBT rights. The

	outcome of this case was that the Court of Appeal made a decision that Botswana was not ready to recognize homosexuality.
2004	The organization re-emerged in 2004 under the umbrella of BONELA
2005	LEGABIBO engaged in a strategic planning process in which BONELA fully participated. This planning workshop was fully financed and facilitated by LEGABIBO members. Two workshops on Safe and Safer Sex were organized by LEGABIBO in partnership with BONELA for the LGBT community. In addition to empowering LEGBIBO members, these workshops also served to increased awareness of the organization and LGBT concerns amongst key actors in the area of sexual health.
2006	LEGABIBO publicly applauds the South Africans for passing a law that recognized same sex marriages. This provided the organization with a spring board upon which to raise public awareness through the private media about the plight of LGBTs in Botswana and the potential negative, irreversible consequences of not recognizing their existence and respecting their human rights
2007	Through the assistance of BONELA, an application to register LEGABIBO was submitted to the Registrar of Societies. The government dismissed this application in which LEGABIBO's stated objective was to "integrate a legal, ethical and human rights dimension into sexual, reproductive and health rights without discrimination."
2007	Through a partnership with BONELA, LEGABIBO pioneered the Prevention and Research Initiative for Sexual Minorities (PRISM). This innovative programme had the overarching aim of developing and implementing an HIV/STI prevention and human rights programme related to sexual minorities.
2008	In partnership with BONELA, LEGABIBO carried out a needs assessment on access to health

	services by sexual minorities and another on Men Having Sex with Men (MSM) to determine the prevalence of HIV and knowledge of HIV transmission in the LGBT community.
2008	LEGABIBO participates in the African Lesbian Conference in Mozambique that demanded equal rights. This conference boldly demanded that being lesbian or homosexual should no longer be seen as a criminal offence.
2009	Two members of LEGABIBO threatened to sue government over Section 164 of the Penal Code which criminalizes same sex relationships.
2009	LEGABIBO places LGBT rights on the Botswana elections agenda. The outcome of this was that both the BDP and BCP issued statements regarding LGBT rights. Although both parties did not stipulate what their parties would do to secure the rights of LGBTs if elected, LEGABIBO took a bold step in posing the affirmatively disruptive questions to the political parties. LEGABIBO and BONELA undergo an organization diagnoses prompted by the need to find new direction, focus and energy. This exercise affirmed what both organizations were doing well and what needed to change for the organizations to achieve their missions.
March 2010	A meeting set to share the results of the study on access to health by homosexuals foils up at the last minute. This meeting was planned between NACA on one end of the table and LEGABIBO together with BONELA on the other end. This sudden cancellation of this meeting of high importance in the fight against HIV/AIDS was followed by a series of events that clearly showed the governments state of denial and institutionalized discrimination against LGBTs. Examples include the Ministry of Health's' intervention to block US funding for HIV/AIDS prevention efforts targeting MSM and their partners because homosexuality is illegal in Botswana.

	It is during this saga that the ex President of Botswana Rre. Festus Mogae, a leader in the fight against HIV/AIDS provided the wisdom that LGBTs need acceptance and deserved respect. Similar echoes on the need to respect the dignity of LGBTs were heard in awareness building workshops organized by LEGABIBO and it partners.
May 2010	Government yields to the pressure exerted by BONELA and LEGABIBO to the meeting to share research findings on MSM and access to health. This move on the part of government represented a milestone in the history of LEGABIBO and its partners as the former had on previous occasions not acknowledged the existence of the LGBT community. The outcome of this meeting was that the key issues affecting homosexuals in the key area of health were put squarely at the top of the agenda at the highest office addressing HIV/AIDS issues.

1. Introduction

Botswana's homosexual history is more than just a sociological aspect of the subcontinent. The politics of sexual identities in Botswana is in need of exploration not just because of the closeted nature, but its treatment in mainstream culture. Locating lesbian, bisexual and women who have sex with women (LBWSW) identities is extremely difficult to access. On one hand, the general community tries to marginalize a group of people from the so called normative structure of society due to their alternative sexual orientation. On the other, we call this a western influence when cases of violence and marginalization because of alternative sexual orientation come from areas where a touch of western thought is still most negligible. The law makers are left in a conundrum where they do not know whether to pass off this 'aberration' as a perverse human fetish or, to dismiss it as a black mark of globalization. LBWSW persons struggle to receive direct reproductive health services as their sexuality remains ignored due to cultural differences, religious misinterpretations and ignorance.

This study's vision has been to investigate whether the LBWSW community is a society free from sexuality-based discrimination where their legal rights are concerned.

Through the research, I critically examine aspects of LBWSW sexuality, gender roles and hierarchies, the kind of information they seek, the underlying factors of marginalization, their concerns and their views pertaining to these issues. I seek to unearth if LBWSW persons themselves feel marginalized, and if so, how, when, why and what makes them feel as such.

1.1. Current situation in Botswana

1.1.1. The Botswana economy

Macro-economic indicators show Botswana as one of the few economic success stories on the African continent. Since independence in 1966, Botswana has made significant socio-economic progress and made the extraordinary transition from the category of one of the least developed countries to having one of the highest per-capita incomes in the whole of Africa. Largely as a result of the discovery of diamonds, post-independence, and vigorous development of the mining sector, Botswana has sustained admirable economic growth. Diamonds remain the mainstay of Botswana's economy, while the beef industry, tourism and, to a limited extent, the manufacturing sector, have contributed to Botswana's rapid economic growth over the years.

Prudent macro-economic policies have made it possible for Botswana to increase its real income per-capita – from low levels at independence to middle-income country levels by the early 1990s. The 2008-2009 global financial crisis has had significant and potentially far-reaching adverse impacts on the fragile single commodity based national economy.

Notwithstanding the challenging economic environment, Botswana is believed to be in a stronger position than most mineral dependent economies in Africa due to its prudent fiscal policies, significant foreign reserves, and limited foreign debt. The current thrust of Botswana's development policies focus on diversification and reform to reduce its dependency upon revenues from the mineral sector. Botswana has recently demonstrated its capacity to implement reforms and is now ranked the seventh best economic performer in the world.

Government and private sector economists, however, concur that the Botswana economy will not experience the growth rates recorded in the past. The economic challenges experienced by the country have, amongst other measures, resulted in the government formulating a cost recovery policy, introducing a value-added tax, and devaluating the national currency. The immediate impact of such reforms has been adverse, particularly on the poorest sections of society who have been hardest hit by inflation. Women, particularly female-headed households, experience greater levels of poverty and have a high ratio of dependency on alcohol or drugs. The economic environment is also characterized by increasing disparities between rich and poor. Although the current unemployment rate is said to be 7.5%, labour force surveys over the past decade and half have shown an unemployment rate of over 20%. Youth in Botswana are hardest hit by unemployment, a situation that fuels social disintegration and ills. LBWSW individuals are found in all social groups and are bound to be affected by the different dimensions of poverty including income or absolute, capability and participation poverty.

HIV/AIDS has forced the government to divert substantial resources towards its mitigation and managing adverse impacts. According to the 2010 Budget Speech, HIV/AIDS mitigation programmes continue to take the bulk of the governments' development expenditure. Similarly, household income which could be spent differently is diverted to caring for the sick, orphans and burials. Furthermore, the epidemic has had far reaching consequences on the household economy as bread-winners, farm labourers and other economically productive members of households have died from the disease or where labour productivity is diverted to the care economy.

1.1.2. Social trends

The economic environment depicted in the preceding section will no doubt have far-reaching negative consequences on social life. The social environment is characterized by rising unemployment, which has bred new crimes, including fraud, bank robberies, and different forms of white-collar crime, while traditional forms of crime are on the increase. Alcoholism and drug and substance mis/use are on the rise, particularly amongst the economically most productive sections of the population.

School dropout rates at both the primary and secondary levels of education continue to manifest themselves as a challenge to the achievement of universal access to education for

all. The growing phenomenon of university graduates not able to acquire work increases the vast pool of unemployed persons. The fact that a significant number of young people either drop out of school or are pushed out of the educational system with the new cost sharing measures (such as the introduction of school fees), unemployable and unemployed youth are expected to increase. To a far larger extent than males, females find commercial sex work and staying in abusive relationships a viable option as a means out of poverty and unemployment. Transactional sex is an increasing trend, particularly amongst younger people. Given that vulnerable social groups tend to be forced into leading precarious lifestyles, it is conceivable that lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgendered (LGBT) persons are also affected by this phenomenon. The feminization of poverty is one of the factors that drive women into commercial sex work, particularly as it is viewed as a feasible livelihood option which requires minimal skills and start-up capital for unemployed, marginalized women.

The social environment is also characterized by an escalation in violence against women and children. Despite the stiff penalties for rape, statistics indicate that instances of rape are sky-rocketing. A disturbing development, 'spite killings' or so-called 'passion killings' are also on the rise. This increase in assaults in turn increases the perpetuation of abusive relationships and other violence and risk of HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), significantly amplifying the socio-economic challenges experienced by the nation. Risky sexual behavior is an issue of concern across sexual orientations. The social environment is also characterized by denial, discrimination, victimization and myths regarding the LBWSW community. Although they face discrimination, the new generation of LBWSWs is increasingly confident and resolute in claiming their rightful place in Botswana society.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is presently the greatest threat to Botswana's socio-economic development, with the national prevalence rate estimated at 17.1% - 19.8% for females and 13.9% for males (BIAS, 2008). Young persons and women are the most infected and affected. Although HIV statistics and surveillance studies do not assess prevalence on the basis of sexual orientation, the LGBT community is recognized as a high risk group. Similarly, the phenomenon of Men having Sex with Men (MSM) is increasingly recognized as a factor that fuels HIV transmission; because a significant proportion of MSM are in the closet, targeting this social group is difficult. This issue represents an opportunity for organizations such as LeGaBiBo to engage the relevant authorities and contribute positively to addressing MSM and WSW issues.

Currently, prevention, treatment, care and support programmes in Botswana exclude the LBWSW community with negative and potentially irreversible consequences on the fight against HIV/AIDS. According to statistics, HIV/AIDS related illnesses are escalating the number of orphans, and it is estimated that 16.2% of children under the age of 18 in Botswana are orphaned (BIAS, 2008). Other impacts of the disease include ill health, absenteeism, reduced productivity, and a significant loss of lives among the country's

workforce, causing adverse impacts on the economy. Once again, women and girl-children carry the heaviest burden for caring for the sick and orphaned.

1.1.3. Political environment

Since independence in 1966, Botswana has been characterized by a stable political environment. The country has been hailed by many as a shining example of democracy in Africa. It is a multi-party state that holds elections every five years. The ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), has ruled the country since independence. Despite signs in recent years of declining popularity, oppositional politics have not grown strong enough to unseat the BDP and their disunity has allowed the ruling party to retain significant power. This situation has further contributed to complacency and a lack of accountability to the electorate, a situation which constitutes a major threat to the achievement of human rights for all.

Although the excessive and largely unchallenged power of the ruling party has been the reality for years, the emergence of a strong democracy, more recent developments to include the BDP split, offer a window of opportunity for improvements in the political landscape of the country. The possible path that politics may take could see the government forced to seek alliances around key issues with its development partners, the private sector and non-state actors. In addition, the government may find itself having to be increasingly sensitive to the needs and demands of minority groups, students, the private media, and the unemployed. If the political arena changes in this way, the political culture of Botswana could undergo positive transformation. In the past, the government has not needed to consult or win the support for some of its initiatives. However, the period ahead may be one in which civil society plays a far greater role in the development discourse and process. The political environment for participatory development organizations could be enhanced and windows of opportunity opened to influence policy reforms. The political will of the people for the government to engage with issues affecting groups such as LBWSW, indigenous peoples, and commercial sex workers may be enhanced accordingly.

Botswana is signatory to a number of international and regional conventions, treaties and declarations to improve the status of women in all spheres of development. At the national level, various frameworks including the National Vision 2016 that points to the need of addressing gender disparities in all sectors of the economy. However, Botswana has made minimal progress in increasing the number of women in Parliament and Cabinet. The target of 30% female representation by 2005, a quota set by the Southern African Development Community (SADC), was only achieved by South Africa and Mozambique. Thus, Botswana is lagging behind the target and is unlikely to achieve gender parity in all areas of decision-making by 2020 in line with the African Union position. Although these regional instruments and national policy frameworks are commendable, they also challenge civil society organizations such as LeGaBiBo to do more to contribute to the attainment of a more equal, democratic society.

1.2. Research objectives

- To understand the factors that lead to the marginalization of WSW in the community of Botswana.
- Through the findings, create a community that is educated and sensitized to WSW - not only that they exist, but that they affect and are affected by the community in one way or the other.
- To create a safe space where WSW can interact, talk, and feel free to be who they are without being judged or oppressed.

1.3. Research aims

The study aims to espouse and unearth factors that contribute to the marginalization of LBWSW persons and if possible on a broader scope, explore the struggle for democracy and equal rights within the nation and beyond.

2. Methodology

The research commenced in two stages; the first, to better understand the social construction of LBWSW marginalization, and second, the actual factors that affects and/or leads to the marginalization of LBWSW persons in Botswana. This strategy enabled the author to fully explore the factors that the respondents felt contributed to the experience of feeling marginalized from normative society they live within. Furthermore, it opened to a dialogue that explored the particular behaviours and lifestyles that LBWSW individuals lead.

The study espoused both descriptive and explanatory designs. The descriptive design focused on describing observable facts in detail. The explanatory design is reflected by the quantitative findings of the study that identified the marginalizing factors that affect the LBWSW community. This expounding research design was appropriate for the study since, by its very nature, explores various perceived aspects of lesbian and bisexual individuals, as well as the general category of WSW across all boards. The importance of exploring identity was recognizing that these women practiced the same sexual behavior but did not all feel comfortable being identified and generalized as women who have sex with women. The findings further illustrate the dynamics of the population and the factors that indeed marginalize the group.

3. Findings

3.1. Biographic information

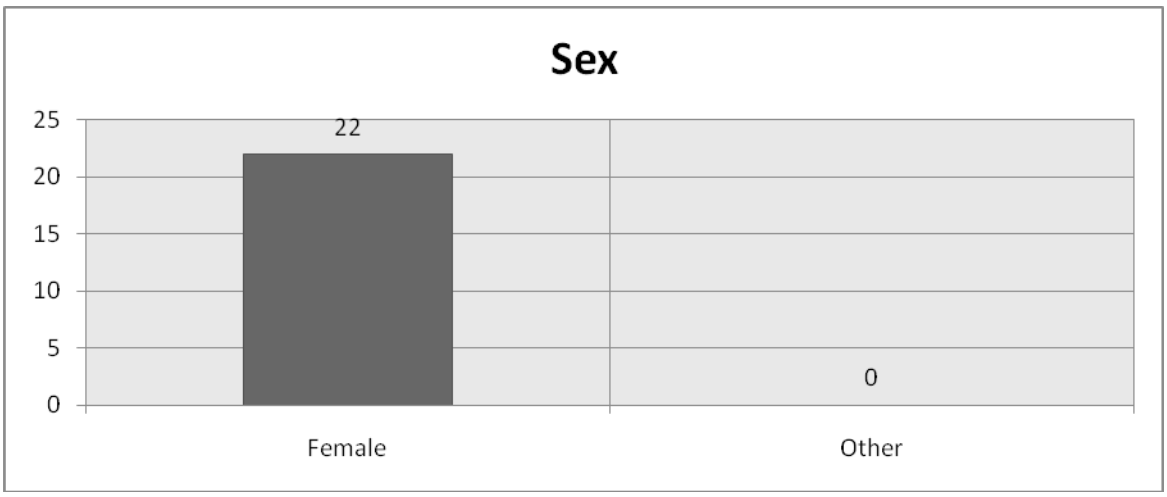

Figure 1: Question 1

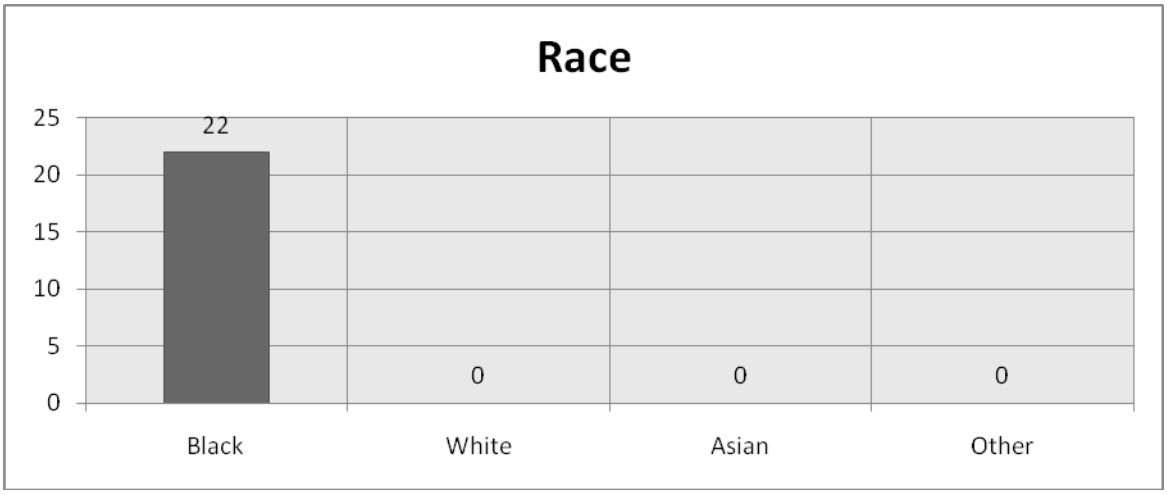

Figure 2: Question 2

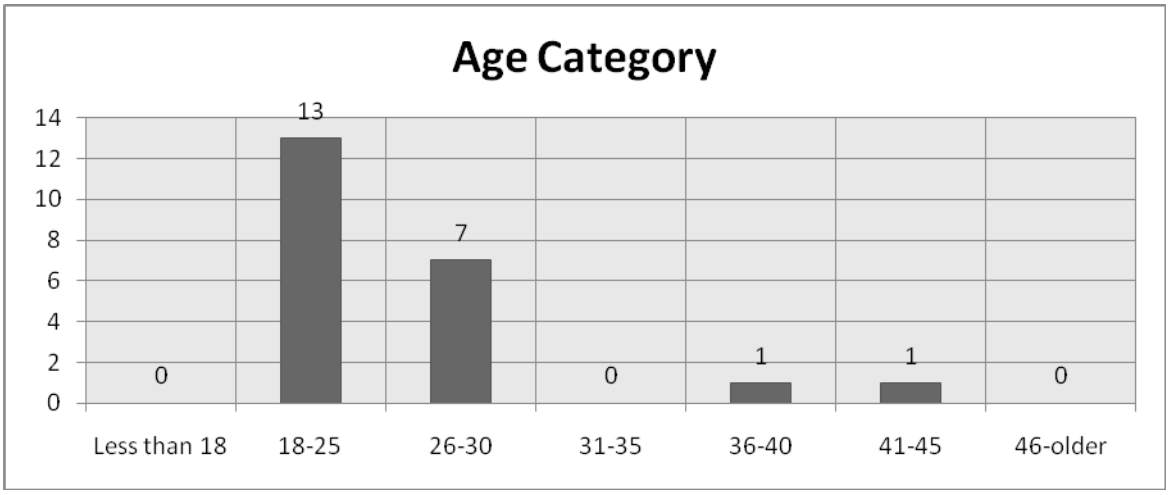

Figure 3: Question 3

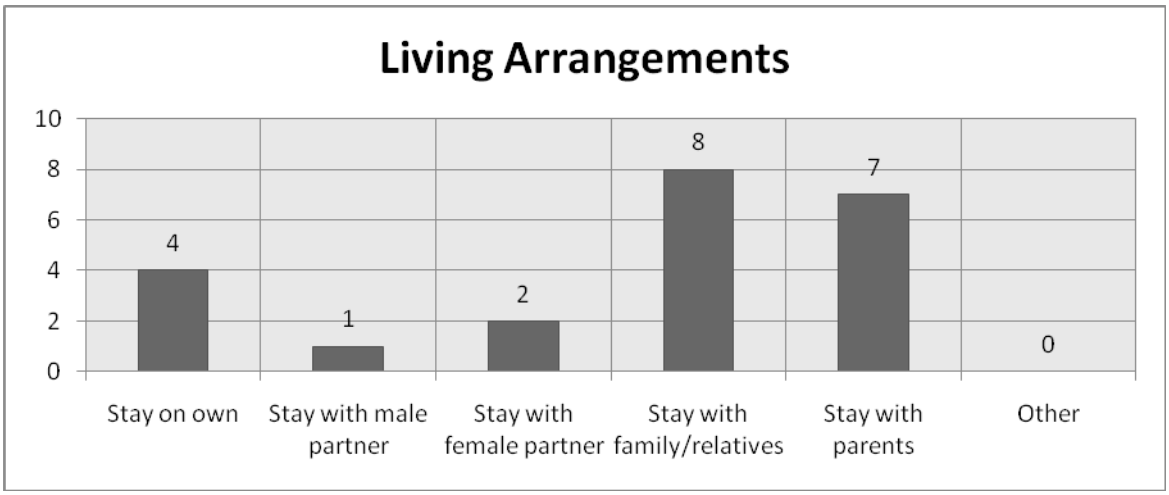

Figure 4: Question 4

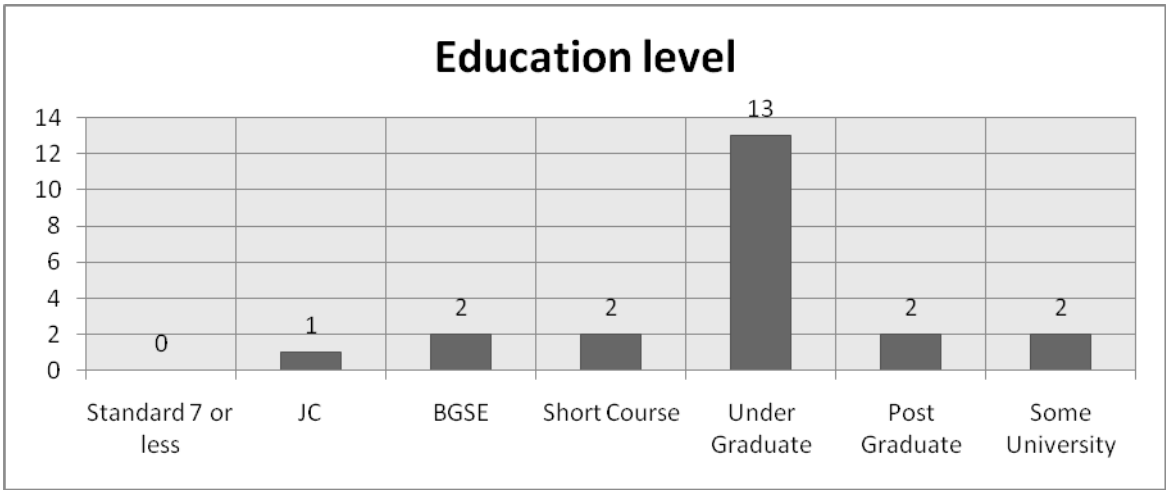

Figure 5: Question 5

Figure 6: Question 6

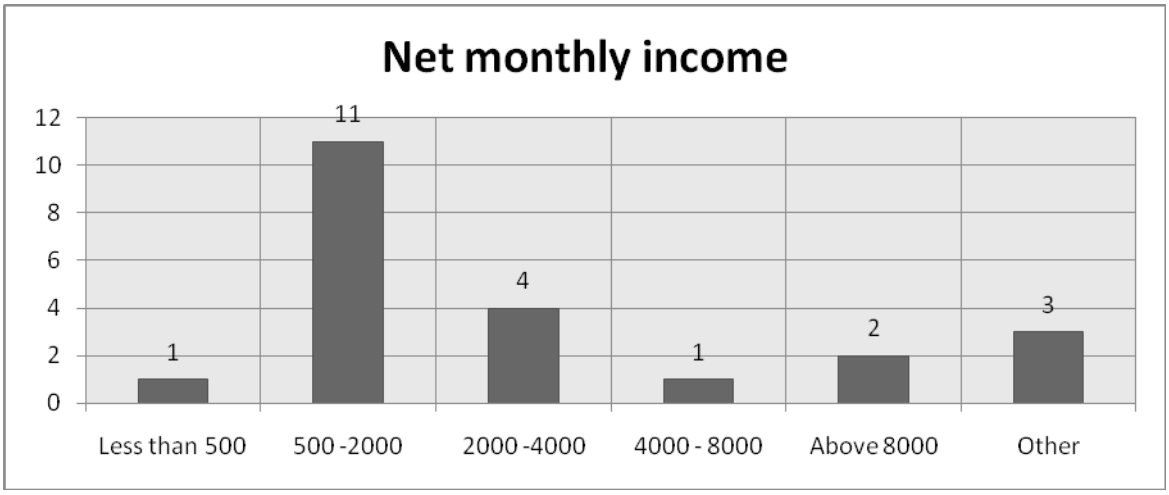

Figure 7: Question 8

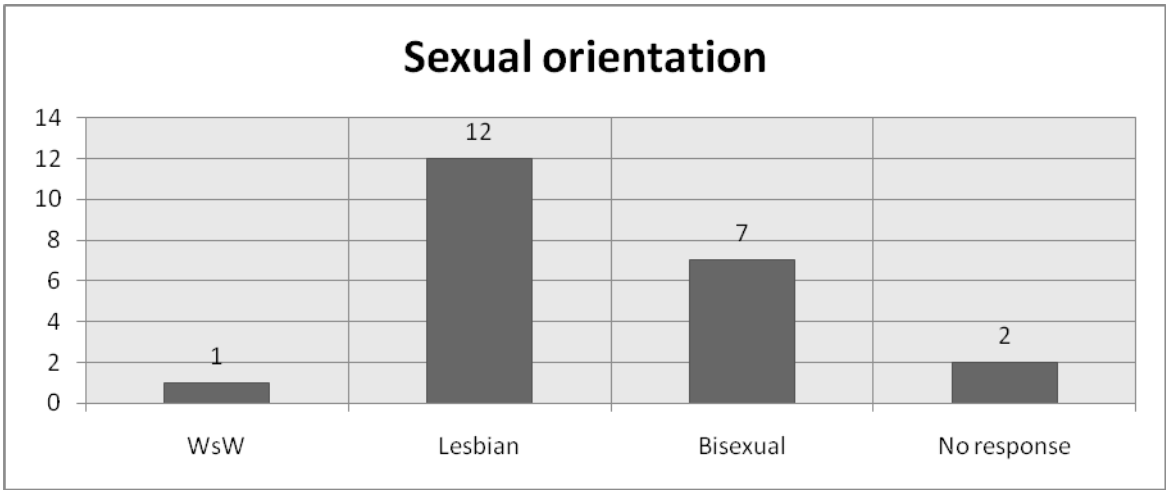

Figure 8: Question 9

3.2. Family background and history

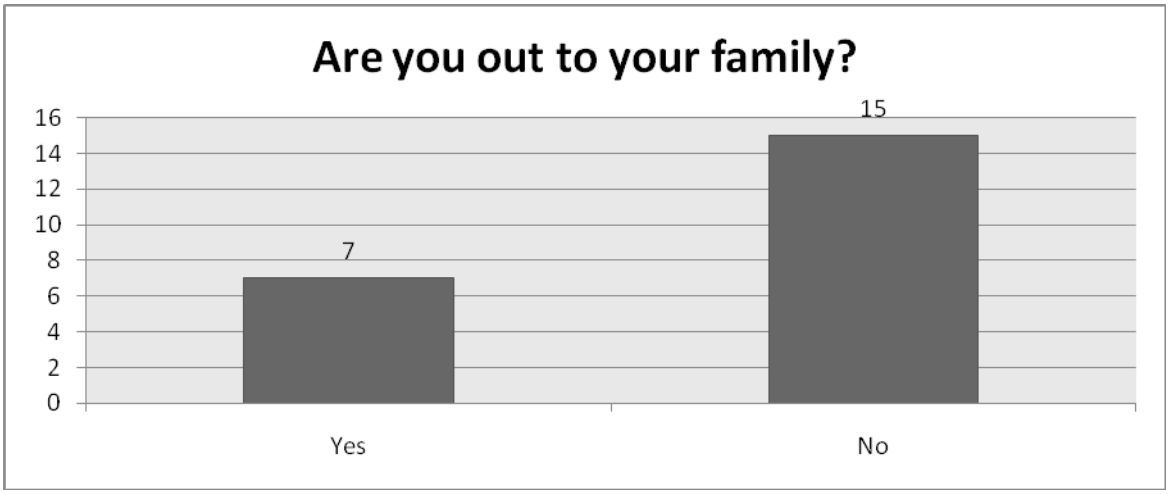

Figure 9: Question 12

Mother says she hates me. My mother says she will pray for me and my little brother says I am disgusting. (Participant 21)

Am still in the closet because my family will disown me plus am unemployed therefore will be doomed, I depend on them. (Participant 14)

No... Afraid of non-acceptance, homophobic family. (Participant 5)

Don't have a plot, still in the closet. Don't want to hurt my parents. (Participant 11)

Yes, they know but they can't say much. (Participant 8)

Yes, they disapprove but have learnt to tolerate it. (Participant 7)

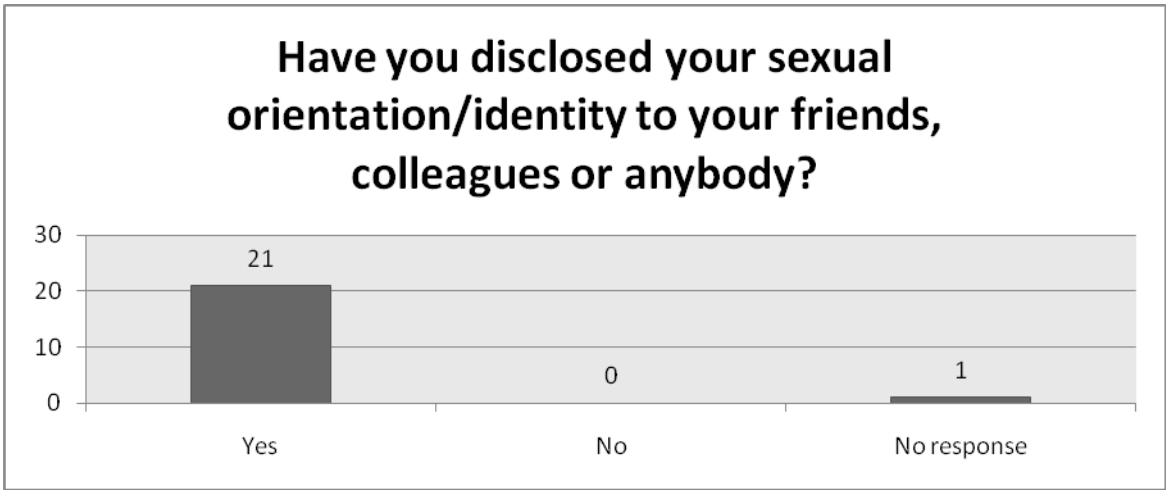

Figure 10: Question 18

All my friends know. (Participant 18)

Yes friends and colleagues. (Participant 21)

I have disclosed it to all my LGBTI friends and a few of the 'straight' ones. (Participant 13)

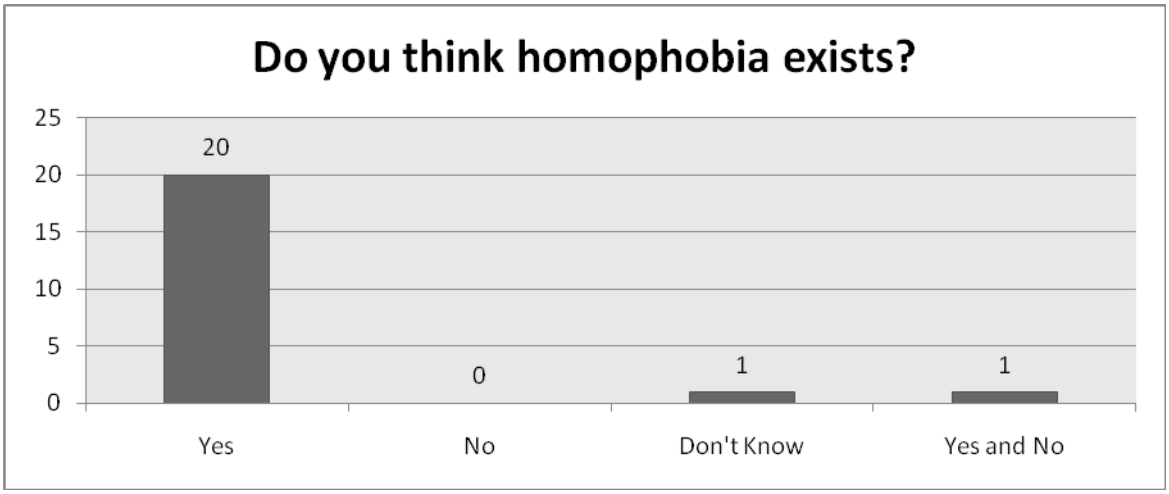

Figure 11: Question

*Yes, a lot of heterosexual people are homophobic. Because they follow the bible too much. They claim they are goodie too shoes. (*Participant 1)

Yes, heterosexual men are the most homophobic because they are uncomfortable with their sexuality. (Participant 21)

*Yes. Elderly people, religious people because their beliefs go against homosexuality. (*Participant 20)

Yes it exist. My brother is homophobic. I guess he is just one of those people. (Participant 14)

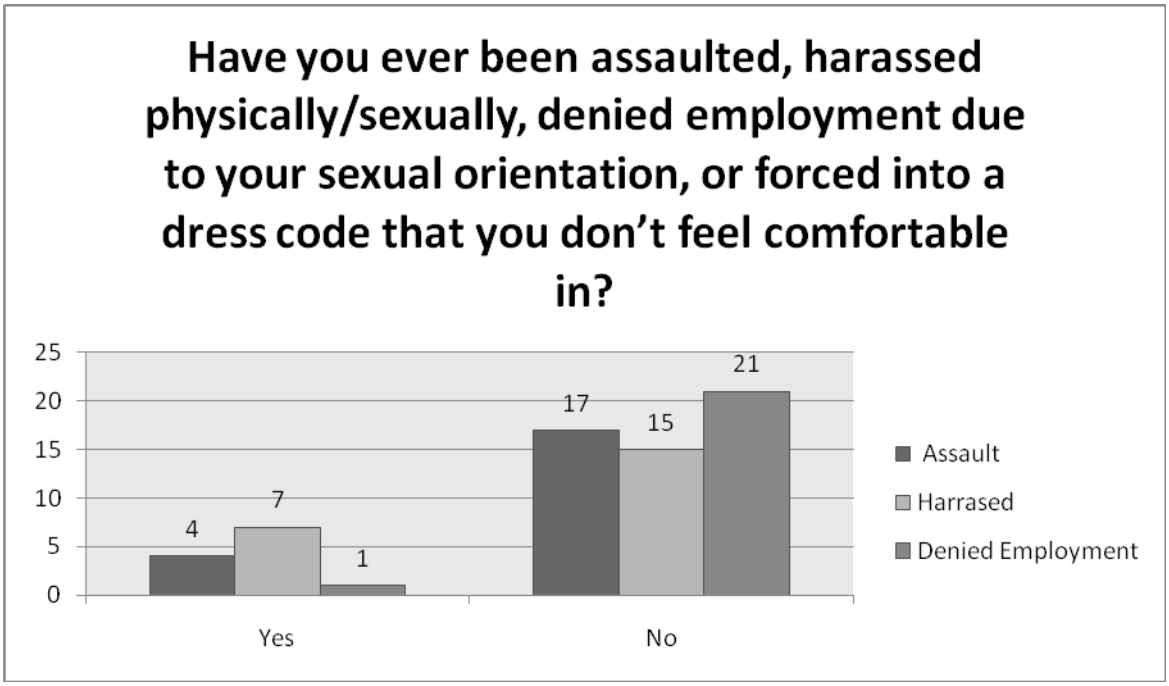

Figure 12: Questions 29, 31, 36, 27

Assault

Yes at a club because I was protecting my girlfriend at the time. (Participant 7)

Yes it exist. My brother is homophobic. I guess he is just one of those people. (Participant 9)

Yes, school. Just because they think its not right. (Participant 15)

Yes, men loved the women I'm with. (Participant 16)

Harassed

Yes, my friends and I were banned from a restaurant because of our sexual orientation. (Participant 2)

Denied employment

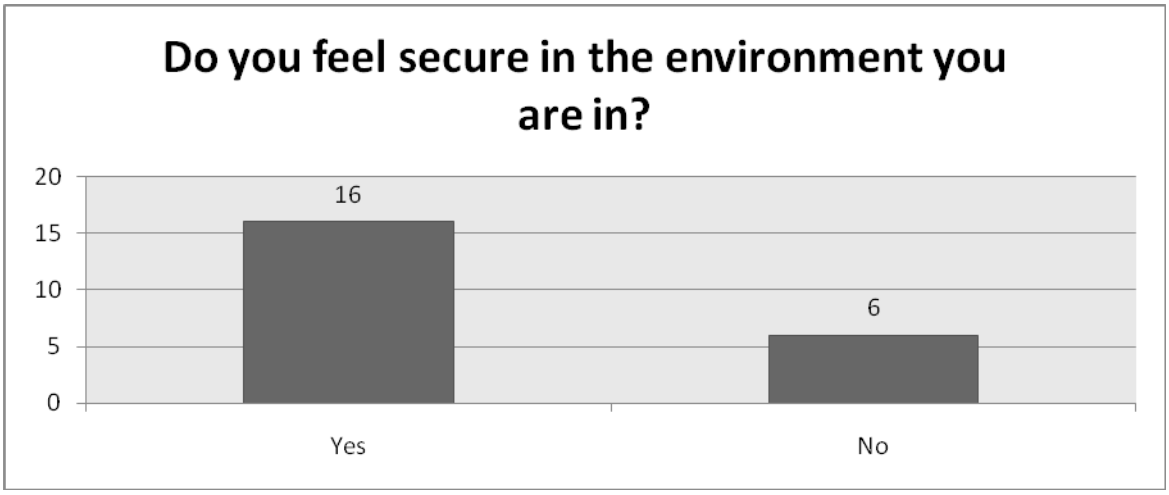

Figure 13: Question 38

No, because I feel my community does not generally feel comfortable what is not out of the norm. (Participant 4)

Not really because people are homophobic and once they know that they are gay they take so much interest in your life. (Participant 12)

No. You'll never know what people are thinking and what they can do when they find out your orientation. (Participant 15)

3.3. Relationship history

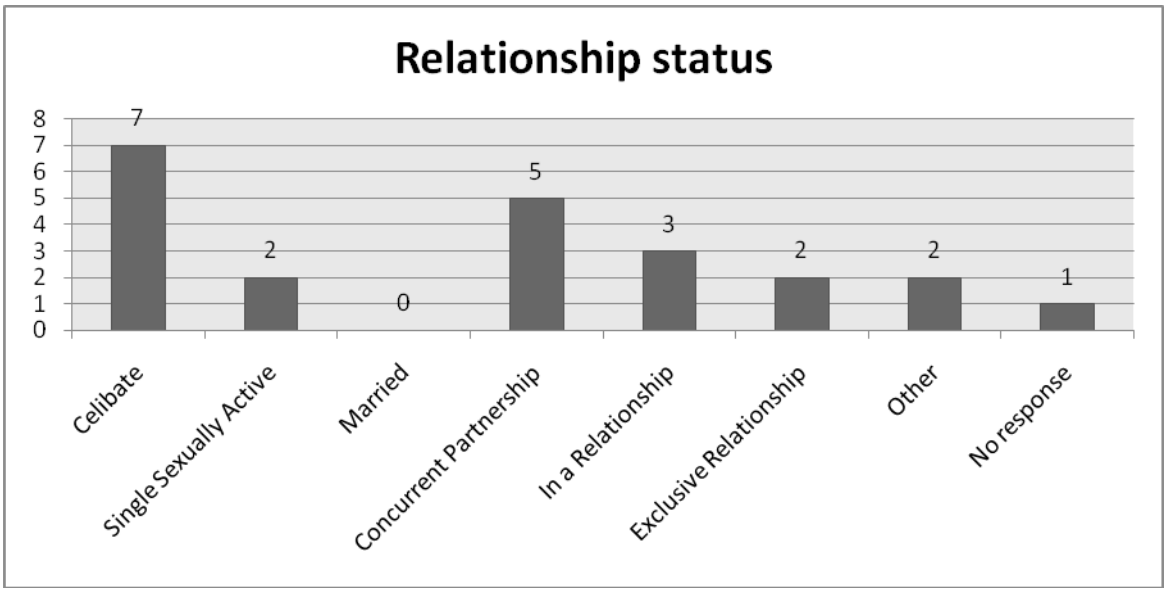

Figure 14: Question D

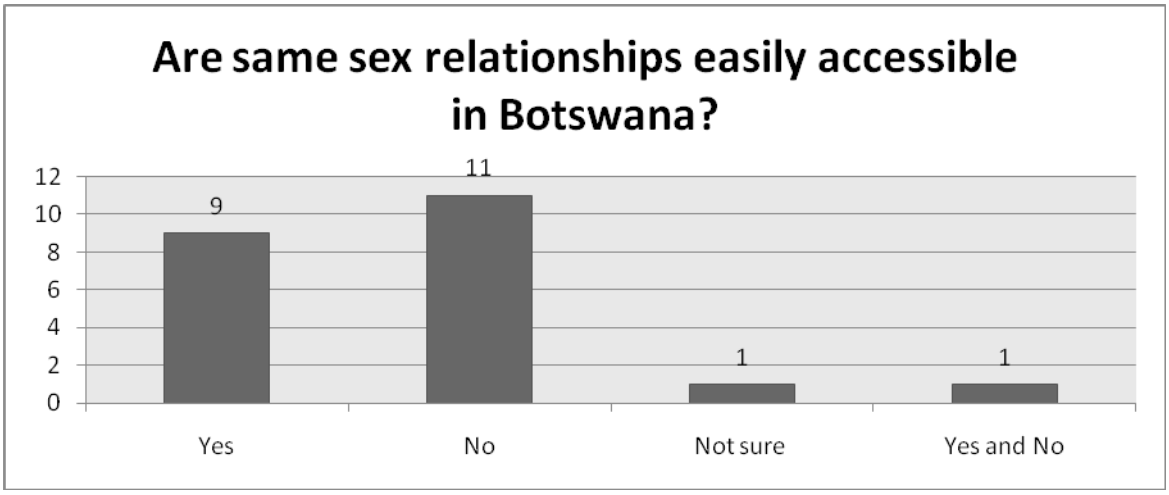

Figure 15: Question 43

No, there' s still a lot of stigma and discrimination. (Participant 7)

No. Secrecy involved. (Participant 4)

They are NOT because it's felt that it is uncultural and to an extent its illegal. (Participant 2)

Yes they are. I usually finding it easy to find female partners. (Participant 1)

3.4. Sexual practices and preferences

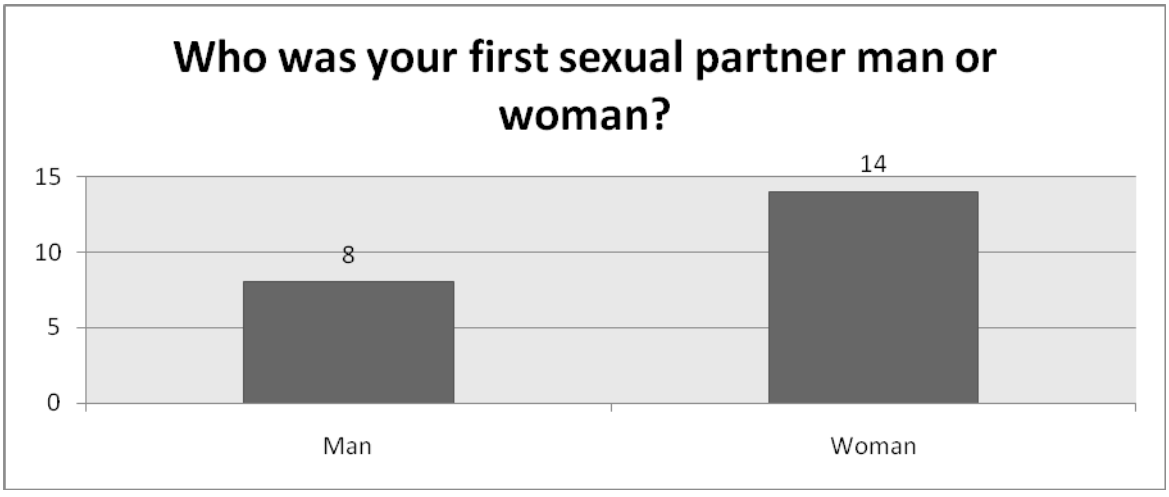

Figure 16: Question 55

Woman- there is more depth, involved, uses all senses. Man- can be very physical & can be detached. (Participant 3)

With women it is more emotional, more intense & satisfying. With men it's brief and unsatisfying. (Participant 4)

I have only been with women sexually so I don't know the difference. (Participant 21)

Man- great kissing but left me questioning, humble and painful; Woman- true reflection of your sexual emotions. (Participant 23)

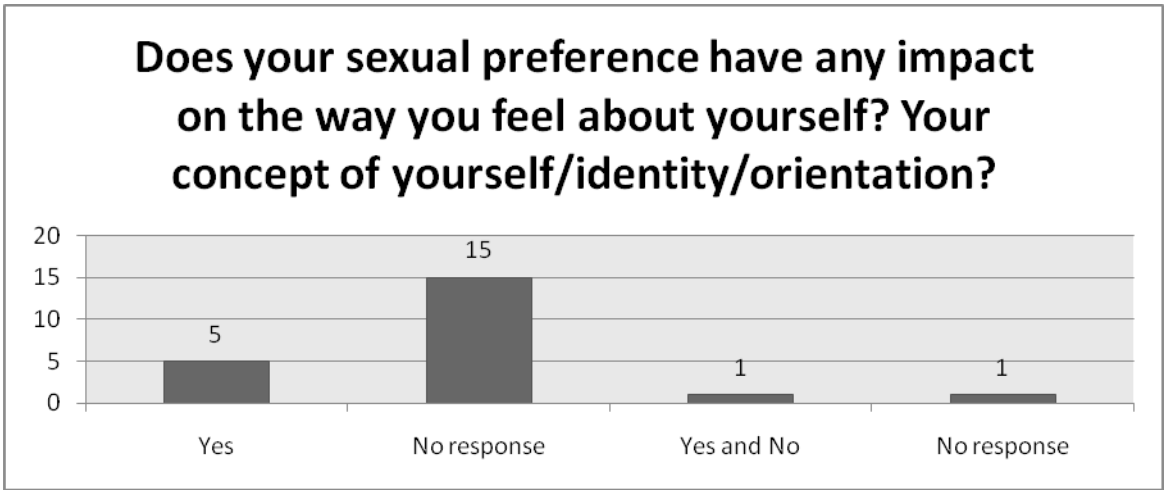

Figure 17: Question 60

In most cases yes, it makes me the happiest woman on earth and doesn't change anything. (Participant 14)

Yes, I m relieved with what I am doing. My life is not suppressed about what I am not doing or what I' m supposed to do. (Participant 11)

No. I m happy with me being me. I'll never change who I am. (Participant 7)

No, not at all. I don't regret what I do but with men I sometimes I regret having sex with them. (Participant 1)

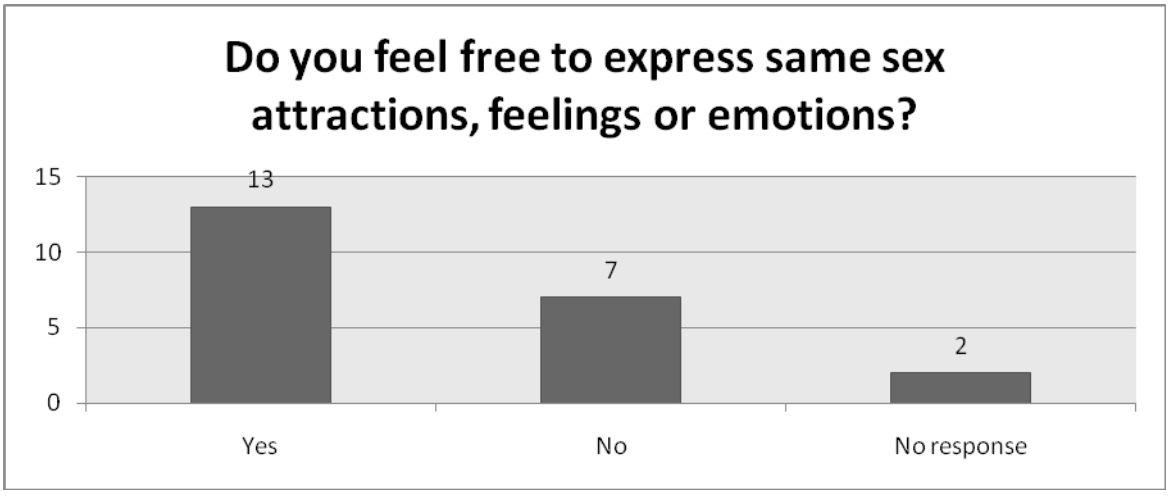

Figure 18: Question 66

No because a lot of people would give me looks or feel uncomfortable around me. (Participant 2)

No. If you don't know a person it's hard to express yourself to them because you don't know their view and how they are going to take it. (Participant 15)

Not free, avoiding labeling, discrimination. (Participant 14)

To some, yes. (Participant 1)

3.5. Marriage

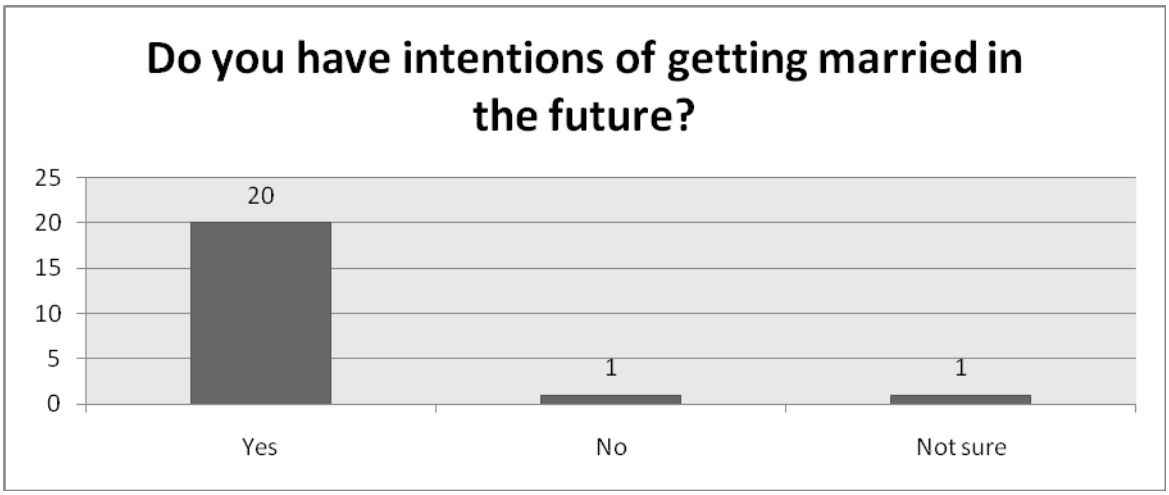

Figure 19: Question 69

I am not very happy with the idea of marriage. (Participant 18)

Yes, absolutely. (Participant 3)

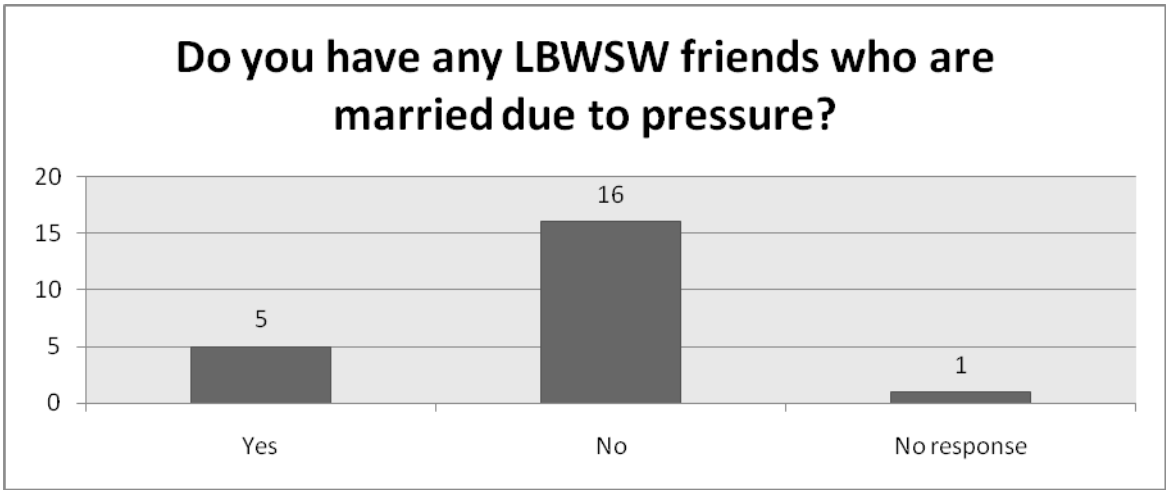

Figure 20: Question 71

Yes, although they still get with women on the side the pressure is usually from the parents side. (Participant 11)

Yes!! And some of them are not good at hiding it. Some of them couldn't resist the spell of a woman and the love making so they decided to get a divorce. (Participant 14)

3.6. Law

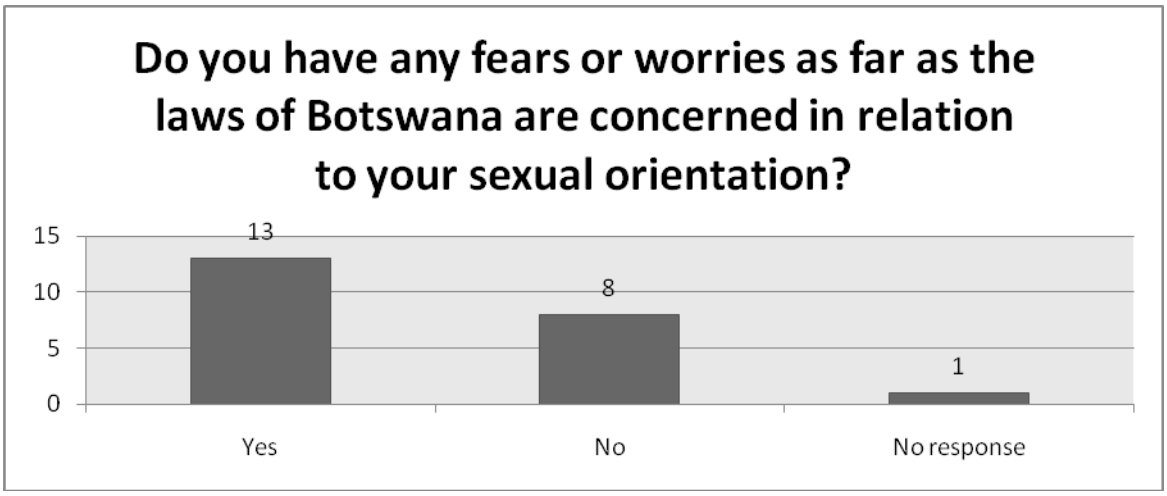

Figure 21: Question 76

Afraid the government is getting more and more aware of people with same sex relations and they want to eliminate these people (Participant 23)

Yes, because we are always at risk of incarceration. (Participant 20)

My worry is we will never be free. (Participant 15)

Yes, because even if I wanted to commit to a woman, I couldn't do so legally and be protected by the law. (Participant 10)

I don't I have any fears because I always try and keep myself away and keeping my secret. (Participant 8)

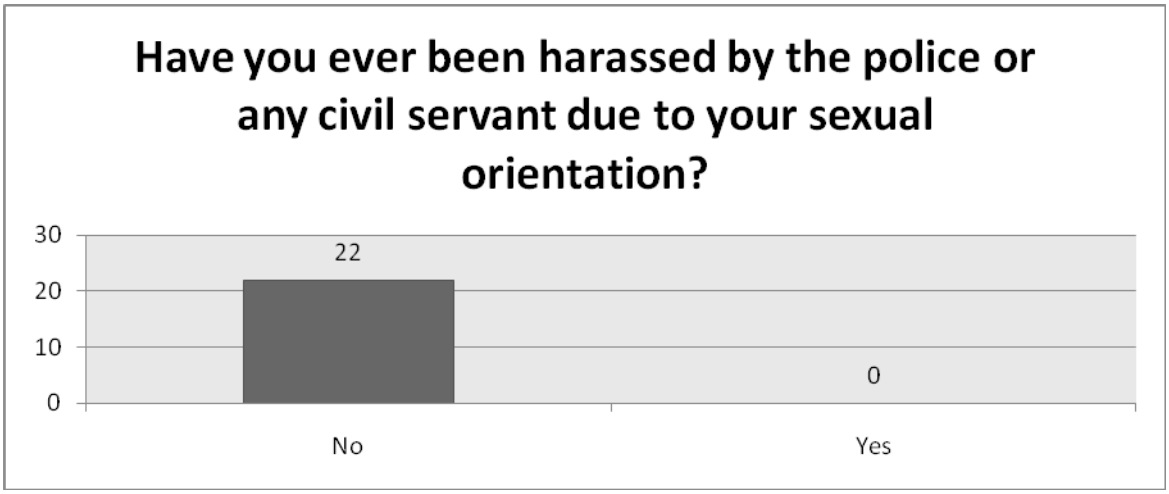

Figure 22: Question 77

3.7. Religious affiliation

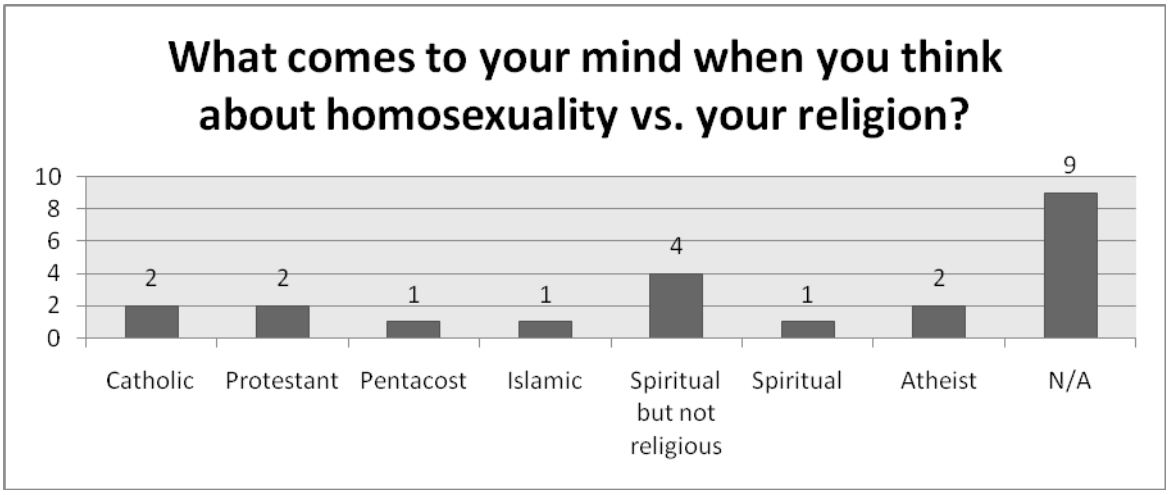

Figure 23: Question 79

I know god loves me as I am but whether my fellow Christians accept is another story & that is why I would not tell them I am lesbian & avoid putting myself in that position. (Participant 3)

That god created us all equal yet unique. (Participant 10)

Abomination. We are all doomed to hell. Apparently god hates gay people. (Participant 12)

I don't think about it. It is best to ignore it. (Participant 17)

I think Christians are the most judgmental people! (Participant 18)

3.8. Needs

Question 82 asked: What do you think are the most serious problems facing LBWSW in Botswana?

Religion, society and the law against sexual orientation, so we face a lot of discrimination. (Participant 13)

Education on same sex relationships. (Participant 12)

Discrimination, rape, labeling. (Participant 14)

Being closeted. (Participant 21)

They are promiscuous. (Participant 23)

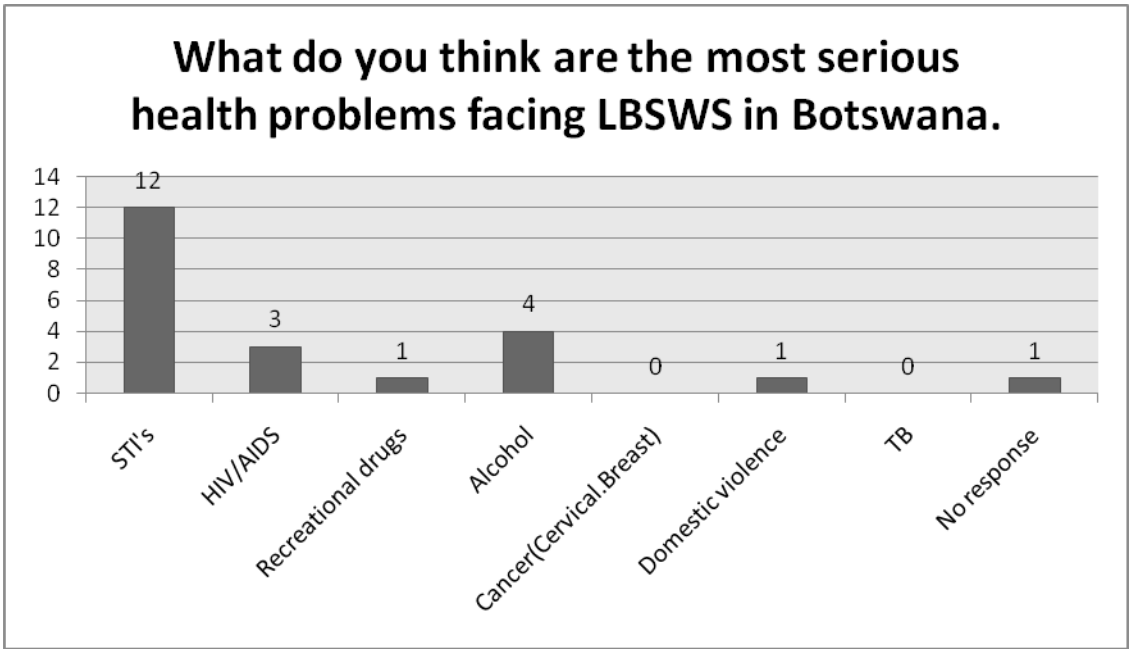

Figure 24: Question 83

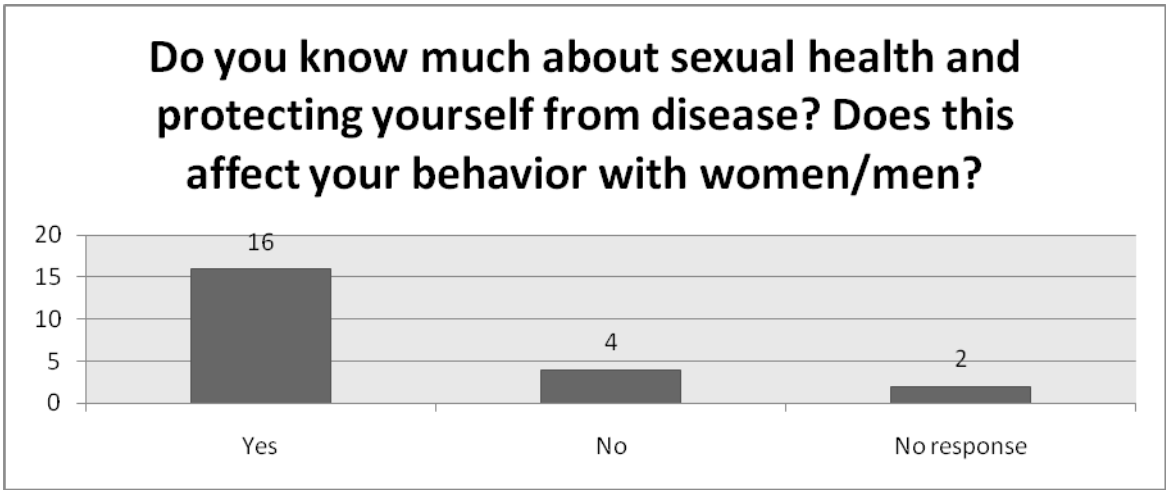

Figure 25: Question 86

> *Yes I know about the risks and it affects my behavior because if I don't have protection I can't engage in any sexual act before getting tested, with men its easier because condoms are readily available.* (Participant 13)

> *I don't do men and it does affect my behavior because there is nothing to use for protection in this country.* (Participant 19)

> *Don't know much because there's little access to information. I know about dental dams.* (Participant 23)

Question 88 asked: What health services do you think are lacking for LBWSW in general?

> *Prevention from HIV/AIDS or STI's.* (Participant 2)

> *Counseling services, mental health is paramount.* (Participant 18)

> *Clinics and hospitals.* (Participant 8)

> *Counseling, protection from disease where women is concerned.* (Participant 1)

Question 90 asked: What issues do you think might stand in the way of stakeholders such as government, organizations and the private sector in providing services?

> *Ignorance. Government should accept there are people who have sex with same sex.* (Participant 1)

> *Religious groups.* (Participant 4)

> *The fact that the country is very religious hinders the government and the population from accepting homosexuals and tolerating us. I suggest people start accepting us with the respect we deserve as human beings.* (Participant 7)

Perceptions of the general public with regard to homosexuality might stand in the way. Continuous education is the key. (Participant 20)

The law, culture and the fact that people are conservative. (Participant 21)

3.9. Community responses

A random sample of ten respondents in addition to the 22 LBWSW was formulated to find out how the general public outside the LBWSW population viewed or perceived same sex relations.

Question 1 asked: What does the word homosexual mean to you?

People of the same gender who have a sexual relationship. (Participant 1)

Same sex relations. (Participant 3)

Having a relationship with same sex person. (Participant 6)

Woman having sex with woman, men having sex with men. (Participant 10)

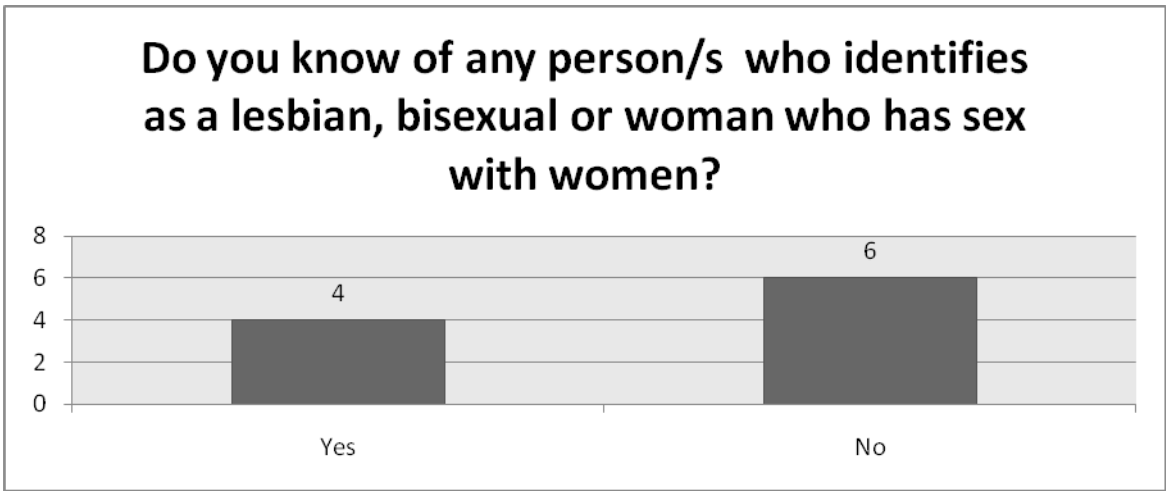

Figure 26: Question 2

Yes a bisexual and a couple lesbians. (Participant 6)

Yes I do, lots of them, more like my friends. (Participant 5)

Not really just seeing them on the streets. (Participant 4)

I've heard about them but don't know of anybody personally. (Participant 3)

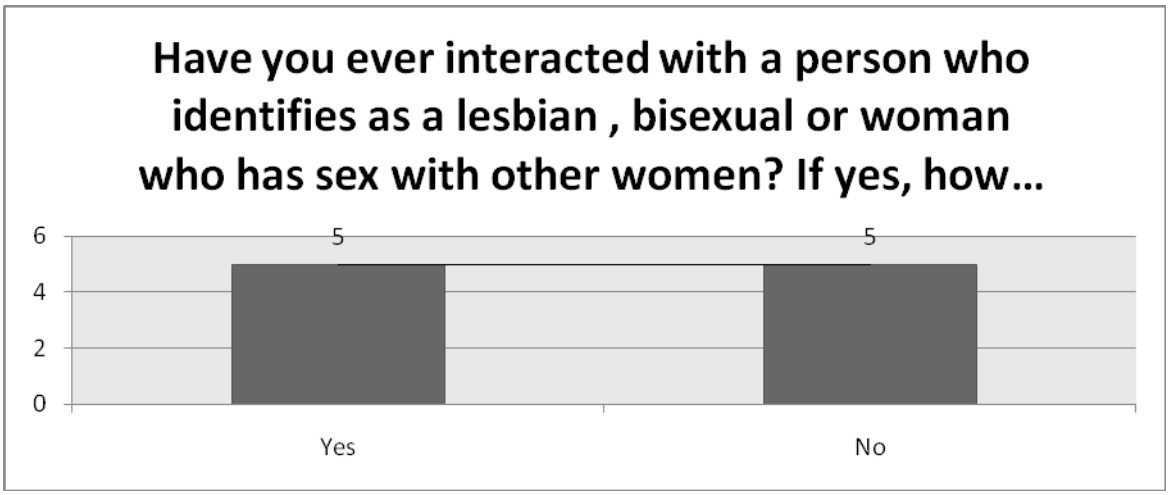

Figure 27: Question 3

Yes, I do not have a problem with interacting with same sex couples and homosexuals. I find them relatively easy and outgoing. (Participant 6)

Yes I did, at LeGaBiBo and its made me feel appreciated and accepted. (Participant 5)

Yes, my cousin actually and it's kind of weird. (Participant 4)

No!! (Participant 1)

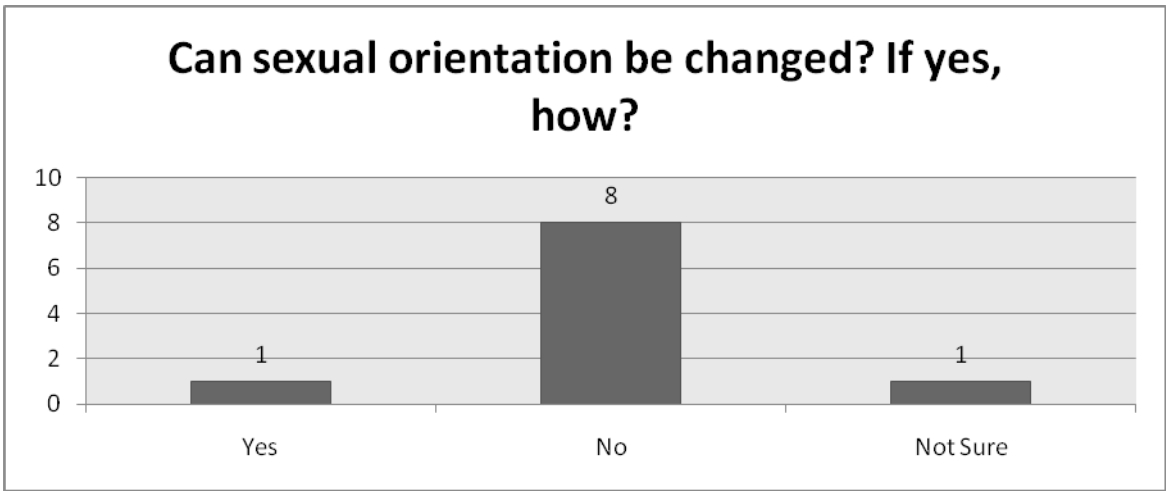

Figure 28: Question 4

Yes! It's a matter of choice. (Participant 1)

I m not sure but I think so. (Participant 3)

Yes, people must go to church, god will help them. (Participant 4)

No. Unless you are pretending. (Participant 7)

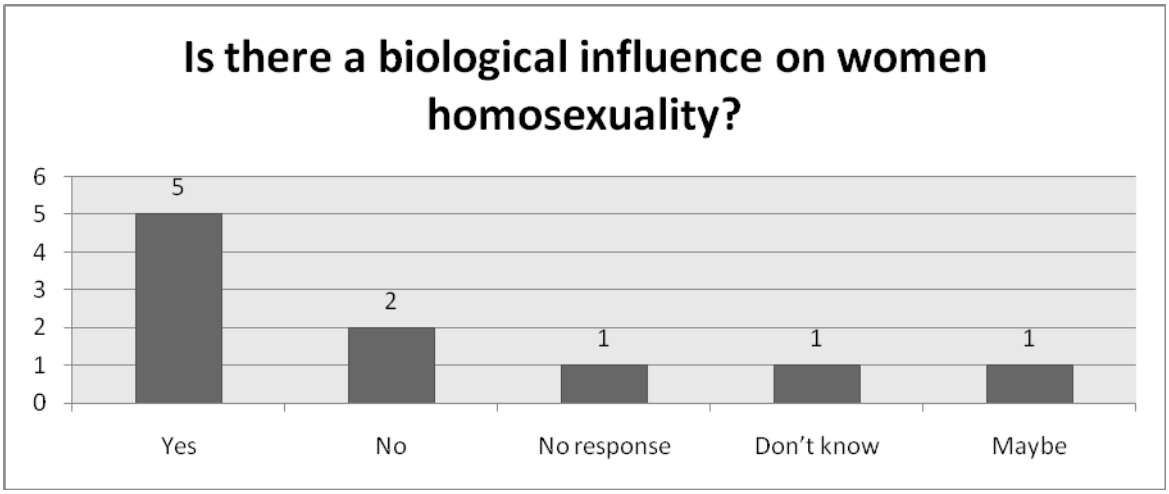

Figure 29: Question 5

Nope, just a matter of misbehaving and ill-choices. (Participant 3)

I think so, I am not a scientist anyway. (Participant 6)

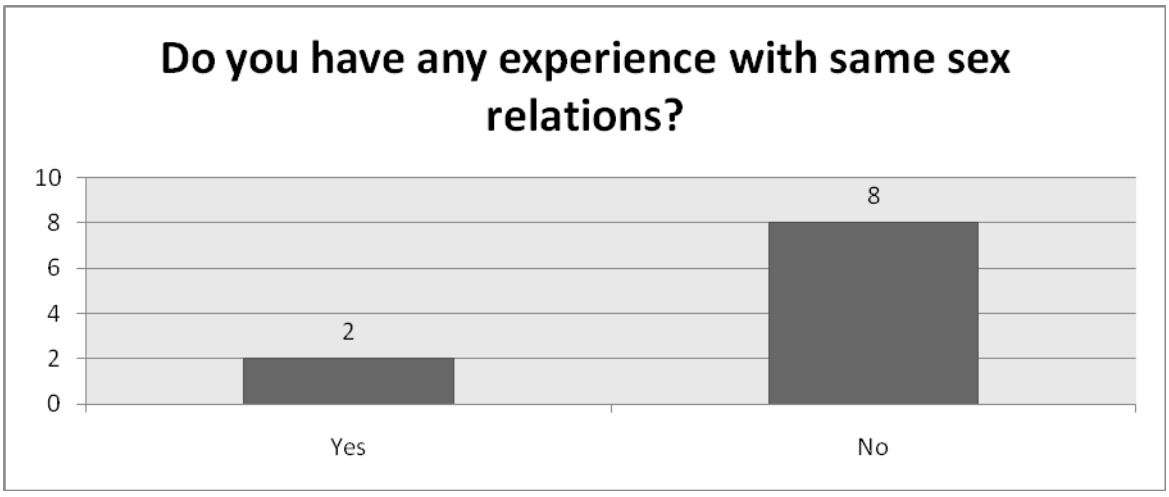

Figure *30: Question 6*

Not personally but my friends are.(Participant 6)

Matter of fact yes. (Participant 5)

Question 7 asked: Why do you think people engage in same sex relations?

> *God said, when I come to an end, a lot of things will happen. Lefatshe le ya bokhutlong* [the world is coming to an end]. (Participant 10)
>
> *Some do it to impress particular people while some just do it for fun.* (Participant 8)
>
> *No, ke matimone aa maswe* [Satanism]. (Participant 4)
>
> *Promiscuity.* (Participant 3)

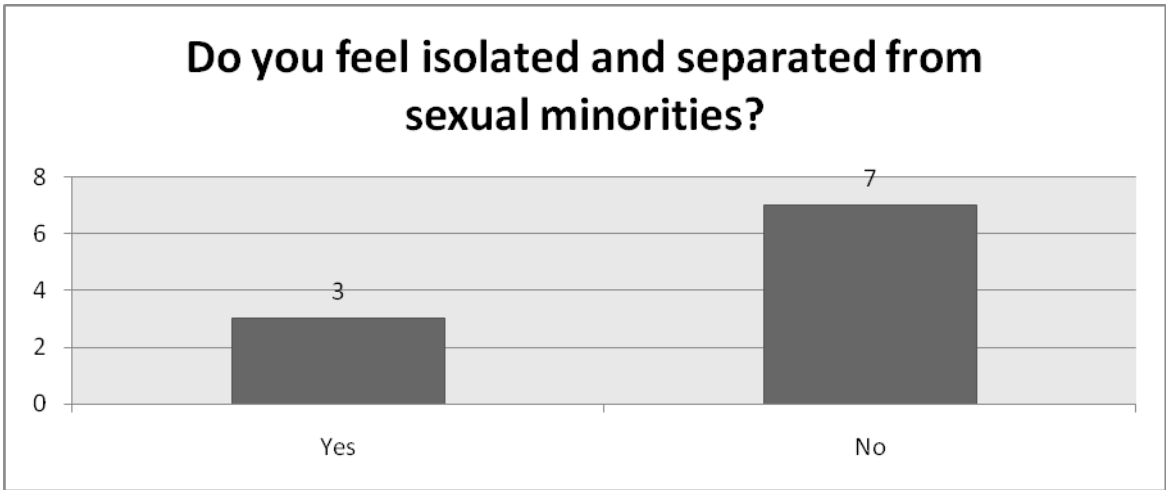

Figure 31: Question 8

> *Am better off, as far away as possible from them.* (Participant 4)
>
> *Yes, I clearly don't belong with such people.* (Participant 3)
>
> *Of course, I don't want to be identified with those people.* (Participant 2)

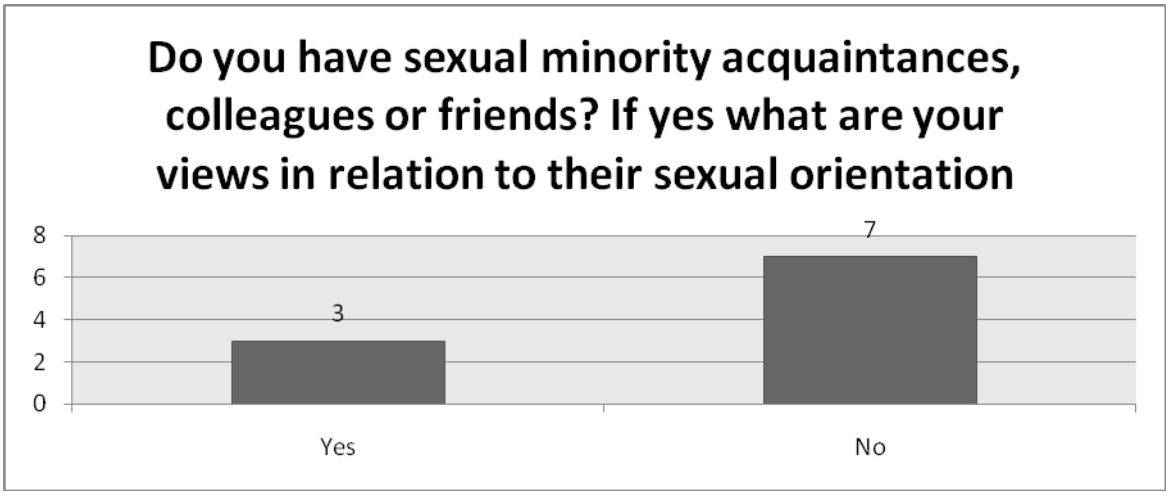

Figure 32: Question 9

Yes, I don't have a problem with them, they are human after all. (Participant 6)

Yes I have and they are fine and fun to hang around with. (Participant 5)

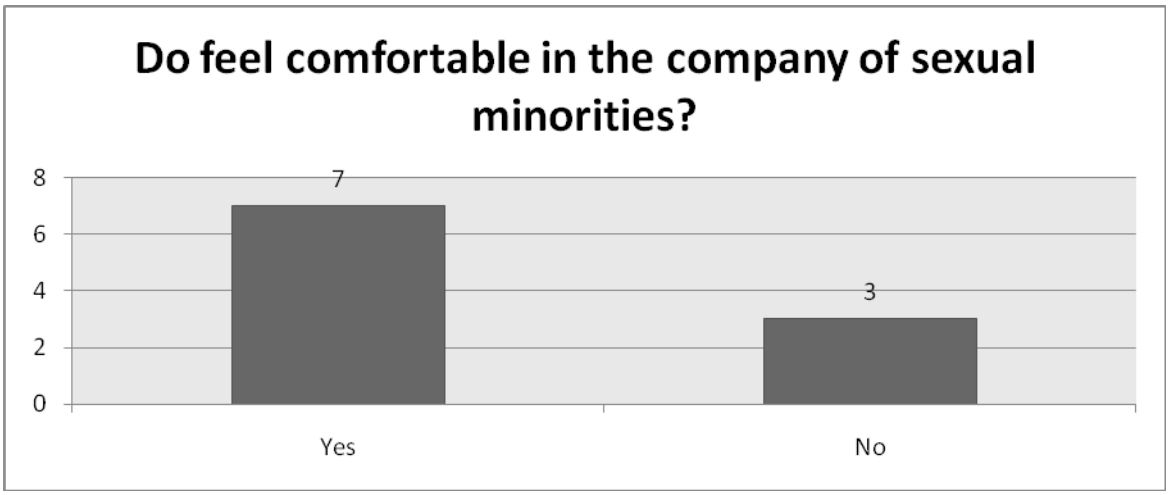

Figure 33: Question 10

Yes, I would I f I knew any. (Participant 9)

No, because I am afraid they will hit on me and I wouldn't like that. (Participant 2)

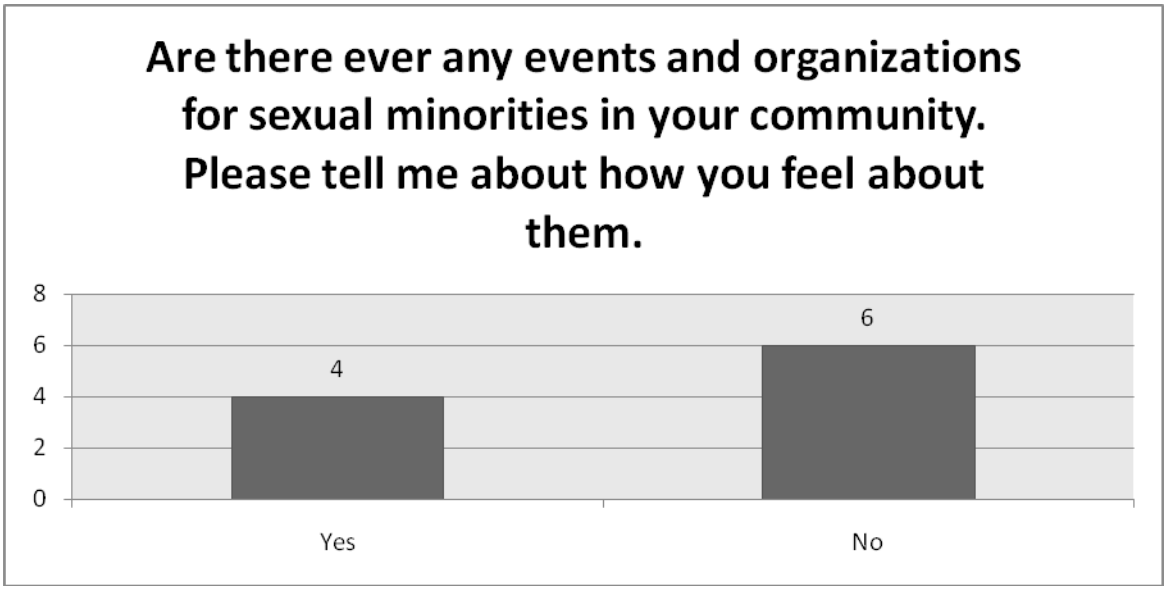

Figure 34: Question 11

Yes, I believe they are doing a good job as they bring wsw and talk about issues which affect them. (Participant 7)

Yes, they are great, very entertaining and educational. (Participant 5)

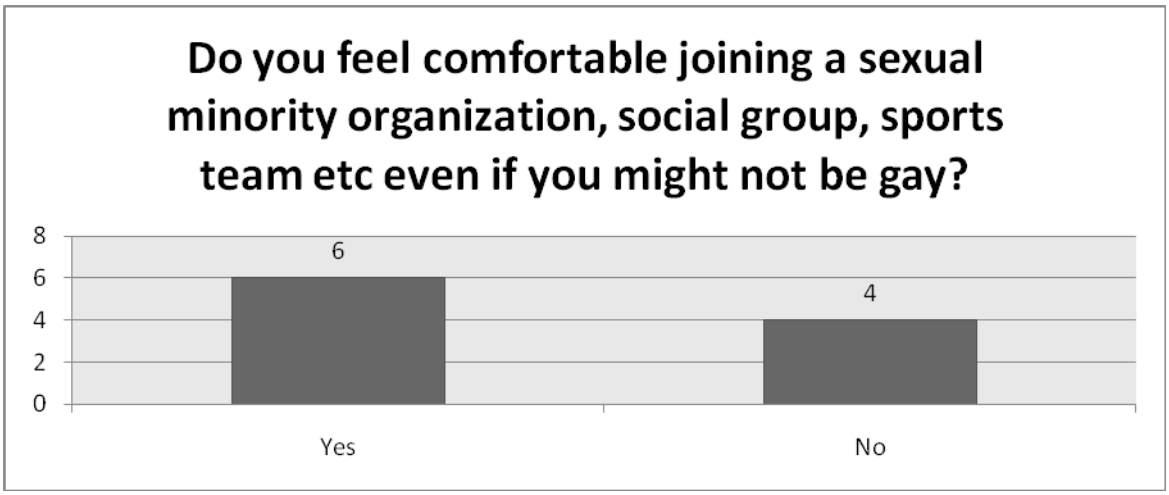

Figure 35: Question 12

No because I don't want to be identified or labeled as one of them. (Participant 4)

Yes because I feel they could understand me better. (Participant 7)

No, not that I have heard of. (Participant 4)

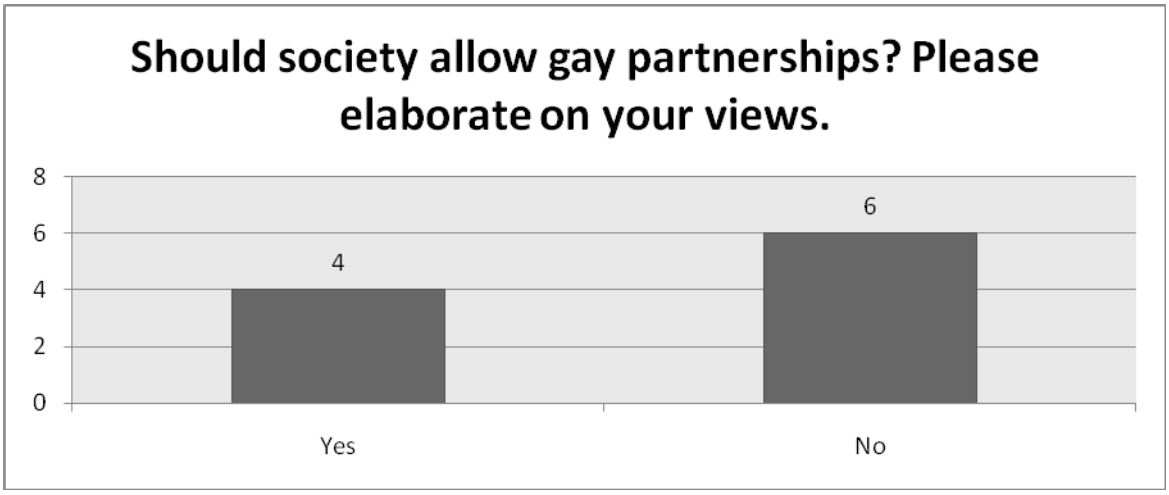

Figure 36: Question 13

No because its abnormal and wrong to have feelings for a person of the same sex. (Participant 1)

Not at all. It's a sin and an abomination. I think they should be hang or put in jail for a very long time. (Participant 2)

Not at all. Clearly gay partnerships are wrong and should not be tolerated. (Participant 3)

Yes, they are humans and they deserve to be treated like anybody else (Participant 6)

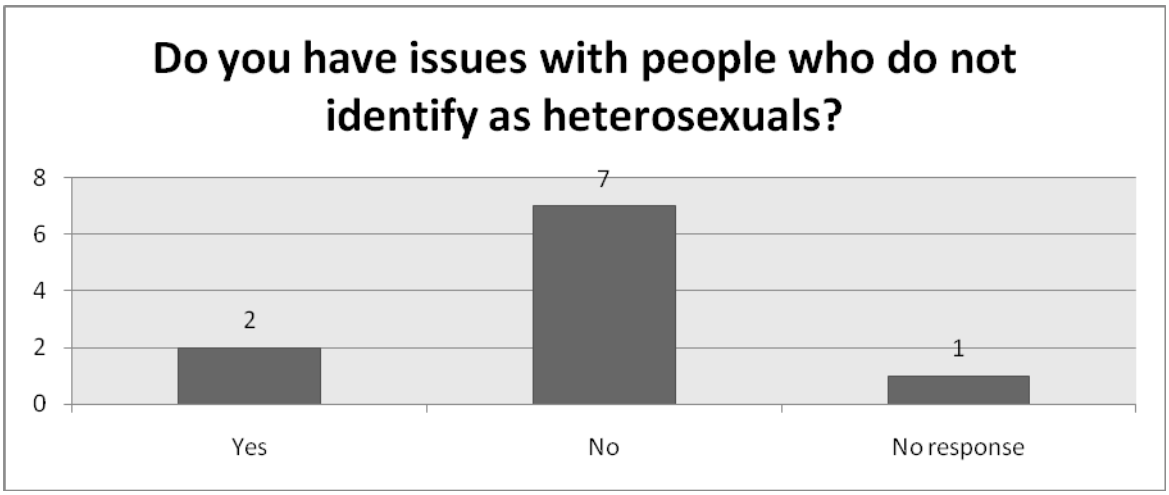

Figure 37: Question 14

Yes, I don't like them. (Participant 2)

Yes, they are a bunch of animals. (Participant 3)

Of course no. (Participant 7)

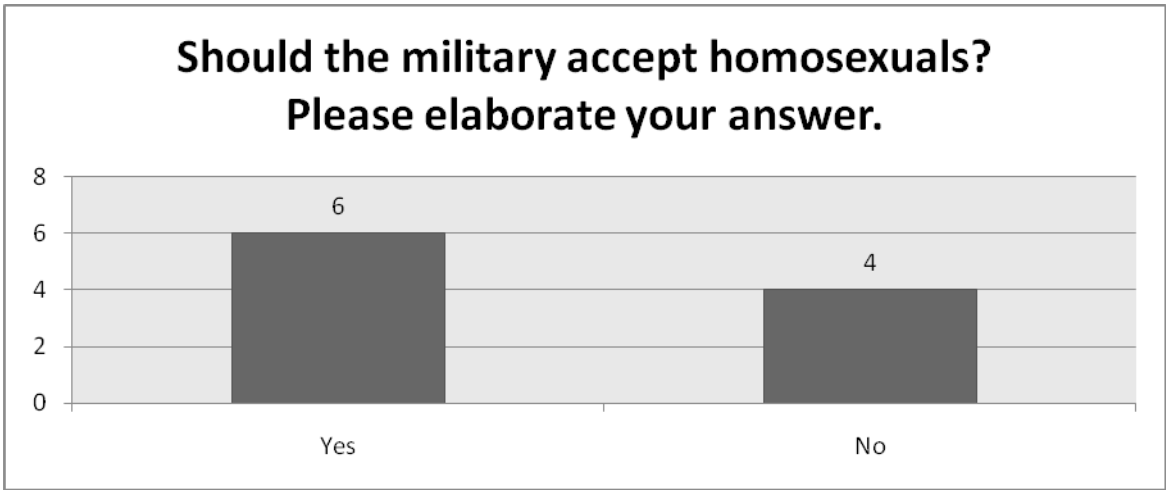

Figure 38: Question 15

No because its abnormal and wrong to have feelings for a person of the same sex. (Participant 1)

Not at all. It's a sin and an abomination. I think they should be hang or put in jail for a very long time. (Participant 2)

Not at all. Clearly gay partnerships are wrong and should not be tolerated. (Participant 3)

Yes, they are humans and they deserve to be treated like anybody else. (Participant 6)

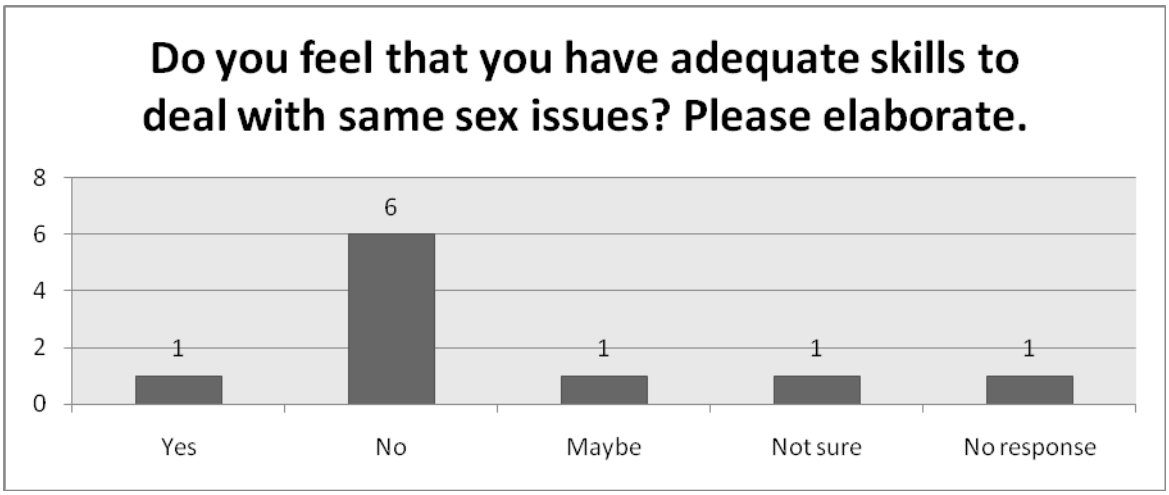

Figure 39: Question 16

No, mainly because I am not interested. (Participant 1)

No, I don't want to work with those people. (Participant 2)

No, why should I acquire skills to deal with animals. (Participant 3)

Yes, I have friends who are homosexuals and I interact with them easily. I guess I have the skills. (Participant 6)

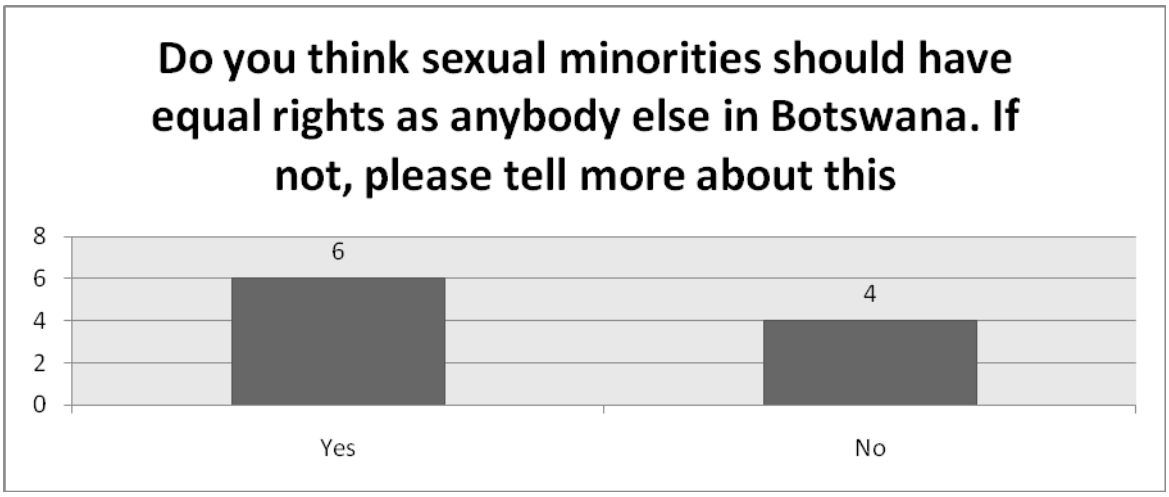

Figure 40: Question 17

No. What they are doing is wrong and homosexuality is illegal so no. (Participant 1)

Nope, they can't have the same rights with other people because they are animals. (Participant 2)

Gosh! Animals can't have the same rights with humans. (Participant 3)

Yes!! I mean we both human hei. (Participant 7)

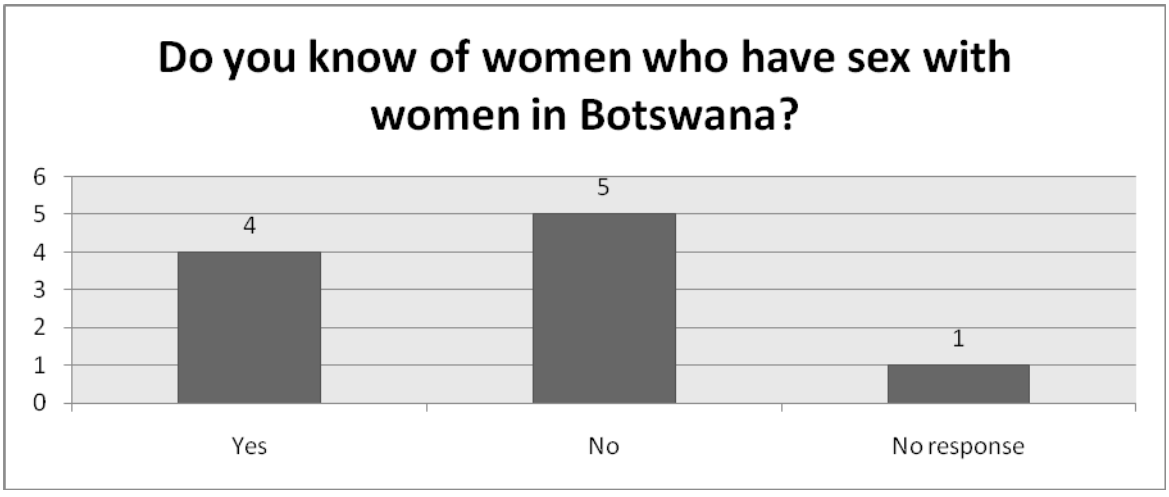

Figure 41: Question 18

No, but always see them passing by, because most dress like men. (Participant 4)

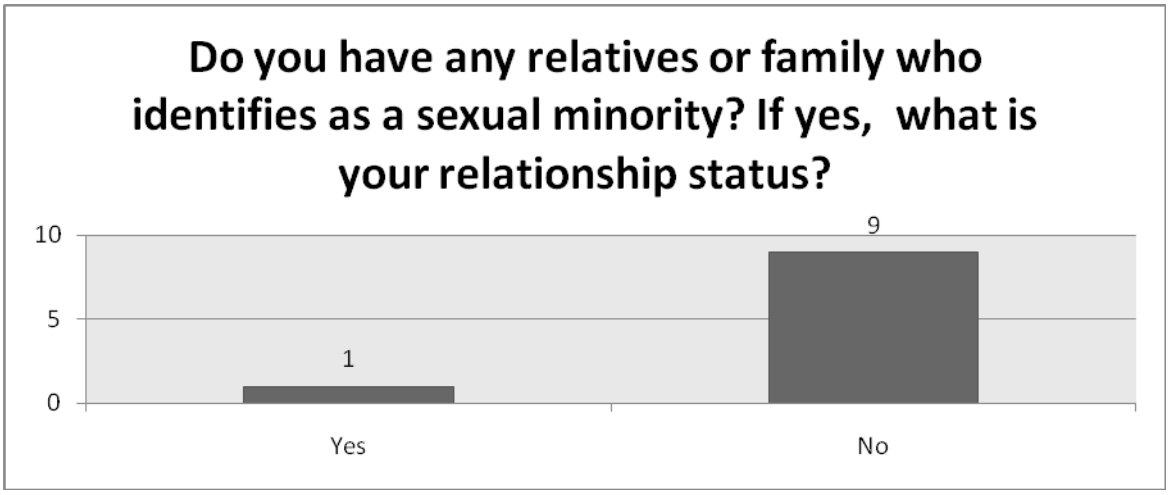

Figure 42: Question 19

Yes I do, my cousin, so he claims. (Participant 4)

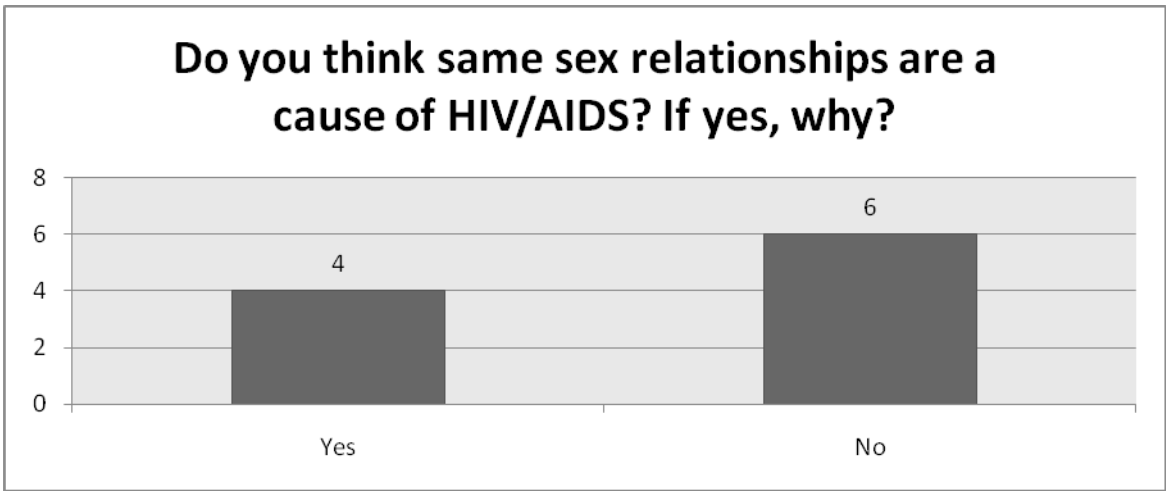

Figure 43: Question 20

Definitely especially men who have sex with men they are responsible for spreading the disease. (Participant 2)

Yes, especially men because there is a lot of friction that side. (Participant 4)

No, it was a disease invented by scientists by mistake. (Participant 5)

No, that is absurd. (Participant 6)

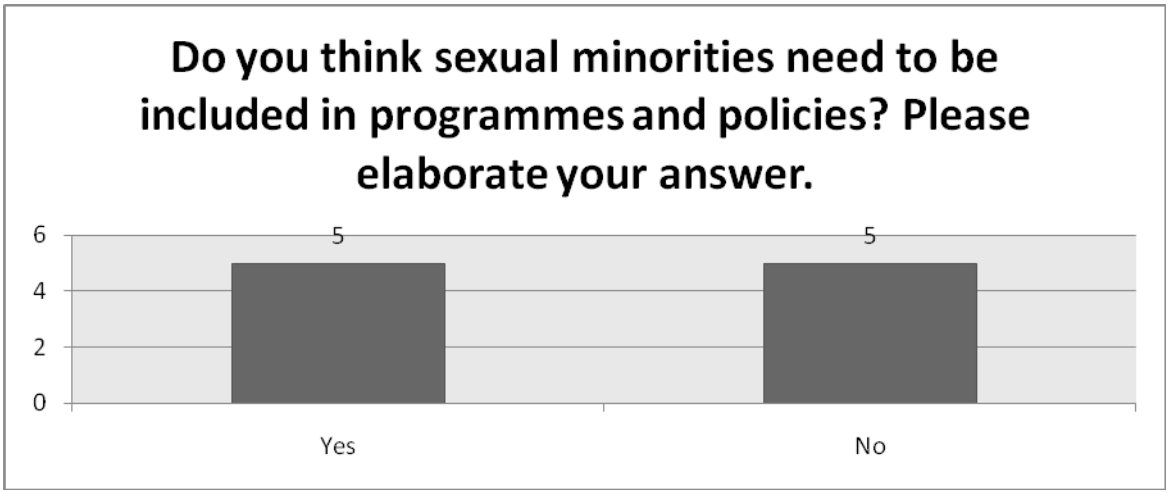

Figure 44: Question 21

No. they are so illegal. (Participant 1)

Yes, for us to have zero transmission rate of HIV they need to be included otherwise we won't get anywhere. They are a part of the chain. (Participant 6)

Yes they have every right as human beings to participate in everything that is done in the country. (Participant 10)

Question 22 asked: Drawing from your knowledge and experience, what do you think contributes to fewer interventions for women who have sex with women in Botswana?

I believe its western or English behavior that's why they are fewer in Botswana. (Participant 1)

I don't want any interventions for those people they should just disappear. (Participant 2)

Ignorance, that's all. (Participant 6)

Total ignorance and lack of knowledge. (Participant 9)

Question 23 asked: Are there community resources for sexual minorities such as bookstores, bars, support groups that you know of?

Why should there be? (Participant 3)

No and it's a pity. Discrimination if you ask me (Participant 5)

BONELA. (Participant 6)

Haven't heard of any. (Participant 7)

Question 24 asked: What do you think needs to change to improve situation of sexual minorities in Botswana?

Nothing needs to change I think god will change these people someday. (Participant 2)

Nothing, they should just stay illegal and go to jail. (Participant 3)

Just teach them the word of god. (Participant 4)

Legalize it that's where we should start. (Participant 6)

People need to know more about wsw so that they could learn to accept them. (Participant 7)

Empower sexual minorities to stand up for their rights. (Participant 9)

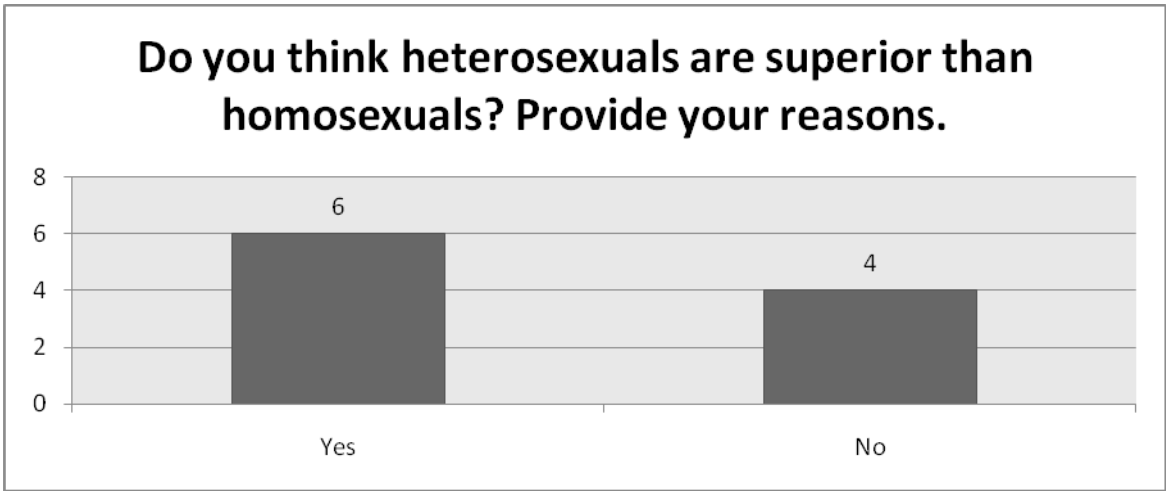

Figure 45: Question 25

Yes, because homos are acting against the will of god. (Participant 1)

Of course, homosexuals are animals and heterosexuals are normal people. (Participant 2)

Definitely, we can't be equated to a bunch of promiscuous, unruly, sex hungry animals. (Participant 3)

Yes, indeed superior because god created man and woman to be fruitful and multiply which I believe is holly and natural. (Participant 4)

Nobody is superior rather we are all unique. (Participant 5)

Not at all we are all human beings. (Participant 6)

A big no! We are both equal in the eyes of god. (Participant 7)

Yes, god created men and women to reproduce not women with other women having sexual relations. (Participant 8)

Nobody is superior than the other we are all humans and equal. (Participant 9)

Yes, god created men and women to reproduce not women with other women having sexual relations. (Participant 10)

4. Analysis

4.1. LBWSW respondents

4.1.1. Self

From the ground it seems LBWSW women face many difficulties and feel marginalized.

Clearly, there is a sign of confusion characterized by awareness of sexuality and internal conflict over identity coupled with feelings of further alienation and isolation. In the Botswana context, the persons I interviewed gave the impression that they assumed there was tolerance of their identities but at the same they accepted that they would never be fully recognized. This hinders the first step in actually coming out to one's self. This realization is strongly suggested and reflected on the basis that the respondents find it difficult to come out to families, instead revealing their sexual orientation to friendship groups. These individuals immerse themselves in friendships and LBWSW communities to try and separate themselves from the heterosexual normative community due to stigma and discrimination. They are not able to integrate their sexual orientation with their overall identity. It is easier for bisexuals and WSW to belong to the larger society than it is for masculine lesbians, simply because they are able to fit in without being noticed.

Marginalizing factors arising from the need for individuals who are members of an oppressed or marginalized group have to come to grips with the oppression or marginalization; for LBWSW identity, development demands the person to deal with the process of coming out, both to themselves and their families, and addressing internalized homophobia.

These findings indicate that most of the respondents earn between the range of P500 and P2000, suggesting that a majority of the respondents are students, resulting in a level of independence that is strongly reliant on family. This demographic indicates a fear to disclose their sexual orientation to family for reasons of possible loss of financial security. There was a strong link between issues of security and finance and individuals being closeted. The fear of perceived homophobia from civil society was also a factor of internalized homophobia.

4.1.2. Culture, religion and politics

In 1998, the process of revising the penal code raised prospects that the sodomy law might be repealed. However, both political and religious forces intervened to block the possibility. Politicians in Botswana defended sodomy laws based on the belief that homosexuality represents both the antithesis of Botswana culture and that alternative sexualities are merely a reflection of Western influence. At the time the then Assistant Minister of Labor and Home Affairs Olifant Mfa, claimed that homosexuality is barbaric, whether you argue it from the perspective of religion or culture. Mr. Mfa went so far as to encourage such individuals to go for counseling and serious therapy so that they can be brought back to normality. He considered homosexuality to occur only when people ignore their religion and culture to suit their absurd behavior. Mr. Mfa also stated that the reason that homosexuality is not part of Botswana culture is because even people who claim to be homosexual are afraid to come out in the open.

Certainly, fear of being exposed to negative and discriminatory treatment by political and religious forces keeps these individuals from coming out into the open. It will continue to be difficult for the LBWSW community to be open about their sexual orientation if it constitutes a criminal offence. According to BONELA and LeGaBiBO, Homosexuality has always been a taboo subject and society has more often than not tried to hide the history of homosexuals. Hardly anything positive has ever spoken about gays and lesbians and their contribution to society. Kgosi Sediegeng Kgamane, a tribal authority, admitted that he was aware of such behavior in the society; however, he said that homosexuality is not welcome in the Tswana custom and is a kind of mental illness. LeGaBiBO responded by informing him that homosexuality cannot be cured simply because it is not a disease. Kgosi Lotlaamoreng II, the paramount chief of Barolong, claimed that there are no elements of homosexuality in Botswana or other African societies. He is convinced that it is alien behavior that comes with foreigners. BONELA responded to the Botswana Gazette's representation of homosexuality as rubbish by a letter stating:

> We continue to advocate for the rights of the lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered and inter-sexed community because they have long been here, contribute to the fabric of this country, and will long be here to stay. Homosexuality is found all around Botswana, including in rural areas.

Hostility to homosexuals has been expressed numerous times by government officials. The executive secretary of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) said his party could not even debate the issue of homosexuality because it would shock the Batswana nation. The then Vice-president of Botswana, Seretse Ian Khama, who is currently the president of Botswana, also spoke out against homosexuals::

> Human rights are not a license to commit unnatural acts which offend the social norms of behavior ... The law is abundantly clear that homosexuality, performed either by males or females, in public or private is an offence punishable by law.

Other traditional leaders, such as the late Bakgatla Kgosi Linchwe II and Bangwaketse Kgosi Seepaapitso IV, have also opposed relaxing the penal code. Bangwaketse Kgosi Seepapitso IV told the *Midweek Sun* that people who are gay should be whipped or sent to jail.

In sum, such factors contribute to the marginalization of LBWSW women in Botswana and are without a doubt a true reflection of the facts unearthed by this study.

4.1.3. The law

Sexual orientation is an axis on which grave discrimination occurs that is both socially and legally sanctioned in Botswana. While there has been some indirect governmental engagement with the issue of male homosexuality through the National AIDS Program, women's experiences of discrimination due to sexual orientation remain unarticulated in the public domain. Issues concerning women whose sexualities are perceived to be non-conforming are completely absent from public discourse and the general public. This invisibility can be traced back to the patriarchal structure of the Botswana society and today leads to a lack of protection from discrimination, harassment, and exploitation,. Female sexuality is only made manifest and acceptable through a legitimate heterosexual union. Therefore, women who have sex with women, as well as lesbian and bisexual women, are marginalized, stigmatized, and often subject to abuse and harassment. For many lesbian women, this also means being socialized into eventual heterosexual marriage without being given the opportunity to live their lives as they desire.

The silence surrounding issues pertaining to female sexuality, whether on the part of the government, society, or civil society, is cause for concern. Where lesbianism is actually acknowledged, it is seen as sick or perverted, and doubly so because the very idea of lesbianism implies female sexual agency in a society where this agency is seen as unacceptable. It is crucial to recognize the more subtle (but no less insidious) forms of violence experienced by LBWSW due to factors such as feelings of shame, isolation, low self-esteem, an increase in the consumption of drugs and alcohol, and a loss of family support networks.

4.1.4. Social construction

The private realm of the home is where violations against lesbian and bisexual women are most prominent due in large part to the social invisibility of non-conforming female sexualities. However, public institutions also reproduce and perpetuate these violations, whether through the health care system, educational system, or law enforcement. Of note here is the increasing number of lesbian and bisexual women who are sent to mental health professionals and religious groups to cure them of their homosexuality. Here, they are often subject to outdated, discredited, and often dangerous therapeutic methods that could lead to lasting damage.

4.2. Community

The findings suggest that all the community respondents were aware of what homosexuality is and what it means. The majority of the respondents did not know someone in particular who identifies as LBWSW. There is an equal representation of people who have in one way or another interacted with a person who identifies as LBWSW and those who have not.. The majority also stated they lack any experiences in same sex relations. When asked why they think people engage in same sex relations, some suggested that it is mainly because they want to impress particular people, have fun, or for demonic reasons suggesting that the world is coming to an end as predicted in the Christian Bible. The majority also felt that they do not feel separated or isolated from sexual minorities, though they did not want to be associated with the LBWSW community. In contrast, the majority of the respondents felt comfortable with joining sexual minority groups/sport teams etc, so long as it did not result in association or labeling of themselves as LBWSW. Rather, they felt that sexual minorities should be kept as far away as possible from their community. In contradiction again, the majority of the community participants did not have an issue with legally allowing LBWSW partnerships and accepting LBWSW into the military, despite the need for exclusion from their immediate social circles. They would prefer that they be hung or imprisoned.

The majority of the community members I interviewed referred to homosexuals as animals who should be jailed and kept away for a long time yet they also pointed out that sexual minorities should have equal rights as anybody else. When asked if HIV and AIDS is caused by same sex relations, the majority said no. The community respondents felt like nothing needs to change where interventions are concerned, but instead, sexual minorities need to be taught the word of God. About 60% of the community respondents said heterosexuals are more superior than homosexuals; homosexuals are animals and heterosexuals are normal people, said one of the participants.

With these findings, there is a contradiction in the way that the heterosexual community respondents viewed same sex relations due to the minimal number which indeed is not representative of the entire population. Therefore, I feel this does not reflect the views of the larger population of Botswana. Further research needs to be conducted to get a true sagacity of what the larger community feels outside the sexual minority population.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

5.1. Recommendations

5.1.1. Law reform

The decriminalization of homosexuality: Botswana is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) following its accession on September 8, 2000. In addition, the Constitution of Botswana establishes in Article 3 that every person in Botswana is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinions, color, creed or sex. Furthermore, Article 12(1) of the Constitution states that:

> No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, that is to say, freedom to hold opinions without interference, freedom to receive ideas and information without interference, freedom to communicate ideas and information without interference (whether the communication be to the public generally or to any person or class of persons) and freedom from interference with his correspondence.

The constitutional protection of freedom of assemble and association is established by article 13(1) that reads

> No person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of assembly and association, that is to say, his right to assembly freely and associate with other persons and in particular to form or belong to trade unions or other associations for the protection of his interests.

The most egregious violation of LBWSW rights in Botswana lies in the Botswana penal code that still criminalizes same-sex sexual conduct in private between consenting adults, which contravenes to Articles 2(1), 17, and 26 of the ICCPR. Section 167 of the Penal Code Act, Chapter 8 of the Laws of Botswana, states that

> Any person who, whether in public or private, commits any act of gross indecency with another person, or procures another person to commit any act of gross indecency with him or her, or attempts to procure the commission of any such act by any person with himself or herself or with another person, whether in public or private, is guilty of an offence.

Section 164 provides that

> Any person who- (a) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or (b) has carnal knowledge of an animal; or (c) permits any other person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature; is

guilty of an offence and is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding seven years.

The very existence of such a law in particular reference to sections (a) and (c) of Section 164 violates an assumption of equality and highlights the State's failure to respect, protect and fulfill human rights. This law can be viewed broadly; and as evidenced in the responses of the respondents, requires redefinition. The right to human dignity, freedom of association, assembly and movement, privacy, non-discrimination, equality and the prohibition against torture are all essential and indispensable rights that should be applied to all citizens regardless of sexual orientation. The discriminatory culture against LBWSW individuals in Botswana further denies the possibility of providing education, prevention and care programs to individuals with HIV/AIDS. Anti-discrimination legislation, directed specifically at LBWSW rights, is needed.

5.1.2. Scale up programming for LBWSW populations

The government must utilize resources effectively and develop scaled, strategic programming consistent with the epidemiological profile of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and ensure there is appropriate guidance on regular HIV/AIDS testing, care, and treatment for groups at elevated risk. This should include availability, access, and quality of physical, mental, and behavioral health and related services for the LBWSW population. Generalization of the findings concerning the health of all LBWSW in general should be considered with great caution.

5.1.3. Advocacy and further research

LBWSW youth as reflected in the study face formidable risks caused by societal stigmatization of homosexuality. Responding to these needs requires approaches beyond traditional services and individualized counseling supports. LeGaBiBo needs a unique model of youth services for the organization in order to develop more appropriate community-based services for these youth. Its programs should be focused on enhancing quality of life for LBWSW youth through empowerment-focused counseling, action research, advocacy, community development, and community education.

5.2. Challenges

As this was the first study of its nature in Botswana, sourcing relevant information for the study was difficult. Being a novice researcher without extensive knowledge on research methods compelled me to learn and conduct the study at the same time. This challenge, coupled with time and financial constraints, made it intricate and complex. Originally I had envisioned interviewing 30 LBWSW participants, but as the process continued, I was unable

to interview two participants who were under the legal age, three who opted to withdraw from the study and three who did not complete the questionnaire. This in total brought me to the final 22 participants in addition to 10 random community members.

It was a hard and thorny road without a reference group. I stumbled often, learning and implementing at the same time. Many lessons were learnt and through the process, the study was an eye opener for a new career path as a researcher.

5.3. Conclusion

The majority of the respondents ranged between the ages of 18 and30 - undergraduates, students and employed, with a majority being lesbians followed by bisexuals. They are not out to family and colleagues due to homophobia, fear of disapproval, and the withdrawal of financial and emotional support, being disowned and viewed as disgusting. Yet, a majority felt comfortable in disclosing their sexual identity to friends. The majority felt homophobia exists, especially amongst religious groups, traditionalists, elderly people and heterosexual men. Religion, culture and familial acceptance play a very important role in how respondents view themselves and how they are perceived by society. Respondents do not feel physically threatened, yet they perceive negativity as a result of their sexuality. Although they feel comfortable and secure within their environment, they limit interactions within LBWSW communities. They feel free to express their feelings and attraction towards same sex partners, although not publicly due to fear of discrimination, stigmatization and labeling. Most of the respondents have the desire to marry in the future, even though they recognize that the law of Botswana does not allow for same sex marriages.

The needs of this particular population are for the government to address healthcare needs - of particular importance is STIs, HIV/AIDS and mental health services. While there is knowledge among the respondents on how to protect themselves against STIs and HIV/AIDS, there remains a strong need for protective barriers within the public healthcare system tobe made available to sexual minorities that are currently unavailable in Botswana. The need is there for sensitization and education of healthcare workers in humanly addressing issues of healthcare for sexual minorities without discrimination or stigmatization.

The laws of Botswana currently criminalize any form of consensual same-sex conduct between consenting adults. Beyond establishing a legal ground for the deprivation of life, liberty, physical integrity, health, and opportunity, these laws preserve ingrained stereotypes about LBWSW individuals and, in effect, serve to reinforce and strengthen social stigmas against them. The cumulative effects of the social world on some LBWSW youth can thus be devastating. Self-acceptance in the face of isolation, rejection, and little or no access to accurate information or resources, is difficult and sometimes impossible.

Appendix 1: Informed consent

Study: I understand I have been asked to participate in a study being conducted by Lorraine Setuke on the Factors Contributing to the Marginalization of WsW community in Botswana.

I understand that I will be answering questions about my family and about myself.

I understand that the risks associated with participating in this study are no greater than the risks associated with everyday life.

I understand that my participation will involve approximately 1hr 30min of my time.

I understand that, even if I choose to participate, I am under no obligation to discuss things that I do not wish to discuss.

I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any point, even after I have begun to participate, at no penalty to myself.

I understand that the information I provide will remain confidential and anonymous; my name will never be revealed to anyone other than Lorraine Setuke, and their research collaborators.

I understand that the only persons who will have access to these anonymous data are Lorraine Setuke, and their research assistants.

I understand that the results of this study will be published, but I will never be identified individually in any publication.

I understand that I can request that Lorraine Setuke mail me the results of this study or describe to me the results of this study once it is completed.

I understand that I can contact Lorraine Setuke by email at setukelk@aol.com for more information.

I understand that I may contact the Office of Research Services at BONELA by email (board.legabibo@gmail.com), if I have any questions regarding my rights as a participant in this research.

Thank you for your interest and participation.
Lorraine Setuke
Researcher

_____
Participant Signature

Appendix 2: LBWSW questionnaire

Factors Contributing To The Marginalization Of WSW(Women Who Have Sex With Women) Community In Botswana, Key Informant Interview schedule

A. Biographic information

1. Sex

Female	1
Other(Specify)_____	2

2. Race

Black	1
White	2
Asian	3
Other (Specify)_____	4

3. Age

Less than 18	1
18-25	2
26-30	3
31-35	4
36-40	5
41-45	6
46-older	7

4. What are your living arrangements?

Stay on own	1
Stay with male partner	2
Stay with female partner	3
Stay with family (relatives)	4
Stay with parents	5
Other (Specify)_____	6

5. What is your (completed) educational level?

Standard 7 or less	1
JC	2
BGCSE	3
Short courses/ Certificate	4
Some university	5
Undergraduate	6
Post graduate	7
Other (Specify)_____	8

6. What do you do for a living?

Paid Work	1
Student	2
Other (Specify)_____	3

7. What is your current employment status?

Employed full time	1
Employed part time	2
Self employed	3
Unemployed- looking	4
Unemployed- not looking	5
Home maker	6
Other (Specify)_____	7

8. What is your current net monthly income?

Less than P500	1
P500- P2000	2
P2500-P4000	3
P4500- P8000	4
Above P8000	5
Other (Specify)_____	6

9. Identity/Sexual orientation

WSW (Women who have sex with Women)	1
Lesbian	2
Bi-Sexual	3
Other (Specify)_____	4

B. Family background and history

10. Where does your family come from?

_____
_____
_____

11. Where did you grow up?

_____
_____
_____

12. Are you out to your family? If not why?

_____
_____
_____

13. How does your family (relatives) feel about your sexual identity/orientation?

_____
_____
_____

14. Do you feel accepted by your family (relatives) for who you are at home, if not elaborate?

_____
_____
_____

15. Who are you closest to in your family & your extended family? Who are the most important men or women in your life/family?

_____
_____
_____
_____

16. How would you describe your primary (non-sexual) identity with regard to religion/gender/family position/country?

_____
_____
_____

C. Friendships, social interactions and discrimination

17. Tell me about your friendship group. Who were the biggest influences on your life & why?

_____
_____
_____
_____

18. Have you disclosed your sexual identity to your friends or anybody? If yes, to whom?

_____
_____
_____

19. Have you ever disclosed your sexual identity/orientation involuntarily? If yes why?

_____
_____
_____

20. How would you describe yourself to your friends/family/work colleagues/others?

_____
_____
_____

21. While interacting with people who do not identify as WSW/lesbian/bisexual who know your sexual orientation, how do you perceive they interpret your behaviors in terms of the fact that you are WSW/lesbian/bisexual?

_____
_____
_____

22. Do you think your sexual orientation influences people around you to behave differently during your presence? If yes, please elaborate

_____
_____
_____
_____

23. Do you think homophobia exist? If yes, which groups of people are homophobic and why do you think this is so?

_____
_____
_____
_____

24. Do you think stereotypes and prejudices about lesbian/ WSW /bisexual or same-sex relations between women exist? If yes, do you think they affect you personally?

_____
_____
_____
_____

25. Have you ever been expected to present in any other way than you identify e.g. gender, dress code, behavior?

_____
_____
_____

26. Do you feel happy as a person in relation to your social standing and interrelations? Explain

_____
_____
_____

27. Do you feel pressure to have sex or relations with women when with your friends or others? If yes why?

_____
_____
_____

28. Are there activities (eg. clubs, political activities, associations) for LBTI people or their allies on your community?

_____
_____
_____

29. Have you ever been assaulted or verbally abused due to your sexual orientation/identity? If yes where and why?

_____
_____
_____

30. Been chased or followed due to sexual orientation/identity. If yes where?

_____
_____
_____

31. Have you ever experienced any harassment/violence/stigma because of sexual orientation?

_____
_____
_____

31. Been verbally threatened with physical or sexual assault due to sexual orientation/identity? If yes, where?

_____
_____
_____

32. Have you ever had objects thrown at you due to sexual orientation? If yes where?

_____
_____
_____

33. Been denied service due to sexual orientation/identity? If yes, where?

_____
_____
_____

34. Have you ever been passed over for a promotion/job opportunity due to your sexual orientation?

_____
_____
_____

35. Have you ever been denied employment because of the way you present yourself?

_____
_____
_____

36. Have you ever been forced into a dress code that you don't feel comfortable in?

_____
_____
_____

37. Do you feel secure within the environment around you generally? If not why?

_____
_____
_____

38. Been pressured to keep silent about your sexual orientation/identity?

_____
_____
_____

D. Relationship history

Tell me about your current relationship status

Single –celibate	1
Single- sexually active	2
Married	3
Concurrent partnership	4
Other (Specify)_____	5

39. Can you tell me about your emotional/romantic relationships with women in the past?

_____
_____
_____
_____

40. Can you tell me about your emotional/romantic relationships with men in the past?

_____
_____
_____
_____

41. Can you tell me about your earliest memory of being attracted to another girl/woman?

_____
_____
_____

42. Are same sex relationships easily accessible in Botswana? If not why?

_____
_____
_____

43. Have you ever used the internet, computer, mobile phone to find a female partner?

_____
_____
_____

E. Sexual awareness/knowledge

44. What does the word sex mean to you?

_____
_____
_____

45. What do you understand by the word sexuality? Are there Setswana words that mean the same?

_____
_____
_____

46. Do you understand the term homosexuality? What does it mean to you? Are there Setswana words that mean the same?

_____
_____
_____

47. Do you remember the first time you heard the word homosexual? (when? where?) please tell me more about this

_____
_____
_____

48. What is your understanding of the terms women who have sex with women/lesbian/Bisexual?

_____
_____
_____

49. Do you know if there are other women who have sex with other women in Botswana not necessarily identifying as lesbian, bi-sexual and WSW. Please elaborate your answer

_____
_____
_____

F. Sexual practices/preference

50. What are some of the words *you* use for sex and different sexual practices/behaviors?

_____
_____
_____

51. Have you ever had a sexual relationship with a woman and a man concurrently?

_____
_____
_____

52. Who do you think your next sexual partner will be? How will you decide?

_____
_____
_____

53. Do you ever think about being exclusively with women or with men?

_____
_____
_____

54. Who was you first sexual partner man or woman?

_____
_____
_____

55. How would you describe the differences between having sex with a woman and having sex with a man?

_____
_____
_____
_____

56. Do you ever/always feel emotional/affectionate about a woman/man you've had sex with?

_____
_____
_____
_____

57. When you have sexual relations with women, who take the active role? Is it always the same, with different partners?

_____
_____
_____

58. Are you attracted to men and women for the same reasons? Please write in full

_____
_____
_____
_____

59. Does your sexual preference have any impact on the way you feel about yourself? Does it change your concept of yourself/your identity/orientation?

_____
_____
_____
_____

G. Sexual identities

60. How do you refer to your sexual orientation/identity in Setswana

_____

61. How does your non heterosexual partner identify?

_____

62. How many years have you identified as non-heterosexual?

_____
_____
_____

63. What do the identities *wsw*/lesbian/*bisexual* mean in Botswana?

_____
_____
_____

64. Between 0-100% rate the intensity of your sexual or erotic thoughts, feelings or attractions towards people of same sex

_____
_____
_____

65. Do you feel free to express these feelings, attractions or emotions? If no why?

_____
_____
_____

66. On a day to day level, about what percentage of your attraction, feeling or fantasies are directed to the same sex vs. the opposite sex?

_____
_____
_____

67. How do you feel about you identity/sexual orientation generally?

_____
_____
_____

H. Marriage

68. Do you have intentions of getting married in the future? If not why?

_____
_____
_____

69. Do you think your husband or current partner knows about your other sexual preference? If no, explain what would happen if they knew?

_____
_____
_____

70. Do you have any wsw/lesbian/bi-sexual friends who are married due to pressure?

_____
_____
_____

71. What do you think would be the implication getting married to the same-sex partner with regard to the community you live in?

_____
_____
_____

72. Tell me about how you would like to be living in 10 years' time. Family situation, work, location.

_____
_____
_____

I. Law

73. Do you have an understanding about the law in regard to homosexuality in Botswana?

_____
_____
_____

74. Do you think the law affects your way of life as WsW/lesbian/bisexual? If yes how

_____
_____
_____

75. Do you have any fears or worries as far as the laws of Botswana are concerned in relation to your sexual orientation?

_____
_____
_____

76. Have you ever been harassed by the police or any civil servant due to your sexual orientation? When, why?

_____
_____
_____

J. Religious affiliation

77. Do you belong to any religious denomination? (If not skip to the next section)

Christian-Catholic	1
Christian-Protestant	2
Jewish	3
Buddhist	4

Islamic	5
Hindu	6
Spiritual but not religious	7
Agnostic	8
Atheist/None	9
Other (Specify)_____	10

78. What comes to your mind when you think about homosexuality vs. your religion?

_____
_____
_____

79. What are the views of your religion regarding same sex relationships?

_____
_____
_____

80. Describe your feelings regarding how you relate with people from religious groups and denominations as relates to your sexual identity?

_____
_____
_____

K. Needs

81. What do you think is the most serious problem facing lesbians or women who have sex with women in Botswana?

_____
_____
_____

82. What do you think is the most serious health problem facing lesbians or women who have sex with women in Botswana today?

STI's	1
HIV/AIDS	2
Recreational drugs	3
Alcohol	4
TB	5
Cancer (Cervical, Breast)	6
Injuries from physical attack (domestic violence)	7
Other (Specify)_____	8

(If multiple answers are given ask which one is the most serious)

83. What do you think are some of the contributing factors to these problem?

_____
_____
_____

84. Who do you think should be involved in addressing health problem?

_____
_____
_____

85. Do you know much about sexual health and protecting yourself from disease? Does this affect your behavior with women? With men? If yes how?

_____
_____
_____

86. What do you think is being done to address issues of general wellbeing of wsw/lesbian/bisexual problems or what do you think can be done or how can different stakeholders improve their role?

1. Government

_____
_____
_____

2. Civil society organizations

_____
_____
_____

3. Any others

_____
_____
_____

87. What health services do you think are lacking for women who have sex with women in general?

_____
_____
_____

88. Of the health services you mentioned, which one do you think is the most important?

_____
_____
_____

89. What issues do you think might stand in the way of stakeholders such as government, organizations and private sector in providing these services? What suggestions can you make to overcome these issues?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

We have now come to the end of the interview. Thank you for participating in this study.

Appendix 3: Community questionnaire

Do you know of any person or persons who identify as a sexual minority(ies)?

Have you ever interacted with interacted with a person who identifies as a sexual minority? If yes, how do you feel about interacting with them?

Can sexual orientation be changed? If yes, how?

Is there a biological influence on women's homosexuality?

Do you have any experience with same sex relations?

Why do you think people engage in same sex relationships?

Do you feel isolated and separate from sexual minorities?

Do you have sexual minority acquaintances, colleagues, or friends?

Do feel comfortable in the company of sexual minorities?

Are there ever any events and organizations for sexual minorities in your community? Please tell me about how you feel about them.

Do you feel comfortable joining a sexual minority organization, social group, sports team etc. even if you might not be gay?

Should society allow gay partnerships? Please elaborate on your views.

Should the military accept homosexuals? Please elaborate your answer.

Do you feel that you have adequate skills to deal with same sex issues? Please elaborate.

Do you think sexual minorities should have equal rights as anybody else in Botswana. If not, please tell more about this.

Do you know of women who have sex with women in Botswana?

Do you have any relatives or family who identify as a sexual minority? If yes, what is your relationship status?

Do you think same sex relationships are a cause of HIV/AIDS? If yes, why?

Do you think sexual minorities need to be included in programmes and policies? Please elaborate your answer.

_____
_____
_____

Drawing from your knowledge and experience, what do you think contributes to fewer interventions for women who have sex with women in Botswana?

_____
_____
_____

Are there community resources for sexual minorities such as bookstores, bars, support groups that you know of?

_____
_____
_____

What do you think needs to change to improve the situation of sexual minorities in Botswana?

_____
_____
_____

Do you think heterosexuals are superior to homosexuals? Provide your reasons.

_____
_____
_____

References

BIAS 2008. Botswana AIDS Impact Survey II 2008, *BIAS III,* Botswana Government

Chapter 3

Oral history of activism, formal and non-formal organizing by women-loving women and transgender organizing in Central Asia

Prepared by:
Anna Kirey
Chair, Labrys

Head of the research team: Anna Kirey

Interviewers: Anna Kirey, Syinat Sultanalieva, Daniyar Orsekov

Transcriptions: Nazik Abylgazieva, Daniyar Orsekov,

Nika Shegay, Bakyt Muzuratbekov

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This project coincided with the time in my life when I was reflecting on my activist life and searching for other activist initiatives in Central Asia. Labrys was ready to cross the borders and welcome other groups and activists. During this time I was also able to think outside of everyday activist struggles of shelter services, staff quarrels, homo and transphobic violence that unfortunately remains very real. This 'outside' came in the form of reflecting about women-loving women and transgender organizing with the 'people who burn' from five Central Asian countries.

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About Labrys

Originally founded as a lesbian organization in 2004, Labrys has grown to become a group inclusive of all queer identities. As some founding members of Labrys came out as transgender men, the organization has a special focus on transgender issues and activism. Labrys focused mostly on community building and service provision in its first years of existence and then moved to being involved in advocacy at both the national and international level and providing technical assistance to similar groups in Central Asia. Currently Labrys has advocacy, service and education/empowerment programs and mostly runs training and advocacy initiatives at the national, Central Asian and international levels. Labrys is committed to involving LGBT people in decision-making processes in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a whole.

1. Introduction

Formal organizing among women-loving women (WLW) and transgender people in Central Asia is relatively new. The oldest account of semi-formal organizing for activist purposes dates back to 1997 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. It was only eight lesbian women with dozens of gay men gathering to discuss HIV prevention and for social interaction. Viktoriya Lotz, a 36-year-old ethnic German lesbian recalls this as:

> *It was when I was 25 and I am 38 now there was a girl named Sasha who was very young, she would publish announcements in Blits Info newspaper about meeting people and we met but it turned out that she was actually gathering the whole group. She was gathering us bit by bit and invited to come to point of blood transfusion. ... They provided a tiniest room for us to meet, our group gathered on Fridays for 2-3 hours. It was so tiny, there was one old computer and other stuff they owned. We talked about STIs, HIV and other things. We got to know each other bit by bit. It was hugely interesting because we all came there on half bent legs because it felt that someone was watching us. But then you came once, then two times and then it became normal. We were only maybe 8 girls and maybe 20-25 boys because there were more gay men because Volodya [the leader] put more emphasis on them and we [women] were kind of like [attached] trailer, a trailer but still a pleasure*.[1]

As evident from Vika's account, WLW came as an addition to spaces that existed for gay men within HIV prevention efforts. Most lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) groups in Central Asia started in response to availability of HIV prevention funding and focus on medical and prevention aspects of organizing. This project came smoothly from the story of foundation of Labrys in 2004 which did not follow the standard HIV prevention model, but instead created its own model of development.

Documenting the history, goals and aspirations of initiatives of WLW and transgender people organizing for social and activist purposes in Central Asia became one of the objectives of the research project with Kartini Asia available through a 1-year research fellowship. The project also had activist, visibility, policy-making and academic objectives which are summarized below, along with the main achievements of the project.

[1] Interview with Viktoriya Lotz, 13.06.2010 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

1.1. Background

1.1.1. Central Asia as a region

Central Asia is a region which is little known to the (developed) world and under-researched by both Western and local academy. Situated between Europe and Asia its location, political and social contexts challenge the neat categories elaborated by the development industry. It is post-Soviet and pre-dominantly Muslim, nationalistically newly 'central' but considered periphery by the 'big brotherly' Russia, and mostly authoritarian with sparks and 'islands of democracy'. The region has over a hundred ethnic groups including those deported there during Stalin's regime and smoldering inter-ethnic conflicts.

Geographically located in Asia, Central Asia is a mixture of different traditions including Islamic, nomadic, Russian and Persian. A century of existence within the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union contributed to establishing closer cultural ties with Russia. Home to two of the world's dictatorships know for the worst human rights violations – Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – the region has diverse forms of citizen organizing. NGOs mushrooming in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are relatively free to pursue their own agenda, while Kazakhstan sets more and more restrictions on issues that NGOs could address.

Central Asian Islam developed in isolation from other Islamic countries and with regulation both by Russian Empire and Soviet Union (Khalid, 2007), through which it became customary to combine different pre-Islamic traditions. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, funding for the *revival* of Islam has been flowing to Central Asia from the Middle East. All Central Asian countries are part of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which makes them follow a political agenda that limits sexual rights, especially internationally.

A lot of homo- and transphobic sentiment is justified by Islam despite most of the population not familiar with any of Islamic texts. Official Islam does not actively speak out against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people but when the media inquire, they are likely to make aggressive comments. For example, in an interview to the Kyrgyz office of BBC (Aspden, 2007), the Mufti (highest Muslim official) calls the Kyrgyz society to "react" to this publication. Should there be no reaction, then it would be possible to say that Kyrgyzstan "has truly sunken below the level of animals" said the Mufti.

Queer organizing was seen as a threat to national security during the Soviet regime due to its close-knit communities and resistance to outsiders. In early Bolshevik efforts to regulate homosexuality, it remained criminalized in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, while being decriminalized in European parts of the Soviet Union. There, the 'survivals of primitive custom' such as a visible presence of *bachi* (young men and boys dressed in women's clothes providing entertainment and sexual services to men), veiling and bride kidnapping, had to be eliminated, which was reflected in the legislation of Soviet Uzbek and Turkmen republics in 1920s (Healy, 2001, pp. 160). Interestingly, same-sex love between women remained within the medical discourse without criminalization in the Soviet times. Possibly regulating women's lives through compulsory heterosexuality was sufficient. Or,

perhaps following Bolshevik emancipation ideas, the 1920s WLW who also had social labels referring to their masculine gender expression, such as *muzhlanka* (literally rude way to describe a man with a feminine ending), *suparen*, *borodunya* (gentle way to refer to someone with a beard), were seen as progressive and non-threatening. These women were able to wear uniforms and non-bourgeois clothes and have access to other women through this dress code (Healy, 2001, pp. 62). As WLW fell outside a system of power struggle due to their lack of access to decision-making, their sexuality may have not needed political regulation because it was already controlled by economic and social forces.

Post-Soviet Central Asian governments chose to decriminalize *sodomy* (with the exception of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan where these efforts are underway) and adopt World Health Organization (WHO) standards of not perceiving homosexuality as a disorder. However, they did not provide sufficient training to the post-1990 generation of medical specialists to prevent them for continuing to 'treat' both women and men for homosexuality. Diagnosis of 'transsexualism' is used in all Central Asian countries and their legislation contains regulations of what people diagnosed with 'transsexualism' are able to do i.e. change legal identification documents after providing a certificate of confirmed 'sex change'.[2] LGBT organizations exist in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan with the latter officially registering Labrys as an LGBT organization.

1.1.2. Uzbekistan

Article 120 of the Uzbek Criminal Code states that "voluntary sexual intercourse of two male individuals" is punishable by up to three years of imprisonment (IRBC, 2007). Although the majority of post-Soviet states have removed this Soviet Criminal Code provision, Uzbekistan continues to enforce it. Reports indicate that between 2000 and 2004 at least 70 men have served prison terms related to Article 120 (IRCSM, 2005). There are no statistics on recent convictions because, during the Universal Periodic Review in 2008, Uzbekistan referred to recommended decriminalization as not part of its obligations under UN Conventions (UNHCR, 2009). However, in its conclusive observations the ICCPR Committee reiterated that article 120 of the Uzbek Criminal Code violates article 7, 17 and 26 of ICCPR.

The issue of criminalization of consensual sexual activity has been raised with Uzbek government on a number of occasions at the national and international level, both by human rights organizations and inter-governmental bodies within human rights and the HIV prevention context. However, to date there has not been any public expression of the government's will to decriminalize.

Additionally, activists working on HIV prevention that is often the only way to address LGBT issues, are accused of promoting homosexuality and 'values alien to Uzbek culture'.

[2] Article 72c of Kyrgyz Civil Code, Uzbek Rules of registration of the acts of civil status article 163, Uzbek Family Code article 229, Tajik Family Code article 73, Kazakh law on people's health

Criminalization and stigma make it impossible to raise LGBT-related issues for a public discussion.

The rhetoric of 'categorical incompatibility' of gender equality and HIV prevention has been used against NGOs working on women's and sexual rights. Any publication planned by NGOs or international organizations has to be monitored by a special government committee (CCPR, 2010) to determine whether its content is 'alien to the Uzbek culture'. A female photographer was found guilty on charges of libel and defamation of Uzbek people for an album of photographs depicting men and women in Uzbekistan (Aspden, 2010).

The NGOs report other state investigations on NGO publications as well. Given the political climate of fear and reprisal, LGBT people are scared to organize and address their concerns to the government or other organizations.

1.1.3. Tajikistan

Tajikistan is the poorest country in Central Asia due to a civil war in the 1990s. LGBT communities in Tajikistan stress family control and the state's reluctance to address their issues. Tajikistan's proximity to Afghanistan makes it vulnerable to security issues that its weak government may not be able to address. In addition, Tajikistan has high numbers of migrants who work in Russia. Migration and drug use make the Tajikistan population increasingly vulnerable to HIV and there are numerous NGOs working on HIV prevention. There is a relatively strong women's NGO movement in Tajikistan which is working with the government in developing women-friendly legislation. This movement, however, has not been inclusive of WLW who are 'difficult to identify'.

1.1.4. Kazakhstan

Since gaining its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan has been making a steady progress in improving its economy and establishing a system of human rights protection. It is the richest country in Central Asia with resources available to strengthen its social institutions. Kazakhstan has been noted in voting against any initiative containing sexual orientation and gender identity at the UN.

While having decriminalized male sodomy in 1998 and passed favorable legislation in relation to gender marker change, Kazakhstan continues to associate homosexuality with criminal behavior in its criminal code and does not include discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in its anti-discrimination legislation. Issues of sexual orientation and gender identity are often discussed in the public realm but in a stereotypical way which creates a hostile atmosphere for LGBT people and forming obstacles for the work of organizations that promote their rights. Due to discriminatory attitudes within the media,

religious institutions and state officials, organizations working on sexual orientation and gender identity matters are unable to fully address the issues publicly.

1.1.5. Kyrgyzstan

A home to 5 million people with over 60 ethnic groups represented within its small territory, Kyrgyzstan has been seen as the most democratic state in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan is considered to be a leader in civil society development and progressive legislation in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has legislation on gender equality and family violence that provides a legal framework for improving the situation of women. In reality, the law is rarely used when addressing specific cases of discrimination or in ensuring that traditional gender norms transform so as not to harm women. Sexuality remains a taboo subject and there are tensions between the state, religious groups and NGOs working on sexuality issues like LGBT rights or HIV prevention. According to the Open Society Institute (OSI) Access to Healthcare report, LGBT people are unlikely to address their own health concerns fearing discrimination and disclosure. In addition, medical specialists may respond to their LGBT patients with disgust and prejudice (2007). Medical textbooks used for teaching in medical universities provide a pathologized view on sexual orientation and gender identity which creates further stigma and discrimination of LGBT patients. In Labrys' experience of working with psychiatrists, many of them did not know that the WHO excluded homosexuality from the list of disorders.

Given the lack of information on sexuality, many families of LGBT people react with negativity, pressure and sometimes violence when they find out about their family member's identity (HRW, 2008). Dozens of cases of domestic violence in the form of beating, humiliation, house arrest, restricted movement and curative rape against LGBT people have been documented by local and international organizations (OCR, 2007; HRW 2008). The government usually responds with arguments that violence is prevalent in Kyrgyz society and that LGBT people are not directly targeted.

1.1.6. Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is an energy-rich state with the fifth largest natural gas resources and in top ten cotton producers in the world. This allows the government to be independent in decision-making and creating an isolated authoritarian state. Saparmurat Niyazov, who was the first party secretary of Soviet Turkmenistan, won one-candidate elections with a 99.5 percent vote in June 1992. He proclaimed himself Turkmenbashy (Leader of Turkmens) and later "President for Life" and took full control over legislative and executive branches of the government. All opposition was removed from the beginning; the only registered Democratic Party of Turkmenistan became the president's party (Roy, 2005).

Niyazov reinforced his systematic personality cult and established "one of the world's worst tyrannies" as described by Human Rights Watch (2007). His policies deteriorated health care, social welfare, education, and employment systems to the extent of great suffering in people's life. Turkmenistan's people undergo pervasive human rights violations, widespread poverty and unemployment, repression of minorities, violence and torture. However, officially government reports opposite.

Despite Niyazov's death in 2006, the government continues to be restrictive on political freedoms. Recently, Medicines Sans Frontiers (MSF) made a decision to withdraw from Turkmenistan due to the obstacles to their work presented by the government. Citizens of Turkmenistan live in fear; it is very dangerous to organize and consequences of organizing may affect one's family and friends. Every citizen is at high risk for being harassed by the police, state, and society for not conforming to prevailing social and cultural norms. Mainstream societal attitudes are openly homophobic.

In 2009, Labrys staff members met with a group of about 15 lesbian and bisexual women in Turkmenistan. Almost all were either married to men or talked about marrying a non-violent man. Marrying a man is a stigma-based defense mechanism used to prove that they are "right" girls to their families and society. A lesbian will definitely be harassed by classmates, colleagues, neighbors and friends for being different. If not punished by the police, a lesbian can face major punishment from family, in the form of domestic violence.

1.2. Research Objectives and Achievements

1.2.1. Activist: Forming a network of activists/initiative groups/NGOs working on L(G)BT issues

Advocacy training in Astana, Kazakhstan in June 2010 concluded a series of trainings that Labrys conducted for Central Asian LGBT activists. 11 people attended the training and presented interventions about sexual orientation and gender identity at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) conference on tolerance and non-discrimination. The participants came from three countries of Central Asia and represented different spectrums of non-normative gender identities and sexual orientations. During the meeting a new Central Asian LGBT advocacy network was launched and its objectives identified. Three transgender people, three lesbian women, two queer people, three gay men took part in the training. Currently the network is communicating via an online listserv and preparing for becoming more organized and structured.

1.2.2. Visibility: life stories of LBT people in Central Asia told and recorded for the first time

The research project produced 29 interviews with the largest coverage of formal and informal organizing in Kyrgyzstan where Labrys is based. There were seven transgender men from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, one queer female-identified person, one transgender woman and twenty WLW from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan interviewed for the purposes of the research project. All of them participated formally or informally in organizing around their identities. Some did it to address the inequality and injustice that they or other WLW and transgender people experienced. Others came into activism by accident seeking to find someone like themselves for communication or relationship. For many, formal and informal activist groups became their second or even first family, a space where they are accepted and can be themselves.

Through their stories it is possible to theorize what kind of situations, backgrounds, political and social climates, leadership styles and background, and various external factors contribute to establishment and formalization of activist groups aiming to create political and social change for people with similar life experience.

1.2.3. Policy-making: data for CEDAW, UPR, women's and human rights organizations collected and presented

During the course of the research project, it became possible to share knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity advocacy opportunities and activists in three out of five countries of research. Labrys cooperated with groups in Uzbekistan (one? recently named Vertae which means 'see the other side' in Latin) and Amulet in Kazakhstan to prepare reports for the UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Committee for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Committee on Monitoring Implementation of Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. With different levels of success, each report produced an international written record, put the issues faced by WLW and transgender people into international and national attention, and contributed to obtaining government's commitment to improving their situation through international obligations and pressure.

1.2.4. Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz government accepted the following recommendation:

> 62. Intensify in practice sanctions in cases of domestic violence, bride kidnapping, forced marriage, polygamy and **discrimination against women due to their sexual orientation,** as well as promote mechanisms of protection that guarantee the rights of victims of domestic violence. (Uruguay)

It was one of the few times when Kyrgyz government expressed its position about discrimination based on sexual orientation. Labrys made a presentation for the government mission to the Universal Periodic Review about sexual orientation and gender identity. Currently, Labrys is actively involved in lobbying for implementation of received recommendations and training government officials about LGBT people's issues.

1.2.5. Kazakhstan

Due to Labrys and Amulet lobbying and raising sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) issues during the UPR of Kazakhstan, the government in response to recommendation 2 para 97, made by France, that Kazakhstan join the UN Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, said that it does not support discrimination on any ground, including sexual orientation, and remains open to consideration of this recommendation in future.

1.2.6. Uzbekistan

Through the contacts established by the research project and working on a report together for CEDAW (2010), one of the important outcomes is CEDAW Committee's concluding observations for Uzbekistan. Currently Labrys is supporting Vertae in Uzbekistan in following up with the following recommendations:

> 40. The Committee notes the very limited information and statistics available on vulnerable groups of women, including elderly women, women with disabilities and women discriminated against on the basis of their sexuality. The Committee is concerned that those women often suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, especially with regard to access to education, employment and health care, protection from violence and access to justice.
>
> 41. The Committee requests the State party to provide, in its next report, a comprehensive picture of the de facto situation of vulnerable groups of women in all areas covered by the Convention and information on specific programmes and achievements.

1.2.7. Tajikistan

Through establishing contacts with local LGBT NGOs and women's NGOs, a cooperation agreement was reached to raise sexual orientation and gender identity issues during CEDAW and UPR where Tajikistan will be reviewed in the upcoming years. Currently the NGO Equal

Opportunities and Labrys are working on gathering information for a report on sexual rights in Tajikistan for the UPR due in March 2011.

1.2.8. Academic: understanding and conceptualizing processes of building identity-based movements/initiatives in Central Asia, understanding and conceptualizing LBT identities

An article titled *What's in Thy Name? The Personal and Political Meanings of 'LGBT' for Non-Heterosexual and Transgender Youth in Kyrgyzstan* was published in Central Asian Survey academic journal co-authored by Dr. Cai Wilkinson and Anna Kirey. More academic articles and potentially two Master's theses will utilize the data collected as part of the project.

1.3. Limitations

Closure of borders due to government overthrow and inter-ethnic violence made interviewing outside of Kyrgyzstan difficult. Yet the issue was solved through inviting Central Asian activists to Astana, Kazakhstan as part of training and interviewing them there. The turbulent situation in Kyrgyzstan had a huge impact on Labrys that finally found itself thrown a decade back because of new urgent priorities for the state and concerns for personal security. One of the key staff members of Labrys moved to Russia permanently and another one, an ethnic Uzbek, had to leave the country with her family during inter-ethnic clashes.

We also hoped to interview more people from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan but too few agreed to be interviewed and we did not have access to WLW and transgender people living in Turkmenistan. Continuing research in these areas, however, remains our goal for the future.

The activist nature of the project contributed to slowing down the pace with which we originally started. As we continued to support newly emerging groups through training and engaging with UN advocacy, there was less time to process research data and prepare a full-fledged report that would utilize the findings in a way that could be useful both for advocacy and academic purposes. The publications emerging as a result of this project may fulfill some of these.

2. Methodology

As the project sought to identify activists and to document their experiences of identity-based organizing, the themes elaborated on during the interviews were aimed at describing the personal, social and historical contexts for organizing. The interview guide was constructed in a way that facilitated drawing on narratives of organizing and what it meant for that particular person. Through the interviews, participants reflected on their path to organizing and highlighted achievements and drawbacks of organizing that they are involved in. As the project was designed as action research we also shared Labrys' organizing stories, motivations and challenges.

Interviewers were chosen based on their experience of interviewing. Both of them had extensive journalism experience and were also involved in activism and therefore familiar with the issues outlined in the interview guide.

28 out of 29 interviews were conducted in Russian with usage of local language terms; one interview was conducted in Kyrgyz language and translated into English. The interviewees were identified based on their involvement in activism. Some participants were known to the research team, while others we met over the internet or by recommendation of others. As expected, ethnic Russians turned out to be the most represented group among the interviewees due to their status being more tolerated by local communities and possibly higher level of access to information and resources. Ethnic Russians occupy leadership roles in two formal organizations and two informal initiatives out of eight organizing units (four formal and four informal initiatives in four countries). The people we interviewed, however, represent the diversity of WLW and transgender communities both in ethnicity and mobility. We interviewed 11 internal migrants, three migrants living abroad, 11 ethnic Russians, three ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbekistan, eight ethnic Kyrgyz from Kyrgyzstan, two ethnic Kazakhs from Kazakhstan, four ethnic Koreans from Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, one Tatar from Kyrgyzstan, one Tajik from Tajikistan and one German from Kyrgyzstan. We interviewed seven transgender men, one of whom is running a gay men's initiative in Kyrgyzstan and one transgender woman. One person identified as queer. All the other interviewees would fall into the broad category of WLW. They named dozens of ways to define themselves during the interviews.

The project has not changed much from its original plan, only dropping the topic of 'pleasure' which potentially could have been too sensitive to address with activists who were not very familiar with the research team. The majority of the interviews have been done with activists in Kyrgyzstan due to issues of access. Therefore, the history of Labrys is well-documented through the stories of 12 members of Labrys.

By country, we managed to interview only one WLW from Tajikistan and one transgender man from Turkmenistan. Six of the interviewees live and work in Kazakhstan, 17 in

Kyrgyzstan, four in Uzbekistan. Two of the interviewees have Master's degrees, 10 have university degrees, another 10 started but did not complete university education, five have professional degrees, two are currently students and two did not mention their level of education. Most interviewees were aged between 26 and 30 years. Four were older than 36, six were younger than 25, 2 within 31-35 age range.

Overall, we are satisfied with the diversity of backgrounds represented in the project. We regret not being able to interview more transgender women. We contacted them but were not able to interview them mostly for logistical reasons.

The interviews conducted in Kyrgyzstan were rich in content due to the researcher's familiarity with the interviewees, yet some of them could have become 'insider' interviews because both participants of the interview process had experience in Labrys or non-formal organizing. More clarification questions could have been asked. In publishing texts of the interviews and making them available online, we will be able to write up necessary explanations.

Being an interviewer in a leadership position was also a challenge in itself because the interviewers tended to praise the leadership and all of the interviewers in the interview process.

A few field notes were taken during the project mostly related to the developments of a group in Uzbekistan. The formal group in Kazakhstan was least responsive due to being busy with different activism initiatives, they were also the most concerned about the results and dissemination of the study because of their previous negative experiences. When taking part in research projects in the past, the group was not involved in presenting the results of the research and mostly seen as 'subjects', putting them in an unequal position. Our team will contact all of the research participants before using the data for public purposes and confirm that they are okay with quotes/sound bites and other parts of their interviews used. Most interview participants received transcripts of their interviews for approval.

3. Selected Research Findings

As the research project resulted in over 300 pages of transcripts and over a hundred pages of documents, we had to be concise in reporting the findings. Further work will be done on preparing more extensive reports and identifying more trends. These findings are those that can be useful for advocacy and shaping the agendas of new organizing initiatives. Findings from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are presented first due to few interviewees. They are followed by findings from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

3.1. Tajikistan

The interviewee from Tajikistan feared being associated with Labrys most of all. It took a long time to gain her trust and we assured her that her identity will be concealed. The interview looks at Zibo's life and her knowledge of historical instances of same-sex loving and women-only spaces in Tajikistan that she learned through communicating with her family.

Before Soviet times:

> *Islam has a strong influence in Tajikistan, our religion prohibits one woman from seeing a body of another woman. My grandma participated in all women's events … where in principle women could openly pass sexual experience to each other. I don't know if it's true or not.*

During the Soviet times Zibo recalls:

> *I heard of two women who lived together and raised a child together. … They were so happy, went everywhere together with their child, had their own car and were together at all events. [People] said that this older woman is supporting this young woman because she has hardships in her life and that's why they live in the same apartment but everyone knew why they live together. … They were called, it was immoral. They would say this woman's name and say 'her girl. In Tajik this kind of 'girl' means 'prostitute'.*

Zibo's identity as an independent woman is very important to her. She earns her own income and does not depend on men. When she mentions working on human rights of LGBT people to her colleagues they usually react by saying "*oh, don't tell us those are appearing here, too."* [3] Zibo notes that most often both queer women and men in Tajikistan have to lead 'double lives' with engaging in cover-up marriage. They would have "*some standard family for parents, for society in order to have a family, children, wife or husband and to have*

[3] Interview with Zibo, 27 (Skype) 09.07.2010

someone for themselves, for their soul". Society, in her words, feels responsible for "*treating this person* [LGBT] *by their means of raising … beating happened in our town*."

In terms of organizing, she heard that the NGO Equal Opportunities was not able to find staff because nobody wanted to be associated with an organization of this kind:

> *It's not even the government that will hit you in the head, it's the society, this is the real attitude of the society, even people who you would think are smart with education, work experience* [in] *human rights, dignity, equality who talk about all this from high podiums.*[4]

If *there would be organizations for women-loving women in Tajikistan, they would be:*

> [places] *where you could go, sit down and talk. To understand that there are other people like you and that it is good and cool. For example, I really how to say that – wasn't exactly embarrassed of it but was blaming myself for it, that I am different from others, in general, I thought it was one of my vices, thought that 'each family has its freak'.*

The organization should not be open since not everyone would want to be out. It would be "*a house where you could come and talk about problems*" with professional staff and providing services and support sometimes financial if needed. It would also be important for an organization to work with the government.

Zibo has been to Labrys trainings and received information from Labrys. Before going to Labrys, she imagined it was something similar to a "*spy cell where all vulnerable groups of population gather, sit, smoke, drink and complain about life."* She was surprised to find out that Labrys had a large staff, an office and a shelter. She felt comfortable there and "*saw kind eyes who know which group you belong to and are happy that you belong to this group."*

In her interview Zibo mostly refers to her identity as 'it'. When asked about local use of language to describe WLW she had to look up the words in the Tajik criminal code. Her mom calls her 'special' because she is too scared to use other language. Zibo's view of Western terms changed after Labrys training because she is now scared to confuse different letters and offend someone.

3.2. Turkmenistan

Only one person from Turkmenistan was available and willing to be interviewed. He is a migrant to Kyrgyzstan and a transgender man. Sandro came to Kyrgyzstan in 2002 to study at a university but later dropped out and started working different jobs. He left Turkmenistan at 18 and does not have too many recollections of it. He remembers that it was very difficult for him to dress in a masculine way because the government required that all women dress in

[4] Interview with Zibo

traditional female clothes and their hair has to be longer than 30 cm. He was dating women there and kissed a girl for the first time at an American (Peace Corps) camp. Like many other transgender people he would like to have his story to be part of history of the WLW and transgender people's community in Central Asia.

In his interview Sandro talked about his coming out as a lesbian and a transperson. He also traces the history of Labrys back to when its founders where university students and organized projects that included information about homosexuality with Amnesty International – Kyrgyzstan group at the American University of Central Asia[5].

Sandro's interview is used for analysis again in findings on Kyrgyzstan.

3.3. Uzbekistan

Given its specific political climate, organizing among WLW and transgender people in Uzbekistan is limited to informal spaces such as internet and entertainment spaces that change frequently. The online community that united over 180 lesbian women mostly based in Uzbek capital of Tashkent and migrants to Russia, has been one of the few safe spaces for WLW to communicate. Through the period of the research and potentially due to availability of information about Labrys organizing and/or personal disagreements within the online community, the space was divided into two new *Moi Mir* (My World) communities. One is based on the original community called *Tema Tashkenta* (the theme of Tashkent) actively developing a political agenda - seeking regular meetings, equality and official recognition, a shelter, a lawyer, a psychologist and reaching out to other regions of Uzbekistan. They perceive their goals as attainable within *"no more than 50 years but our female grandchildren will live well."*[6] This community limits their online space only those who can prove that they are either WLW or gay men.

The new community that emerged in August 2010 states that it is for 'lesbians who believe in existence of a life out of the boundaries of *temnaya tusovka*[7] (community of *tema* e.g. of women-loving women). It is called Anti-Tema Tashkenta and describes itself as ready for 'spitting out the shit and starting to live' referring to a conflict that emerged following interaction of Tema Tashkenta with a homophobic lawyer who wrote about her meeting with this initiative group in her online journal. The conflict emerged from a discussion of how the issue of being 'outed' was handled by the group leaders. One of the women who created and lead Anti-Tema was the one who recommended this lawyer and defended her homophobic opinions.

This situation created a conflict by pushing the online community beyond communication and entertainment. The stated goals of Tema Tashkenta were criticized by an outsider in a semi-public space and 'misinterpreted'. Reactions of Tema Tashkenta leadership were those

[5] Interview with Sandro 20.06.2010
[6] Notes from the first non-online meeting of *Tema Tashkenta*
[7] http://my.mail.ru/community/anti_tema_tash/

of fear and resistance. They were outraged by *"someone coming to see us as if we were a Zoo*."[8] Many discussions emerged from this thread mostly asking how to protect oneself from people who exoticize WLW. The other themes that were part of the lawyer's writing were whether lesbian women 'make up' their problems or not since "*labor code does not discriminate against lesbians".* This theme was supported by the leader of Anti-Tema who, in her interview, defined most lesbian women that she knows as "*giftless and lazy*"[9] who do not work hard enough to achieve high social status. She lobbies for self-development and earning the respect of homophobic society through that mandate. In her view, there are no lesbian-specific issues, yet she would like to organize and support when she is bored. She does not have specific goals except bringing pleasure to someone.

Other interviewees note that there is little support for political organizing, although it remains important. Gulya, an ethnic Uzbek lesbian woman in her forties, would like to contribute to establishing a center for women to "*have someone to talk to when they realize* [come out to themselves]." 23-year-old ethnic-Russian Irina who is actively involved with informal organizing suggests that the main principle of Uzbek people is "*it is important that they are not touched and if they are touched, [they] just turn away as if this never happened."*[10] All interviewees note that they are not satisfied with organizing for entertainment because it lacks depth, yet they are not ready to assume leadership roles, yet would support other people even in "*cooking plov as activists need to eat and be warm, too"*[11] (Gulya, 40s).

Each woman shares her personal story in the interview and talks about coming out to herself and others. Younger interviewees mention the importance of visibly lesbian Russian singers Nochnye Snaipery and Tatu in forming their own and their age cohort's views of lesbians. All the interviewees dislike the word 'lesbian' which they perceive as rude. Although familiar with the word *tema*, they are ambiguous about what it exactly means. Some define it as something neutral of a way to call *"a pot a pot"*[12] (Viktoriya, 36) and some as "something that does not convey the essence" (Gulya, 40s).

It is also interesting to observe the language used by interviewees to describe their identities. They use medicalized words such as 'homosexualism' and 'homosexual inclinations' and yet claim being exceptional – "*superior to our colleagues and age cohort and masses*"[13], "*not a stereotypical organism",* and, *"*[in my small town] *even if there were gomosexualistki, they were also neformalki* [hippies] *who represent something special, they were 'multi dimensional.'"*[14] Interviewees also mention that Uzbekistan historically used the term 'homosexualism' to refer to the culture of *bachi,* resulting in continued criminalization of sodomy today.

[8] 25.08.2010, Tema Tashkenta page, discussion thread 'We were walked over as if we were a Zoo'
[9] Interview with Frau Koch 25.03.2010, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[10] Interview with Irina 24.03.2010, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[11] Interview with Gulya 25.03.2010, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[12] Interview with Viktoriya 24.03.2010, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
[13] Interview with Gulya
[14] Interview with Frau Koch

Further directions of analyzing the interviews of Uzbek WLW involved in semi-formal and informal activism would be in looking at their stories of living as they are in Uzbekistan, reactions of others, and their own ways of resisting heteronormative social structures.

The new group that emerged out of Tema Tashkenta is now called Vertae and their website is available on Vertae.ru. They would like their first project to be seeking other women like themselves outside of the capital city in order to document their lives and human rights violations associated with being a WLW in smaller towns and villages.

3.4. Kazakhstan

The seven people interviewed in Kazakhstan represent both formal and informal organizing experiences. Two of them run discos and parties, one provides online and face-to-face consultations for transgender people on his own initiative, four others work at Amulet, the only LGBT NGO in Kazakhstan with women in leadership positions. Valentina Ragoza started her activism by running a café named Palatka (Tent) that served as a meeting space for lesbian and bisexual women. Labrys met her in 2006 during a fact-finding mission to Kazakhstan with COC-Netherlands. At that point Palatka was undergoing problems with the building's owners due to the fact that lesbian women gathered there. Following the mission, the leadership of Palatka decided to establish their own organization originally named Amet. They published a magazine in winter of 2007 in which they identified their intention to work for those who

> are scared to trust their close people, friends about who they are, who tremble when thinking that their mom, dad, sister etc find out about it; for those who do not hope to tie a knot of legal marriage with their loved ones; for all those who do not hope to adopt a child based on legal grounds; for those who lost love because she was too scared of the public opinion! For all those who experienced aggression from homophobes! For all those who were advised to turn to a psychiatric clinic. (2007).

The group consists of 13 people and later following COC advice, joined another LGBT organization dominated by gay men. They later left that organization and reestablished themselves as an independent organization in 2008. Valentina, 31-year-old ethnic Russian, is the executive director of Amulet. One of the issues that all four interviewees from Amulet mentioned as an issue of concern and urgency is transgender people's possibility to change documents. In 2009 Kazakh government introduced a new health code which outlined the procedure of changing documents as one that requires surgeries for transgender people. This health code created a lot of negative reactions from the media, religious groups and other citizen groups which contributed to making it impossible for transgender people to change their documents. This created a spark for Amulet, reacting to and lobbying about an urgent issue. Valentina says that Amulet was accused of "*paying too much attention to transgender people."*[15] Throughout the interview she identifies the emergence of 'problems' as triggers

[15] Interviews with Valentina Ragoza, December 2009, June 2010, Almaty, Kazakhstan

for activism. She sees the movement in Kazakhstan as still quiet because there weren't a sufficient number of problems yet. She sees women involved in informal organizing as "*not activists but people with big outreach* [to the community]."[16] Informal activism is more for *tusovka* which could be translated as 'partying'. Women and transgender people turn to Amulet when they encounter legal issues like a sperm donor refusing to provide services or an aunt throwing a lesbian woman out of the house. Thus, the formal organization becomes a mediator between WLW and transgender people and the government. It exists to solve problems through legal means and support, while informal activism, as seen by Valentina, is a way to reach out to the masses, not necessarily for activist purposes. Just like Valentina's colleagues in Uzbekistan she believes that the fact that Kazakhstan is in 'the East' has to be taken into account. Activists have to work in the East in a "*concealed, soft, smooth and beautiful*" manner without "*taking a flag and going to the streets and yelling 'give us rights.'*"[17]

The imaginary flag and banners are present in every interview with Kazakhstani WLW and transgender people. As both of these are symbols of Western activism and being out, they are contrasted with soft, gradual and smooth 'Eastern' activism.

Informal activists in Kazakhstan position themselves as providing support and services to the communities of WLW and transgender people. They also have an interest in making a profit and "*making people happy*."[18] In their experience, WLW usually first discuss their problems with friends at her than *"run to the organizations*" right away.

Informal activists used medicalized language of 'homosexualism'. Another interviewee who organizes parties for WLW defines *tema* as a political identity which to her is stereotypical. She believes that it is not possible for her to have a legal marriage in Kazakhstan and she "would not prove [herself] here where it is not allowed and she won't be understood."[19]

Interviewed transgender activists that are engaged with advancing their rights both formally and informally highlighted childhood experiences as formative years important for their identity. They also identified a number of allies – mostly their natal family and medical specialists who helped them on their journey through transitioning. 32-year old ethnic Russian Aleksandr who is employed as an outreach worker in Amulet identified his mother's acquaintance who discussed his identity with his mother as an important person in his life. Aleksandr became an activist when he encountered an issue with changing documents. Before that he "*did not pay close attention*"[20] to Amulet and just communicated with people who work there. He came to Amulet, talked to its leadership and *"it all started whirling and spinning and we started solving problems together and started spending a lot of time on it."*[21] Now Aleksandr organizes sports events for the community, reaches out to the LGBT

[16] Interviews with Valentina
[17] Interviews with Valentina Ragoza, Amulet, December 2009, June 2010
[18] Interview with Chip, December 2009, Almaty, Kazakhstan
[19] Interview with Korizza, December 2009, Almaty, Kazakhstan
[20] Interview with Aleksandr, Amulet, June 2010, Almaty, Kazakhstan
[21] Interview with Aleksandr, Amulet, June 2010

community and gives out condoms. As many others he "*does not beat himself in the chest"*[22] as a trans person but would not deny that he is if asked. Aleksandr says that most people 'dissolve' in the crowd after transitioning but those who end up in Amulet "*after some time a person becomes interested and has a goal to struggle for something [since] we are people just like others and we have problems*."[23]

Just as a specific problem with changing documents for transgender people mobilized Amulet, being part of Amulet encouraged Aleksandr to become an activist. Another individual named Aleksandr is supporting a number of transgender people in Kazakhstan through consultations by having a profile on FtMPerehod.com website, a popular Russian-language resource for transgender men. He is not involved with formal LGBT organizations in Kazakhstan but was supported and continues to be involved with the Russia-based website. In his interview he uses 'these people' to refer to transgender people and emphasizes the importance of living with 'stealth'. He is one of the few interviewees who is of the age to have experienced Soviet times which he described as traumatizing because of the school uniform that he had to wear and people humiliating him for his identity at work. He also emphasizes the importance of people who understood his situation, including his long-time employer to whom he revealed his transitioning status and who agreed to allow him to transition at work. Other people helped him change his documents without any problems A woman whom he rented an apartment from washed his hair after he had his first surgery. Aleksandr is concerned that some transgender people get consumed in their issues and drop out of common life. He urges young transgender people to keep trying and things will work out. He uses the Ombudsman's office in Kazakhstan to address his concerns about legality of his marriage, for example. He is not interested in communicating with LGBT organizations and addresses his concerns through existing legal means.

Overall, the interviewees in Almaty, Kazakhstan, seem to have high levels of awareness about their own rights and organize with clearly defined goals in mind. In terms of informal organizing, there is more emphasis on individual gain and doing things for others, not as a part of a larger struggle, but rather as interpersonal support for others in similar situations. Amulet, as a formal organization, has a set of goals and motivations available to activists that position their struggle within the larger movement. Amulet is seen as another channel for 'solving problems' by the community activists, just like the government is seen by Aleksandr involved with FtMPerehod. On a larger scale, the perception of a formal organization is similar to that of paternalistic Soviet government that 'solves problems' as the last resort.

[22] Interview with Aleksandr, Amulet, literal meaning of the expression: to show yourself off seeking attention from others
[23] Interview with Aleksandr, Amulet

3.5. Kyrgyzstan

17 interviews from Kyrgyzstan were the most difficult to analyze because of their diversity and insider knowledge of the interviewers about interviewees experiences. We also had people who combined informal and formal organizing experiences, those who left Labrys, those who established other organizations, those who are now working in mainstream human rights NGOs, and those who dropped out of activism for good. For the purposes of this report we will focus on personal transformation as part of organizing, various forms of activism (both formal and informal), opposition to activism and future of organizing in presenting findings.

Five interviewees were never actively involved in formal organizing but continuously organized informally. Two of them are known and respected among the community of WLW for providing shelter and support to young lesbians who needed a place to stay and work when their families would not support them. Another activist has worked with Labrys on the website and brochure projects but did not fully accept the type of activism that Labrys was engaged in. She describes her own ways of 'changing the attitudes' in her interview. The fourth activist was involved in sports as a coach and supported young lesbians' coming out. The fifth activist, a transgender woman, supports women like herself and belongs to various sex worker communities.

Yulia Barabina, a 30-year old ethnic Russian, in her interview analyzes her own path as an activist for LGBT rights, expressing that she has not yet found an organization to reflect what she would like to do, although she can critically analyze other initiatives. In her own words, Yulia *"moved her own foot inside her mom's uterus to the rhythm of 'I Will Survive'."*[24] She appreciates that some of the members of Labrys have come out publicly, and thework with the police and doctors that the organization does and calls Labrys people who "*are active, are burning at work, they have fire in their eyes, spark that they are not yet another grant eater who doesn't care about their work ... but they really are interested."*[25] Yulia notes that her own activism was through writing a letter about her love for a woman to a popular newspaper, being out at the university, contributing ideas to Labrys specifically shelter and club for parents of LGBT people, and informing her journalist colleagues about LGBT people so that they would write better articles. She also initiated a project for LGBT people at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. Yulia, like many other interviewees in Kyrgyzstan, complains that the community of WLW and transgender people is 'passive' and only wants to have discos and parties without being informed about the long-term plans of Labrys. Another activist, 42-year-old Olesya, notes that Labrys is losing touch with the community since it stopped organizing discos. "*Discos bring people closer and these lectures, you know, maybe someone needs them but you just stupidly sit* [at the lectures]*."*[26] Olesya sees the work that Labrys is currently involved in as something that the staff only does for themselves rather than the community. Getting the community together and 'knowing' other women's lives is

[24] Interviews with Yulia Barabina, June 2010 Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
[25] Interview with Yulia Barabina
[26] Interview with Olesya, July 2010, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

seen as more important than formal organizing with reports, trainings and pushing for change of attitudes.

Throughout a number of interviews, including with Labrys staff, the theme of formalization comes up over and over again, as the interviewees appreciate the feeling of togetherness and closeness that was present before Labrys officially registered and became more of an office than a 'home'. An office in the words of Jika Torobekova, Labrys core staff member, as she imagined it when making her first call to Labrys was:

> *an office with a female office manager, some director ... I did not want to tell some random guy about anything. ... When I came ... a young woman opened the door and I thought, wow, super, at least not an office manager and I also did not find a guy with moustache*.[27]

Early in the organization, Labrys catered to community needs more than legal issues.

Personal transformation is a recurrent theme in interviews with current and former staff of Labrys. Overcoming fear of being out, not passing, and feeling alone are things that they found in Labrys that later helped them in becoming activists. Many interviewees refer to Labrys as a home or a family for them, a safe place that provides support and acceptance.

Olesya and Galina Sokolova from Labrys both raise violence within the GLBT community as an issue that they are frustrated about, especially because couples who they know are physically violent with each other are back together. They also note that is not addressed sufficiently with the community or the organization.

[27] Interview with Jika Torobekova, June 2010, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Short- and Long-Term Recommendations

Uzbekistan

Short-term

- Support for research project to reach out to women in other regions and document their lives and issues for Vertae
- Training on organizational development in Uzbekistan for more people to attend
- Fundraising for an office and regular activities
- Supporting international advocacy through Central Asian LGBT Advocacy Network which addresses a gap caused by the dangers of Verate communicating with the government

Long-term

- Raise awareness among the communities of WLW about political activism and the impact of lesbophobia on their community

Tajikistan

Short-term

- Support Equal Opportunities in reaching out to women and transgender people by conducting a meeting and/or event for WLW and transgender people in Tajikistan
- Get WLW and transgender people in touch with women's NGOs in Tajikistan regarding potential cooperation on CEDAW reporting
- Work together on the UN UPR report on sexual rights
- Support Equal Opportunities in developing an advocacy project for transgender people to be able to change documents

Long-term

- Share experience and support in training staff members from the community to work with the NGO professionally
- Support WLW and transgender people in establishing their own NGO

Turkmenistan

Short-term

- Reach out to more WLW through Labrys board members who have contacts in Turkmenistan
- Bring WLW to Labrys events and other Russian-speaking events in the former Soviet Union and internationally

Long-term

- Engage with existing WLW in documentation and reporting

Kazakhstan

Short-term

- Establish better connections with Amulet and informal groups

Long-term

- Involve Amulet in Central Asian LGBT advocacy
- Share experience of formal and informal organizing

Kyrgyzstan

Short-term

- Document and publish the history of WLW and transgender activism in Kyrgyzstan
- Share the results of the research and stories with LBT communities
- Follow-up with a proposal to record stories of women over 40
- Acknowledge activists involved in formal and informal organizing, their effort and achievements

Long-term

Monitor the implementation of recommendations by UN UPR and CEDAW and involve communities in making the government accountable

4.2. Recommendations for Further Studies

Recommendations to Labrys and other groups willing to support development of activism in the region

- Further training and coaching for emerging new groups taking into account the issues highlighted by the report i.e. opposition to activism and specifically public activism
- Develop and disseminate research publications on history of Labrys, best practices in formal and informal activism
- Launch and disseminate a website with a map of Central Asia with activist stories to inspire others and share successful practices
- Continue to be engaged with research and advocacy
- Continue efforts on documentation, reporting and follow-up for Universal Periodic Review
- Continue efforts on documentation, reporting and follow-up for CEDAW; write new reports

4.3. Themes for Future Articles

Diverse identities and their meanings for Central Asian communities of women loving women and transgender people

- Identifying paths from opposition to activism to becoming a political group and potentially a social movement
- Personal experiences of transgender people becoming activist and political triggers for challenging heteronormative and patriarchical state institutions, specifically medical agencies and civil registry

4.4. Conclusion

The conclusion of this report is a comma rather than a period. The issues raised by this report, such as differences in formal and informal organizing, the impact of medicalization, criminalization on queer organizing and, in general, providing space for WLW and transgender people to speak up, are to be explored in more depth and length through further analysis of the interviews and developing activist initiatives and cooperation in Central Asia. Yet, what I learned is that the wealth of knowledge and diversity of experiences associated with organizing among transgender people and WLW should become part of history through documentation and sharing. The interviewees explored their identities, collective and individual, and shared ways in which they supported each other and their own community. Sometimes, their motivations were very personal, while at others, their fascination with their own community and injustices that it experienced motivated their activism.

Appendix 1: Interview instructions

When you talk to the interviewee about the nature of the interview, you need to describe what the project is about. You can say that you are documenting history because there are no women-loving women or transgender people in official history. You can say that the emphasis is on organizing if you want if they ask you why you chose them for the interview. The project is about identity politics, pleasure and organizing. So don't forget pleasure e.g. informal organizing, informal support networks, helping nashi!

Also – remember that there are many people in the room when you're doing the interview e.g. it's an interview for history so make sure to clarify things that other people may not know. Also remember about your role as an interviewer to keep the interview understandable to those who will be listening to it years from now. Perceive it as an important historical document.

Don't worry about asking all the questions, let them talk and expand on what they say, if they ask you something, respond to it and engage in the conversation.

Connect questions to their experiences and follow-up based on what they say and let them talk about whatever it is they want to talk about that is relevant to organizing, identity politics and pleasure.

It is also to try to get them to talk about their interpretation of their identity, events, history at the point when it was happening and now. Ttry to ask them that through things like if you were there right now, where would you go, what would you see, how would others react?

If they will describe specific events (e.g. violent episodes, leaving families, being involved in a fight/revolution etc) that they are blaming themselves for, ask them things like how did you and your colleagues feel about it? What were you not able to do? What did you do about that?

You may also incorporate questions like – how did other people see you? What did other people think of you? That is if the interviewee talks about something that is very unique to their perception (e.g. someone going on and off about how transgender people need to be diagnosed). This can put people into perspective.

Something that can be helpful to get into more narratives is to ask the interviewees to walk through the experience with you and describe what they saw and where they went.

Appendix 2: Interview guide

Childhood: You are looking at photographs in a childhood photo album, what do you see? What kind of periods are your childhood and young years divided into? What kind of events influenced you as a person?

Family: Describe relationships in your family, how did your family treat you as a child? As an adult? What kind of topics would you usually discuss at dinner table?

Identity: how do you identify and how do you call yourself? Describe the process of how you started to explore yourself. What was it like for you to meet your first girlfriend? What did it mean for you? How did the society and your close ones react to your relationship?

Community: Who are 'nashi', 'tema', lesbians? Which words does the community use to describe itself?

Soviet Union: Describe the time when the Soviet Union collapsed, how did it impact your life if it did?

History: What other historical events were important for you and other women who love women? If you were to write a book about the movement of women-loving women and transgender people in your country or Central Asia, which events would you include? How would your personal story become part of this book/history? Who would you have a monument for? what did they do to deserve it?

History of women-loving women in Central Asia? Who were they 20-30-40-50-100 years ago? Where did they live? How were they treated?

What in your personal story would you like future generations to know, let's say, in fifty years?

Movement: What does a 'movement' of women-loving women look like? Who gathers and where? What kind of goals do they have?

Achievements: What are the most important achievements of 'nashi' in your country? What kind of things did not work?

Places: Describe how 'nash' or 'temniy' Almaty/Tashkent/Bishkek/JAlalabat/your town/village look. Where do 'nashi' go? Where do they live? Where is it safe and not so safe?

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Chapter 4

VioMap Final Report
by Sappho for Equality

Documenting and mapping violence and rights violation taking place in lives of sexually marginalized women to chart out effective advocacy strategies

Prepared by:
Sappho for Equality
11A Jogendra Gardens (South)
Ground Floor
Kolkata – 700 078
West Bengal, INDIA
sappho1999@gmail.com
www.sapphokolkata.org

Principle Investigator: Dr. Subhagata Ghosh
Co-Investigators: Ms. Sumita Basu Bandyopadhyay & Dr. Ranjita Biswas

This research work is dedicated to women who had to erase themselves by committing suicide or been murdered for loving their own kind.

November 29, 2010

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1. Organizational Profile

1.1 Sappho for Equality

Sappho for Equality is a forum – the first of its kind in eastern India – that has emerged as a consequence of a unique effort to bridge the ever-widening gulf between the queer and the non-queer community in India. Taking wing in October 2003, Sappho for Equality (a registered trust/NGO) aspires to become the collective voice of all cross-sections of society who feel the imperative to challenge the hegemonic hetero-normative order that rules our present.

Sappho for Equality is also the name of a journey that reflects a shift from identity politics to issue-based activism. The motivating force behind this journey has been the need to build a coalition with the non-queer society through their direct involvement in a movement that seeks to question the assumptions of 'mainstream' sexual practices and norms. Sappho for Equality provides a platform to anyone and everyone, irrespective of gender and sexual orientation, who seek to question
the organized workings of homophobia, heterosexism and hetero-normativity. A focus on the terms of exclusion through a politics of standpoint can contribute to a radical rethinking of the hegemonic social and engender a re-signification of the categories through which the world is made visible to us.

Vision

A society free of sexuality-based discriminations, where rights of the sexual minorities will be ensured.

Mission

To address the issues of sexually marginalized women in the society and to broaden the struggle for their social equality and rights within the nation-state and beyond.

1.2 Sappho

Deriving its name from the legendary character of ancient Greek literature, Sappho is a support group for lesbian, bisexual and transgender women. With its base in Kolkata, West Bengal, it is the only group of its kind in the whole of eastern India, founded on 20th June 1999. The primary goal of the organization was to provide safe space for women with same sex preferences but gradually it moved into a rights oriented movement to fight discrimination and hatred against marginalized
women with same sex preference. However, in due course of this journey, the core members of Sappho have taken the lead to form Sappho for Equality indicating the mission to work on a broader framework of human rights. But Sappho still exists as the informal support group of lesbians, bisexual women and F-to-M transpersons. 17 out of the 18 individual respondents and 1 of the 2 groups in the LBT category of this research are members of this group.

2. Context

Across the world violence against women is recognized as a symptom of power hierarchies that feed different social structures such as the family, community and the state. Patriarchy operates in a multi-layered fashion. Working through a three-pronged method the ensuring of hierarchy proceeds in the following way: first, by laying claim on woman's body and her self through acts of coercion, second, by making her conform to socially ordained norms and behavioral stereotypes by employing the threat of such violence, and third, by making her seek protection from the same agents of patriarchy that exploit her in the first place.

In India particularly, violence takes many serious forms like female feticide, battering, rape, stripping and parading in public, trafficking, 'honor killing' and more recently, acid splashing. Women experience physical and/or mental abuse throughout their life cycle – in infancy, childhood, adolescence, during adulthood as well as in old age. Most of the instances of violence against women also take place in the everyday, and in very specific mundane forms. Such acts of violence, not being easily recognized or speedily countered, have lasting implications for women. This everyday violence against women is largely located in the very intimate realm of the family, often within relations of love and kinship. Women's deep emotional investment in kinship networks, and near-total dependence for survival on familial and community resources, makes it more difficult for them to acknowledge or articulate the painful moments of violation. We also realize that violence need not always take the overt form of physical force or assault. It can well be perpetrated in the form of subtle psychological and emotional intimidation. Rigidly defined and deployed gender and sexual norms create an environment of discrimination and deprivation leading to widespread violence. In the Indian context the situation is further exacerbated by the fact that besides strict gender and sexual norms, economic vulnerability renders women more susceptible to control and violence.

No discussion on violence is anywhere near complete if it does not take into account incidents of sexual orientation based violence, particularly violence that inhabits the space of non-heteronormative women and relations. This violence is perpetrated by homophobic heterosexual people against people with same-sex orientation and gender non-conformation. In recent times there has been substantial coverage in the media of certain incidents of violence (targeted at both individuals and groups) perpetrated against people of non-normative gender and sexuality and these hate crimes are demonstrative of the daily perils lived by members of any marginalized group, more so, if they embody a non-(re)productive, non-heterosexual, non-familial/non-familiar way of life. The legally ambiguous status of homosexuality precludes the possibility of any formal public means of redress. The law makes even consensual sex look like sexual crime itself, without the possibility of regarding same-sex relations normal and natural. Thus, the overt violence of certain same-sex relations defies any legal conceptions of violence, as all same-sex relations are always already 'criminalized' so to speak. LGBT abusers utilize the legal and social institutions created by homophobia and heterosexism to unleash violence against people practicing non heteronormative sex.

Sexuality in our country has always been given a rather skewed approach. While a veritable silence around sexuality has dogged the political and academic circles, the space of the legal, demographic and medical disciplines has more than kept the issue of sexuality perpetually in the limelight. India being a secular country we have people here practicing Islam,

Christianity, Hinduism as well as Buddhism, Jainism etc. In most religions homosexuality is not condoned. But when it comes to lesbianism it does not even find mention in religious texts thereby signifying the fact that the imagination of sexuality does not include sex between two women, let alone judge it. Some sculptures on Hindu temples and cave carvings/paintings however do bear explicit evidence of the knowledge and practice of lesbian love even in the olden times. Faced with the charge from right wing circles and the state that homosexuality is a western import and antithetical to "our" culture and to a certain extent to oppose social and political activists who refused to acknowledge the existence of problems related to sexual choice there have been efforts by gay-lesbian activists to recover narratives from India's written and oral traditions. These collections seek to establish the fact that homoeroticism has been an integral part of our tradition and people indulging in same-sex love "were honoured and successful members of society who contributed in major ways to thought, literature, and the general good". There have also been collections of autobiographical accounts, poetry, fiction and gay journals that have sought to place the issue of non-heterosexual love decisively in the public arena.

In India a defining paradigm for understanding homosexuality is Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Introduced in 1869 by the British it persists to this day as a draconian law that has more extra-legal use than legal. Section 377 of the IPC is another category of sexual offences which has occupied much public attention in recent times. The crux of the debate about the utility of this section rests on the fact that it promises to address a wide range of sexual violations on the one hand, while delimiting (for all, including heterosexuals) the scope of sexual pleasure within the narrow contours of penovaginal intercourse. Put another way, the section promises to deal with sexual transgression precisely by spelling out a constricted definition of what is natural, normal and legal. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code states that:

> Whosoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman, or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation – penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal offence described in this section.

While the letter of the section holds unnatural and against the order of nature all activity that entails penetration outside the peno-vaginal route, in the practice of law only men having sex with men come under its purview as it is interpreted to criminalize anal sex between men. In 2001 Naz Foundation, an NGO working with MSM (men who have sex with men) filed a writ petition to the Delhi High Court noting that Section 377 of the IPC infringed on homosexuals' rights to equality, privacy, dignity and health. In its reply the Union Government of India responded by drawing upon familiar notions of "Indian morality" and "public sentiment". The State decreed that Section 377 could not be repealed as "Indian society by and large disapproves of homosexuality". Justifying its stand, the State opined that the purpose of section 377 of the IPC was to provide a "healthy environment" in the society by criminalizing "unnatural" sexual activities and yielding to such changes in law could instead open the flood gates of "delinquent behavior". Petitions like these, the affidavit responded, could jeopardize the delivery of justice in incidents of child sexual abuse and rape – crimes that are supposedly covered under this law. This argument of course overlooks the fact that the petition appealed for decriminalization of consensual, private, adult sexual behavior and did not prevent its use in child sexual abuse or to fill the lacunae in rape cases as claimed by the state.

On 2 July 2009, a Delhi High Court ruling declared that Section 377 violates Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Indian Constitution in so much as it criminalizes consensual sexual acts of adults in private. This ruling is being seen as a landmark in the LGBT movement and will hopefully help in curbing the unprovoked arrests, harassment and prosecution of homosexuals.

It is true that this section, if used judiciously can be of help in delivering justice to victims of sexual violence, since it stipulates that any carnal intercourse that is not peno-vaginal intercourse (understood in law as natural) can be punished especially if it is non-consensual. The fact is that this section has been put to very sparse use to convict other forms of sexual assaults that do not fall under sections 375 or 354. It is most often used by the custodians of law (police) to harass gay men and even extract free sex from them. It has also been used to separate lesbian couples and deny them the right to privacy, employment or right to domestic partnerships as can be seen from the innumerable cases where two women marrying each other or running away from home to live with each other have been forcibly separated by police or community leaders citing the law on homosexuality.

The legal situation regarding homosexuality is further complicated by the lack of sensitivity and awareness on the part of the medical-scientific fraternity. Though homosexuality has been erased from the official list of disorders, psychiatrists in India have been rather tardy in following this de-pathologization in their clinical practice. Till date there are mental health professionals who use counseling and drugs to treat homosexuals. There has been a dearth of debates, discussions, sensitization and awareness campaigns among the mental health professionals and no active role taken up by the psychiatric community to dispel fears and misconceptions in the larger society. Either professionals have demonstrated ignorance about the removal of the clinical category of homosexuality from the list of disorders or have perpetuated social stigmatization by continuing to practice aversion therapy, behaviour-cognitive therapy and other normalizing procedures in a bid to bring "sexual deviants" back to the mainstream. While the lesbian, gay and transgender movements have relied heavily on scientific tenets to formulate their activism (both in drawing its support as well as in dismissing its homophobic claims) they have mostly failed to involve the scientific community in supporting their efforts to repeal discriminatory laws and change public opinion in their favour. There have been some instances of sensitive clinicians who have contributed to the effort of changing perceptions and societal attitudes but the general scientific community has been largely indifferent.

Contemporary psychiatry though presenting a more accommodative stance nevertheless retains its normativizing function – a function that relates to the way the broader social functions. Echoing scientific caution, Psychiatrists are quick to point out to their "patients" and their guardians that homosexuality is indeed a non-pathological condition and a "common phenomenon seen among many adolescents." Holding on to the rhetoric of non-pathology, they counsel parents not to treat their wards harshly or irresponsibly, assuring them about the transitoriness of the phenomenon. This belief in homosexuality being a temporary phase capable of being transformed finds reflection in many suggestions on record: visit the disco more often, read more pornographic literature and practice skipping everyday!

The central thrust of contemporary "treatment" modalities is to orient the concerned individuals about the social non acceptance and (therefore) non-viability of such alternative sexual lifestyles. In other words, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals remain completely noncommittal about their professional role in changing societal attitudes towards

what is to be considered pathological illness in the realm of sexual behavior. What emerges, then, through an examination of such clinical discourses, is the continued psychiatrization of homosexuality and transgender people and psychiatry's overwhelming propensity to govern human behavior into categories of what will or will not count as socially viable, a marking off in advance.

In the last three decades, the women's movement in India has contributed to a growing public awareness of violence against women. Besides seeking legal reform, women's groups in India have taken up other forms of protest like awareness raising, street meetings and campaigning through the media. The 1990s saw a new phase of activism in the form of lobbying and advocacy with a view to mainstreaming women's issues. This was a move away from the more confrontationist measures of the 1970s and 1980s in the form of legal campaigns and protest marches. The law has been looked upon as the major agent for women's empowerment. However, unlike other situations the Indian law does not provide any protection to the LBT woman since it does not recognize her as a bona fide citizen.

The women's movement in trying to make sense of problems like rape, trafficking, honour killing have arrived at the insight that sexuality is an important issue that can no longer be ignored in any discussion on gender justice. However, in spite of these re-articulations within the domain of the political, issues pertaining to non-normative sexuality remain restricted to the very specific work field of only those groups committed to the cause by virtue of embodying the cause. This continues while sexuality – considered by some women activists as a peripheral issue, secondary to problems of education, livelihood and violence – becomes the route/root for denying some women their right to education, livelihood and a primary reason for perpetrating violence, be it through forced marriage or rape, murder or desertion, ostracization or pathologization.

Barring some, most sections of the feminist movement are of the opinion that sexuality is primarily a gay-lesbian problem, failing to acknowledge the hegemonic operations of heterosexuality that bestow on them the privilege of occupying the 'majority' position and banish such issues to the 'minority sexuality rights' forum. The women's movement in India with its largely left leanings finds the issue of sexuality causing confusion and distraction about more pertinent problems such as illiteracy, poverty alleviation, domestic violence, women's empowerment and so forth. Such is the disdain for issues regarding non-normative sexuality that lesbians were not permitted to carry their group banners in March 8th rallies in Delhi some years ago – a decision that went on to further prevent lesbians from participating at all in the rally even if they are not raising the issue of lesbian rights. Seeking to mark a clear disjunction between "women's interests" and interests pertaining to sexual rights and preferences it was clarified that such issues could receive support from the women's movement as issues coming under the broad category of civil liberties and democratic rights but not as constituting "common women's life-worlds". Even where the women's movement has been more accommodative of lesbian concerns it has done so more from a feeling of concerned sisterhood rather than from any inclination to seriously engage with the issue of (hetero)sexuality.

Today however the situation does not remain so bleak. There has been a definite shift in the understanding of the interface of feminism and lesbianism and more importantly between women's rights group and sexuality rights groups. Sexuality rights is acknowledged as an important constituent of women's rights and the mainstream women's movement is much more engaging of sexuality rights issues than they were before with many heterosexual

women activists taking up these issues for campaigning. There is a sincere effort from both sides on how to foster a dialogue on issues of gender and sexuality that have to be thought in unison and integration in any agenda of feminist politics. In recent times the mainstream women's movement and the lesbian, bisexual and transgender women's organizations have come together (along with child rights groups) on multiple occasions to debate and dialogue on the new Sexual Assault Bill that talks of changing the definition of rape to sexual assault to denote sexual violence other than peno-vaginal penetration, and changing the notion of 'victim' to include sexual assault perpetrated on persons other than women, i.e., trans people and hizras. This collaborative and cohesive working together signals the new camaraderie that is emerging among the women's groups and the LBT women's groups despite the ideological differences that have separated them so far.

Though a large body of work has been done on violence against women in India, violence against lesbian, bisexual and transgender women has remained a blind spot of these endeavours. There have not been adequate research or advocacy materials to address this lacuna. Most of the instances of violence against LBT women being either invisibilized or normativized have remained outside public discourse. In an effort to challenge the overwhelming homophobic attitude in the society and generating a more liberal and understanding acceptance of non-heterosexual mores of life the alternative sexuality groups have carried on a sustained campaign. They have demanded legislative changes that recognize their sexuality as non-criminal and ensure them the right to participate fully in the societal process without fearing discrimination on account of their sexual practice. Actively organizing mass awareness programs, college sensitizing interactions, public debates etc, activist groups are questioning social mores and gender stereotypes that stifle individual expression of desire.

We at Sappho for Equality feel that to build a fruitful and effective advocacy we need a strong and extensive database. So, apart from the documentation carried out at our organizational level we needed to take up research work that would generate qualitative data that can be then used to design and build advocacy and campaign material. Sappho for Equality also felt that the research work had to be taken up from a different and critical angle. So, instead of merely focusing on narratives of LBT women (we do consider these narratives essential and critical, however we felt other constituencies also needed to be brought into the analysis) we have sought to document the narratives of other persons who constitute the world of these women, as 'intimate enemies', as critics of change and as critical agents of change. Hence this project seeks to map the ideas, thoughts and feelings of people who inhabit the close personal world of LBT women, the people of the world outside, i.e. the general mass as well as people who form part of the activism world.

The project sees this mapping as necessary to understand the level of tolerance or intolerance, hatred, compassion or empathy that the non-queer section of the society feels for the non-normative woman. Our work as a support cum activist group also made us realize that most of the instances of violence are not direct effects of a politics of hatred but derive from internalized assumptions and norms that have remained unacknowledged and unchallenged for all these years. It is our conviction that for an effective advocacy or dialogue to take off, it is necessary to recognize, document and bring to crisis the 'mainstream' theories and norms that act as a major driving force behind a culture of hatred. Besides trying to understand the processes of normalization and pathologization that feed such homophobia, it is also significant to identify and nurture spaces of solidarity and support within the 'dominant' in order to actualize the process of advocacy. This project is the first step in that direction.

The project is an outcome of a long process that has clearly shown us how social and legal reform together can take us towards the much needed actualization of organizational mission of social equality and full citizen's rights.

During our project time, on July 2, 2009, Delhi High Court issued a historical judgment decriminalizing adult consensual sex (both homo and hetero) thereby marking the beginning of a new era in the history of sexuality rights movement in India. It was a great moment that brought in greater responsibilities for us as with this verdict, the invisibility cloak surrounding non-normative sexuality got lifted to a lot extent exposing us to enjoy and endure all the violent and beautiful elements of nature. Our research on sexuality mapping thereby becomes all the more relevant at this moment because exposure and violence are now going hand in hand more than ever before.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this research project are as follows:

i. To document experiences of violence and violation faced by women with non-normative sexual orientation
ii. To document testimonies of family members and other persons residing inside the intimate circle of the non-normative women about their experiences vis-à-vis her sexuality
iii. To document narrations of normative persons from different walks of life to know their feelings, ideas, levels of acceptance/non acceptance of non-normative sexualities
iv. To document accounts of Women's rights and LBT rights activists of bridging and/or failing to bridge the existing gap between the movements
v. To collate, analyze and synchronize the data thus collected and synthesize it as a manual suggesting effective advocacy strategies against violence and violation on women with non-normative sexual orientation.

4. Methodology

Our research is completely based on the interviews collected from different cross sections of the society in order to document and map violence and rights violations happening in the lives of lesbians, bisexual women and female to male transpersons.

Using oral narratives as tool of feminist research methodology is internationally accepted. We have been using this methodology for quite a long time now; it began with collecting first person narratives of LBT persons and publishing them with a story-flavour for general reader since 2005. In course of collecting these narratives we could understand the immense potential of this process and also the cathartic element hidden in it. Therefore for mapping violence and violation, oral narratives was our first choice of basic tools.

We divided our respondents into three major categories. First was the woman with non-normative sexual orientation [Lesbian, Bisexual woman, female to male Transperson (henceforth LBTs)], second category was further divided into two sub-categories, LBTs'

intimate space and larger society, and third category was women's rights activists and LBT rights activists.

In this research we have placed the LBTs in the centre. In their private space their experiences of violence and violations are our primary data.

Complimentary to their experiences are those who inhabit their intimate sphere and the persons from the normative larger society outside their selves. Our next step was interaction with the second layer, the intimate space around the LBT person shared by her immediate and extended family, friends, colleagues, neighbors. We have tried to uncover the level of tolerance or intolerance, hatred, homophobic expressions or empathy towards a LBT sister/daughter/friend/colleague/ neighbor or any other relationships through these testimonies. This is the non-normative woman's immediate reality.

The general non-queer society forms the outer range of the second layer where narratives of normative people from the society have been documented. If this research aims to address issues of violence and violation on LBT persons, accounts of people from the non-queer parts of the society who could give meaningful insights both positive and negative was necessary, because it is the general mass around us that creates, nurtures and implements various forms of violence and violation on LBT persons and also helps us fight back.

From the 'regular normative' we travelled towards the 'special normative' in the third category, that is people who are already into some kind of rights movement, who already are conversant in the rights language. Here we had dialogue with women's rights and LBT rights activists who have either etched out ways of complimenting each other's movements or are engaged in doing so. As we believe that a lesbian's primary identity is that of a woman and that is why she is doubly discriminated, we only naturally wanted to document the critical yet crucial relationship between the women's rights and the lesbian rights movement for the last twenty-five years in India.

The diagram here tries to explain in three layers the private space inhabited by the LBT (Category I), the intimate personal space where she interacts with her family, friends, colleges, and neighbours (Category IIA), the larger civic society that forms the outer cover of her existence (Category IIB) and finally the political sphere of women's rights and LBT rights activists (Category III) that overlaps all the other segments and tries to politicize LBT rights as women's rights issue.

The data thus generated from these three levels of in-depth interviews help us chart out effective advocacy strategies to combat overt or covert homophobia present in the society as well as to ensure rights for the woman with non-normative sexual orientation.

4.1 Process adopted for each interview in each category is as follows

1. Selection of interviewers and respondents
2. Training of interviewers
3. Obtaining consent of the respondents
4. Audio recording the interview
5. Transcribing the interview

6. Translating the interview
7. Coding the interview
8. Compilation of the coded data
9. Summarize the interview from the coded data
10. Collating and preparing the master summary
11. Archiving the audio cassettes, transcriptions, translations, coded data and summaries

4.1.1 Selection of interviewers and respondents

We selected a team of interviewers and prepared a list of respondents for this research. Three of the research team members had given interviews, two in the LBT category and one as a LBT rights activist. For the LBT category we had selected peer interviewers, for the intimate relation category senior (both in age and experience) members of the research team were chosen, professionally qualified persons from the research team were engaged for interviewing larger civil society and for the last category we had involved those research team members who are most actively participating in the rights movements.

Selection of respondents also demanded some aforethought, as to a) who would be the LBT respondents – it was done on a lesbian/bisexual/F to M transperson plus age/class/education/profession/marital status/location basis, b) which would be the subcategories of the civil society – it was done on ac lass / gender / education / profession / age / occupation basis and c) how far can we travel to which organizations and individuals to collect a balanced input on the interrelation of the women's rights and LBT rights movements – it was done on budget-location relationship/individual-organizational ratio/women's rights - LBT rights percentage basis. For the intimate circle, family, friends etc we had accepted whoever was kind enough to help us with her/his time, who qualified for this category. This was the toughest to reach/handle group.

Total number of interviews - 75

Categories Sub-categories Number of Interviews in each sub-category Total number of interviews
in each category Duration of each interview
Category I (LBTs) Individual 18 20 1.5 hours to 3
Hours Group 2
Category IIA (LBT's Intimate circle) Family 6 13 30 minutes to 1 hour Friend 3Colleague 3 Neighbour 1
Category IIB (Larger society) Student 3 25 30 minutes to 1 hour Teacher 3 Housewife 3 Government Clerk 3 Working lady 2 Media person 2 Creative person 2 Psychiatrist 2 Police 2 Lawyer 1 Scientist 1 Political party cadre 1
Category III (Activists) East zone Individual 3 17 45 minutes to 2 hours Group 1 West zone individual 3 Group 2 North zone Individual 3 Group 2 South zone Individual 2 Group 1

4.1.1.1 Demographic Representation of Individual LBTs

We have taken in depth interviews of 18 individuals and 2 groups who identify as lesbian, bisexual women and F to M transperson. The two focus group discussions that are included in this section are coded as LBTG1 and LBTG2. These groups are identity based support groups,

working as safe space for lesbian, bisexual women and transpersons in two different cities in eastern and southern parts of India. Both the groups though city based, cater to people from rural and suburban areas. The Kolkata based group caters to middle to lower middle class educated persons mostly dentifying as lesbians and the Bengaluru based group caters to lower to lower middle class less educated persons mostly identifying as F to M transpersons. 17 out of the 18 individual respondents are members of the Kolkata based group and two of the research team members also participated as respondents in this category. [Please see ANNEXURE, for more details].

4.1.1.2 Demographic Representation of LBT's Intimate Circle

In Category II (the intimate circle) we interviewed 13 persons, two mothers, one brother, two sisters, one sister in law, three friends, three colleagues and one neighbour. All of our respondents in this category know about their close one's orientation and they all have voluntarily consented to talk about this issue vis-à-vis their close one. [Please see ANNEXURE, for more details].

4.1.1.3 Demographic Representation of Larger Society

We have selected 25 individuals from different cross section of the society irrespective of gender, age and educational qualification. We tried to become as diverse as possible with respect to their occupations. We made ourselves restricted within urban and suburban locality and middleclass and upper middleclass, with one person coming from lower middle class, in terms of socio-economic background. [Please see ANNEXURE for more details].

4.1.1.4 Demographic Representation of Activists

In this category we interviewed 11 individuals and 6 groups from eastern, western, northern and southern zones of India. [Please see ANNEXURE for more details].

4.1.2 Interviewing

We took all the interviews with fully informed consent of the respondents. We did not use any specific questionnaire for the interviews; instead we transformed it into themes. We selected a number of themes (Annexure I) on which we would carry on the conversation. Selection of the themes was done in consensus of all the research team members. The topics were selected keeping in mind that we are supposed to collect feelings and experiences of violence and violations while interviewing the LBTs, opinions on rights issues and conflicts from the activists, and impressions on an extremely tabooed and touchy subject like homosexuality and LBT issues from the larger society (including the intimates of the LBTs). We kept the interviews free flowing so that the respondents can open up unhesitatingly. The interviewer only saw to it that the conversation fell in track with a few comments or giving clues on the topics. Each interview was given a specific code number to maintain anonymity. The language of interviews were selected according to the comfort level of the respondent, most of the interviews were done in the local language, which is Bengali, some in the National language, that is Hindi and some in English.

4.1.3 Transcribing

We transcribed each interview word by word and whatever we heard from the audio cassettes. We have done it because we delved into an extremely sensitive and private corner of a person's self that dealt with violence and violations and we tried to transfer every emotion on paper as far as possible by using the words - pause, silence, sobbing, crying, hesitating, fumbling, laughing, sarcastically, loudly, angrily etc. so that the sensitivity and intensity of the narrative is kept intact. Transcriptions are mostly done by the interviewers themselves with a few exceptions and names and others identity points are obliterated at this level so that translators could be hired from outside without disclosing identities of the respondents.

4.1.4 Translating

Each interview was translated into English if it was taken in any regional language (Bengali or Hindi) and translated it into Bengali (the vernacular language) if the interview was taken in English.

4.1.5 Coding

We used number codes against each theme under each category and then critically went through the transcriptions and translations putting the specific number codes allotted for a particular theme beside the region in which that particular theme is expressed in the interview. The themes and code numbers of each category are given in the Annexure.

4.1.6 Compiling and Summarizing

All selected regions of the whole interview under each specific code were compiled and then summarized.

4.1.7 Data Collating and Preparing the Master Summary

The master summary was prepared for each category by collating all summaries under each code of every interview. This master summary is our research finding for each category.

4.1.8 Archiving

Audio cassettes, transcriptions, translations, coded data and summaries are stored in a secured place.

4.2 Special Inclusion

We had adopted a unique methodology to include an account of a deceased LBT person given by her same sex partner. It was agreed by the research team that the partner of the deceased girl is the legitimated heir of their joint history of love, and hatred that they both faced; therefore her account of the incident was most important. This interview was taken in two parts. The principal investigator had taken the primary interview and then the co investigator later talked with the PI to bring out her interpretation and feelings about the narrations of violence and violation. The team had also gone through some of the letters written by the deceased girl to her partner which have been archived as supportive document.

This particular interview was important as it brought us face to face with various forms of violence at the same time. The deceased girl, who was practically an orphan, had faced the worst kind of physical violence, rape by her own brother, her only close family and cousin brother, as a punishment of her 'depravity'. We can only assume the kind of psychological trauma she must have faced and fear and helplessness that actually made her loose sight and the very purpose of her existence became void. She decided to marry to get rid of this situation and died an unnatural death just a few months after her marriage. The case is still ongoing, with allegations against her husband being murder/abetment to suicide.

We had treated this case with special interest and sensitivity. Partner of the deceased girl recounted their relationship and the incidents of rape, physical abuse and psychological threat given to her by her brothers. While narrating these incidents we also noticed the amount of emotional trauma this girl had gone through while in the relationship, her heartbreak, when her partner decided to marry a man and put an end to this relationship and the final blow being her death which this girl is not being able to cope with. So we got two violence accounts from a single narrative which facilitated even a third. The principal investigator had taken the interview of the partner of the deceased girl and she had also interacted with the deceased girl herself through tele-counselling via help line and also face to face interaction for more than once. The account of the partner along with her own interpretation of the deceased girl's life story opened up another chain of emotional trauma within herself, which was addressed through the cathartic process of sharing it with the co-investigator.

We had used multiple interpretation method for the same narrative and compared those to find out the subtle and nuanced information about violence and violation other than those present in gross forms. Three different accounts were prepared, one for the deceased girl, one for her partner and one for the principal investigator.

4.3 Ethical Fiber

As part of our research ethics, questions of confidentiality and anonymity were fully observed. The interviewers were encouraged to identify and dissociate with the respondents as far as possible. As a feminist research process, we needed to relate and politicize our personal identification with the 'subjects', but at the same time to maintain a critical viewing angle we needed to dissociate from them and have a subjective-objective interplay. Especially with the LBT respondents, it was a
subtle and complex situation as the interviewer and respondents were often close friends, associates or comrades. The
training imparted to the interviewers covered these areas and the interviewers had performed their tasks well.

Since this research dealt with human beings and their emotions, we had to be very careful about our research ethics. The steps we had taken to maintain a high degree of ethical value are:

- Informed consent from all the respondents and researchers
- Complete anonymity right from the transcription level as all translators were not from the community
- Complete confidentiality even within the team (if a researcher wanted to discuss some issues with the team, she had to use code number)

• After each interview the respondent was given a choice of interviewing the interviewer to minimize power hierarchy
• Each interview was sent back to the respondent after transcription for her approval

4.4 Research Team

Principle Investigator:	Dr. Subhagata Ghosh
Co-Investigators:	Ms. Sumita Basu Bandyopadhyay Dr. Ranjita Biswas
Other team members:	Ms. Minakshi Sanyal
	Ms. Sumita Majumder
	Ms. Sudeshna Pal (Discontinued for some months)
	Ms. Agnes Joseph (Discontinued)
Report Witting Team:	Dr. Subhagata Ghosh
	Ms. Sumita Basu Bandyopadhyay
	Dr. Ranjita Biswas

We also had hired a part time research assistant & transcribers (within the community), and translators.

5. Research Findings

Violence is an operative word for Indian women in general, though they perhaps do not recognize its existence in everyday life. They are living in the continuum of violence and violation; and by virtue of being biological women LBTs are also a part of that continuum. But LBTs are not just biological women; they are sexual women proclaiming definite sexual choice. Hence they are doubly violated, as women and as women with same sex preference. Our research project has tried to map violence and violation done to this particular category of women, by recording and documenting violence on LBT persons by family and society, intra-relational violence within the LBT community and activists' stand vis-à-vis women's rights and queer rights movement.

To begin with we tried to cull out definitions of violence and violation from all the responses from all the categories. Almost all the respondents had segregated violence between physical and mental. Something done to cause bodily harm to make the victim obey the perpetrator is physical violence, which is tangible and there are some legal recourse available to deal with such violence. Mental violence is to break the victim's spirit, so that she/he has no other option but to obey the perpetrator. It is more subtle in form and more difficult to be addressed through the existing legal system of the country.

Other than these two broad categorizations there are finer layers of violence and violation and the relationship between these two. As silence, or knowledge or ideology as forms of violence. As violation in itself being a form of violence, or bringing in the concept of context (time, place and individual) as part of understanding violence and violation. In a way violence and violation is dealt here as a general overarching idea as well as a definite contextualized one. We needed both, as gender based violence is a more generalized form of violence whereas sexual orientation based is violence is more contextual. About violation, one thing was interesting that most of the respondents have linked violation with rights, violation is not letting one have her/his rights but understanding of rights per se is rather vague for almost all.

5.1 CATEGORY I

Category I (the LBTs) is the section where we are taking an account of actual violence and violation happening on LBT persons. From the findings of this category we have been able to collect documents on:

1. A varied range of understandings of violence and violations
2. Issues of violence and violation
3. Different forms of violence and violations
4. Sources of violence and violations
5. Coping techniques of the individuals

5.1.1 Understandings of Violence and Violations

Violence is understood by all the LBT respondents in very clear terms but violation is not so explicit. The relationship between violence and violation are unclear but the act of violence emerges out of violation of rights is clear. Power relationships vis-à-vis violence, optionless-

ness as violation, self inflicted violence and violation of one's own rights has clearly come out at practical as well as conceptual levels. Internalization of violence and violation that is practiced in the society and enacting the same in intimate relationships is a consciousness that became helpful for many of our respondents.

The realization that the patriarchal framework has been imbibed by those who are supposed to challenge it, was a challenging moment. The chain of violence, in which violence gives birth to even more severe form of violence, within relationships and also in the society is another concern expressed by our respondents. Similarly, 'how far is too far' is a question asked by many to understand the limits of own rights vis-à-vis family.

5.1.2 Issues of Violence and Violation

Issues of violence and violation experienced by respondents in this category are generally both sexual orientation and gender based. Overt violence had been experienced by LBTs for not conforming to the gender roles. Along with that we have noted specific forms of violence happening particularly because a person is an illegal child or an only child or an orphan or a married woman with children or a nun inside a convent or having a mentally ill father and so on. It clearly indicates that violence happens to people who do not conform to norms and expectations of the society, an only child is supposedly to fulfill all her parent's dreams or an illegal child is not supposed to exist.

5.1.3 Different Forms of Violence and Violations

We have categorized instances of violence and violations faced by our LBT respondents under different forms. The numbers within bracket is the number of instances of violence and violation faced by LBTs that came out from this research. [Please see ANNEXURE, for detailed lists for each form].

• Physical violence and violation [31]
• Psychological violence [139]
• Verbal abuse [37]
• Any other form of violence and violation [20] [education/work/health care services/support group]
• Gender based violence and violation [29]
• Self inflicted violence and violation [39]
• Respondent as perpetrator [41]
• Violence and violation within the LBT Relationship [49]

5.1.3.1 Physical Violence and Violation

We have identified many forms of physical violence, 31 in number to be precise. This includes rape by own brother, murder/abatement to suicide by husband, forced sex by partner, forced consumption of contraceptive pills by partner, medical violence as head to foot examination, including vagina by male doctor after learning about her orientation, innumerable instances of sexual abuse by close relatives, neighbours, known persons, different forms of mob violence beginning with stone pelting to severe beating, police case,

physical captivity by family as well as by partner, physical abuse like beating, throttling, using teeth, nail, sharp objects, cigarette, to cause physical harm by partner, and many more. It is interesting yet painful to note that most of this violence is perpetrated either by family or by the same sex partner.

5.1.3.2 Psychological Violence

Psychological violence has 139 entries in our list. Frustration, anger, helplessness, humiliation, dejection, worthlessness, self doubt, phobia, anxiety, psychosomatic diseases, attempt to suicide, stress, trauma, distress, public shaming, paranoia, panic, unloved-ness, claustrophobia, hatred, loss of self worth – these are the basic emotions that has appeared in different permutations and combinations throughout these interviews. The family has exerted as much emotional pressure as they could to bring the 'erring member back to sanity' and the same sex partner has on the other hand done everything under her control to keep this cow tied to her noose. It often seemed like a jigsaw puzzle to us, every piece fitting into the other. A is getting harassed by her family, feels frustrated and angry takes that out on B, her partner, who in also emotionally tortured by her family thinks A is her only refuge so never retaliates, designing an exact replica of hetero-patriarchal violence within a homo-relational boundary. Proper education and a good employment seemed an answer to us in many cases, but we have come across a highly educated, career-wise very well placed LBT person who succumbed to her family's emotional blackmailing and married to fulfill her duty as an only child. In the process of being a dutiful daughter and a dutiful wife she lost her own perspective of life and completely lost her identity not just as an LBT but as a human being living with a purpose. At this moment she has conceived, another attempt of placating her natal and marital family. But her same sex partner is still kept hanging in between as she would not let her leave.

5.1.3.3 Verbal Abuse

Kinds of verbal abuse identified are 37. Verbal abuse ranging from 'slut' to 'daughter-fucker', from 'non-man' to 'fuck your ass' –has no end, no rational explanation. And most of these came from closest of relatives, mothers, brothers, husbands or even same sex partners. A mother who is almost 70, when she comes to know about her daughter's orientation, her first reaction was of horrified stupor. The daughter was married by then with a 12 year old daughter. The mother not knowing how to cope or combat with this information lashed at her daughter with extremely abusive words - whether she feels attracted to her own 12 year old girl child! We have another F to M transperson, who was forced into marriage with a man and had a child out of that marriage. This transperson's female partner verbally abused him/her calling ugly words meaning pseudo-man for his/her maternal inclination towards the biological child.

5.1.3.4 Other Forms of Violence and Violation

A LBT person faces violence from almost all sectors of her life. If her identity gets exposed she can be hunted down by her class mates or school authorities. She can be punished by taking away her school game-team captaincy or denying her promotion. We have come across students who discontinued education as they were not being able to cope with open hatred and slandering by fellow students and the authorities for their non-girly attire. The same happens

in case of work place where promotion is denied, work opportunity is withdrawn and general work atmosphere gets so much vitiated that an employee has to opt for transfer or quit her job. There are instances where a LBT person was sacked after her identity got exposed under some other pretext. Violence within the health care system, particularly psychiatric violence is very much to be noted in this context. LBT persons are treated as sexual perverts not just by lay persons but by qualified psychiatrists and other medical practitioners, which gives them the license to be physically/sexually/psychologically abusive to the person. Against a dark back drop of violence and violation, a support group, may or may not be identity based, can help people to a great extent. But in a few cases violence and violation had been experienced by our LBT respondents from the support groups where they took refuge.

5.1.3.5 Gender Based Violence and Violation

A LBT person begins her life with a double discrimination – as a woman and a same sex loving woman. Therefore gender based violence is a very important part of her life. We got rampant instances of sexual abuse in this category; respondents are sexually abused by close relatives, neighbours or unknown men just because they are women. Then they had gone through corrective rape because of their orientation. Another form of gender based violence in this category is because of gender non conformity. A woman who does not behave or dress like a woman is not accepted in the society and there are instances that such women were driven towards committing suicide.

5.1.3.6 Self Inflicted Violence and Violation, Respondent as Perpetrator, Violence and Violation within the LBT Relationship.

Violence within the homo-relational structure, self inflicted violence and respondent as a perpetrator, inputs under these three codes actually brings us face to face with the most difficult issue to address, the internalized notions of heteropatriarchy. The accounts that we collected on relational violence within the LBT relationship speaks the same language of heterosexual violent relationships. The gender binaries are very spelt out in these relationships and the adopted form is patriarchal. It is often coupled with lack of actual social support that a hetero-patriarchal structure gets, which leaves a void in them accentuating violence towards soft target, the femme partner. Therefore in the process, the LBT person becomes the perpetrator. Those who are conversant in the violence language know that survivors have a tendency of becoming the perpetrator. And it is not uncommon in our case. Violence received from outside takes a complete 360 degree turn and becomes violence directed at others. We have documented instances of such violence perpetrated by LBT persons. Self inflicted violence is the most common form of violence documented through this research. In the process of trying to cope with the society LBT persons have negated their core identity and kept on living a pseudo life or a closeted life. Or to hold on to a relationship, since LBT relationships are difficult to form, they are letting themselves be violated as much s possible, which in other words mean the age old practice of holding on to a ‘bad marriage’. Internalized homophobia also plays a vital role in case of self-inflicted violence.

5.1.4 Sources of Violence and Violations

Family, both intimate and extended, stands out as the seat of severe most violence and violation happening on LBT persons. It can begin with psychological pressure, to emotional blackmail to mental torture and can reach up to rape to 'cure' the LBT person. Sexual abuse is abundantly thrown in for good measure here and there in between.

Educational institutions and workplace ends as a close runner up. Especially because the authority and power they have over LBT persons as students or employees. Refusing promotion, taking away captaincy, vitiating atmosphere in such a way that a student is compelled to take a TC or victimizing a worker for her orientation, refusing promotion, refusing job, taking away her job, these are all instances of institutional power at its best display. Friends, colleagues, associates are individuals are nails and screws in the hate machinery.

Within relationships between LBTs a strange yet not so strange event was identified. Expressions like 'gender-typical relational expectations leading to violence' or 'inherent violence of heterotypical relationship' was repeated over and over. Mistrust, suspicion, promiscuity, disrespect – are violent words from hetero-normative world that has found their way into their couple-dom. In one hand there is lack of security in socio-legal terms and on the other hand lack of recognition. Then there is internalized homophobia, lack of proper information and in-depth knowledge about homosexuality in general and same-sex relationship between women in particular. All these factors have contributed negatively in intimate spaces. In fact for many, homosexuality used to mean only having sex with a same sex partner. Therefore many of our respondents had entered into marriage with this idea of living a married life as well as continuing with their same sex practice, exposing themselves, their partners and their husbands into more violence and violation.

As researchers we have tried to bring out a more generalized version of individual encounters with violence and violation. The instances of violence and violations that are listed reflect that generalized version where we tried to capture in an objective way, subjective cases of violence and violation happening on people. Some of the items listed are more frequent than others. We have identified one pattern of physical abuse like beating as a common occurrence, but have classified that into two parts – beating by family and beating by partner. It clearly shows violence within and outside can actually converge. Every single interview talked about variety of psychological abuse that was categorized into an exhaustive list, but a similar category was made where self-inflicted violence was listed. It clearly shows again that violence within somewhere resonates with violence outside.

5.1.5 Coping Techniques of the Individuals

Coping techniques already explored and/or suggested to deal with violence and violation clearly shows a bipolar division. One set talks about creating a space within the society, to be self sufficient, emotionally strong, economically independent, knowledgeable, continuous dialogue with family in particular and larger society in general, joining a support group, joining the rights (women's/LBT) movement, taking help from women's organizations, creating issue awareness – these are positive approach to combat violence and violation. The other set talks about keeping a low profile, compromising as a married woman, compromising with feminine dress and/or behavioral code, living inside closet, pretending as a heterosexual

and finally exercising violence against violence. As researchers we have uncovered the second group as well as the first, now as interventionists we will be building upon the first to combat the second. [Please see ANNEXURE]

5.2 CATEGORY IIA (THE INTIMATE CIRCLE)

Findings of this category throw light on the reaction of the intimate space inhabited by a LBT in day to day life. Category IIA (intimate circle) constitutes the smallest section, but nonetheless, a very powerful one. There we were dealing with people, family / friend / colleague / neighbour, who share the most intimate space with the LBT persons. The first problem faced in the very beginning was people were not willing to volunteer for an interview. People, who are generally open and accepting their LBT relatives, friendly with the research team, even they were not willing to let us document their views. Even LBT persons within the group were not keen to have us talk to their families. Friends were easy to get, but colleagues were not. In a workplace where exposure of orientation can actually cost one's job, it was really difficult to get hold of colleagues who could speak about a person, whom she/he knows to be a LBT. We were lucky to get a neighbour, who has rented out her ground floor flat to Sappho for Equality, knowing fully well what kind of organization it is.

From all our respondents of this category we tried to find out what they actually understand by violence and violation. Our findings show that sometimes the family, friends, colleagues or neighbours are not aware that they are inflicting violence upon or violating the rights of LBTs in the name of doing "welfare" of their daughters/sisters/friends/colleagues/neighbours/or any other relationships. So understanding of violence and violation is a major issue.

But one thing became clear as soon as we began working with this group that we are interviewing only those who have accepted their close one's orientation. There is subtle adversity, a feeling of helpless frustration or irritated indifference in some cases, but there was no overt negativity. In most of the cases it was clearly seen that people have accepted the LBT as someone close, they have accepted the person as their daughter, sister, sister in law, friend, colleague etc, i.e., the relationship with the LBT has become more important than her/his existence as an individual. They are coping with the situation out of love and responsibility. Acceptance/recognition of the issue as another individual's free choice remained as forbidding as possible. Family is playing the most important and interesting role here. It is the family that brings down the most hideous from of violence on its LBT member, because it believes in purging through punishment, it is the family that accepts its LBT member because after all she is family and finally it is the family whom the LBT cannot think as a perpetrator, hence disregards all violence done to her. It is quite problematic to assess the relationship between family and there are many instances where the LBT person understands and speaks in clear terms about the violence done to her by her family, but it is nonetheless very complicated.

Some of the LBT persons, who appeared in our Category I, have their family or friends speak in this section. In certain cases we have documented contradictory versions among them. Same incident or same situation have been described by an individual LBT and her family from two completely different and incongruous positions. In such cases we have treated these two versions as two completely different narratives, each true to its own perception.

A strange twist in tale happened when a housewife, family of an LBT person, married at 17, mother at 18 and 21, could not even finish high school, living as happily married as anyone else for 22 years, after a little trepidation, somewhat bewildered at her own expression, said that she never thought about having sex with a woman, she doesn't know if that is possible, but she would have been happier if she could be as free and confidant as her LBT sister-in-law! For her lesbianism signifies independence, autonomy, determination.

5.3 CATEGORY IIB (THE LARGER SOCIETY)

In this category we tried to find out acceptance or non-acceptance of LBTs and LBT issues by the larger society.

The most interesting observation in Category IIB (the larger society) is emergence of the gendered face of society. We know gender is inevitable, but every time that inevitability materializes, it gets reinforced once more. From the responses of our respondents from the larger society it was very clear that there is a basic gender based distinction in understandings of violence and violation. All male respondents defined these two terms in a more general way while for most of the women respondents these are more of personal in nature, more specific and more subtle. At the beginning of each interview we informed the respondents about our topic of discussion. Only one person, a woman, included lesbians as victims of violence - "marriage of a lesbian with a man".

There is an overall knowledge on different sexual identities among our respondents in this section. They are aware that these people exist but not accepted by the society or the state law. Many of them know about the 2nd July 2009 Delhi High Court judgment. In most of the cases media is the source of information. Some have acquired information from their respective professional fields. It is also evident that educational background does not matter in shaping up opinions about homosexuality. We got completely opposite responses about the same point within the same sub-category.

In many cases the responses are crafted in the most politically correct way, but the moment they entered into the personal domain, the double standard became largely evident. People are happy accepting the lesbian who stays a light year away, than in India, may be somewhere in a distant city in India than in Kolkata, and even if in Kolkata then definitely not within the locality.

We have placed two sets of enquiries to our respondents, one set is her/his response towards LBT persons and the other set is towards LBT issues. Persons and issues brought in two distinctly different, but not always opposing views. The same person would give sermons of non-violence towards homosexuals and declare that homosexuals are abnormal because some of their organs are not fully functional or a mother should be ready to look after her lesbian daughter as a mentally retarded child's mother would. It is somewhat like the Christian preaching – hate sin, not the sinner!

There was a query in this section that was meant for personalizing violence experiences and building empathy that fell almost flat. We got very lukewarm responses to personal violence related information as perpetrator or even as receiver. Since the discussion was basically on violence against LBT persons, all presumably straight respondents could not place themselves in the same league.

Parent-child relation is something that every respondent focused upon. A child definitely needs parental care and acceptance, but it also reflects a typical pattern of hetero-normative pattern of understanding. Family is the most important site, in security or in violence, in care and nurturing or in the most hideous form of rights violation, family is the ultimate.

We have interviewed a political cadre from the right wing opposition party, who perhaps had given the most candid responses. She generally will not take part in any mob violation against a homosexual, will try to convince a neighbourhood lesbian girl only, even help such persons if they come to her in any crisis, but she knows it is wrong, it is abnormal. She won't even discuss this issue, she won't even care if it is legalized, because inside her mind she feels it is wrong, an aberration and if her own son becomes a homosexual, perhaps that's the threat that will make her violent. She is the target of our intervention.

5.4 CATEGORY III (WOMENS' RIGHTS AND LBT RIGHTS ACTIVISTS)

Category III, the women's rights and LBT rights groups and individual activists shows reflections on the relationship between women's rights movements and LBT rights movements in India.

To develop an effective advocacy strategy for reducing violence on LBTs it is extremely necessary to have the accounts of women who already are conversant in the rights language. We, therefore, as the third level data of our research, documented the experiences of women's rights and LBT rights activists who have either etched out ways of complimenting each other's movements or are engaged in doing so. According to this category, violence has 3 segments, overt or physical, covert or psychological and structural or standardized through socialization.

Some important and critical issues raised by the respondents in this category are directly related to violence and violation and some are obtusely. Like the issue of exclusion as a violation, this happens because of the notion of normalcy predominant in the society. Every society has its own notion of what is normal and it is assumed that normal is natural. And going beyond that construct would bring down violence on the individual. Many of the respondents felt that LBT rights movement is crucial because one cannot hide behind an identity that is not her own. It is violence, and a violation of her own rights. Normalcy is not a matter of majority's decision. People are different and people have to accept that difference. As women defied patriarchy through the women's rights movement, queer persons would defy heteronormativity through the queer rights movement.

In course of interviews some of the respondents raised the question of women as a biological category. Persons whose biological sex do not correspond with their psychological sex are branded as gender variants. They are embodiments of violence and violation and the time has come to give gender a much needed twist and to challenge the very notion of woman. And as woman is not a homogenous category, lesbian is not a homogenous category. There's a working class lesbian, Muslim lesbian, dalit lesbian. These differences have to be kept in mind.

Media violence is another important issue raised in this category, stories of lesbian suicides are portrayed in such a way that either people who are reading it gets appalled by the word

lesbian or queer or they glamorize these deaths and encourages other couples showing the way to defy the normative society.

A very interesting input has come from one of the respondents, women's groups perceive queer people as threat because a] notion of asexual, sacred sisterhood getting challenged, and b] notion of a fluid sexuality continuum that can challenge their own sexual positioning is a reality to many of them. So people want to maintain a clear safe distance creating the boundary of 'them and us'.

It has come out clearly through these interviews that some rights are put higher up in the ladder by powerful players in the main stream rights activism. This is a display of power against the disempowered marginalized groups. By building up a rights hierarchy or by prioritizing some rights over the other, the rights activists themselves are internalizing the same power structure imbalance that they are supposed to fight against. Also the fact that putting some of the rights in the margin comes from lack of knowledge and macro level thinking and people are not ready to admit their lack of knowledge or larger vision. Fighting only for the rights of one's own constituency is not social transformation. It happens when one can associate with the struggles of those that are not one's own. Those can even be challenging one's own beliefs and hegemony is social transformation. Just because there are lesbians in a group doesn't mean that their experience is a part of the group's understanding.

About social reform vis-à-vis legal reform the legal activists have made important remarks. According to them law has very many symbolic significance in the society. How it is going to be translated or executed or changed, repealed or read down, also has important symbolic significance. Not that the society is going to change overnight according to the law, but the fight to change or bring in a change in the legislature has always been very important in this country's social change history. But to think this is the only kind of battle to be fought, or that legal ground is the only battleground, would be wrong. Even if IPC 377 is repealed, neither compulsory heterosexuality would stop nor would the gamut of violence and violation faced by the queer community disappear.

While raising the issue of queerness/ homosexuality as an identity, the respondents have remarked that people have a stock response against the identity of a queer that if heterosexuality is not an identity why would queer be. The answer should simply be, because heterosexuality is so very mainstreamed, a queer person has to establish her identity with conviction and people should know whom they are dealing with. In Indian context it is even easier to think of oneself as the member of the opposite sex than to feel attracted sexually to the same sex. Homosexuality is so very unacceptable to even a homosexual person.

The first point that needs to be documented while analyzing this category is we did not get a single entry in the section of 'indifferent' reaction within the movement [LBT rights and women's rights]. There is 'positive cohabitation', 'negative reaction', even 'mixed reaction', or 'shift in understanding', but no indifference. So one thing is very clear, the women's rights movement and the LBT rights movement are at least closely related to each other.

Point number two, it is not yet decided that the onus of further consolidation should rest on whose shoulders. Both the groups think it is 'their' responsibility, which reminds us of an old saying – it could be done by anybody, but everybody thought it was somebody else's responsibility and finally nobody did it. We need to really work harder to make 'everybody' do it.

Point number three is by going through the history of Autonomous Women's Movements of India by almost all the respondents, we can clearly see that the women's groups that are proactively trying to integrate the sexuality issues are actually headed by queer women. They may not work singularly on LBT or even sexuality issues, but have opened up to the issues with the personal being political conviction.

Point number four, sexuality is actually not understood or accepted by people within the women's movement even today. It is now a political question, and like other marginalized issues as disability, mental illness, caste, communalism, it is given a specific position within a broader rights framework. But sexuality and gender as a pair of lens to be used together to see the hetero-patriarchal structure of oppression, is yet to be accepted and understood.

Point number five, some radical/forward thinking/younger groups and individuals in the women's rights and queer rights movements have started questioning and challenging women as a homogeneous category and accordingly homosexual women as a homogeneous category, which is positive problematization of certain given age old structure. Gender is reviewed vis-à-vis sexuality and biological woman is placed vis-à-vis self-identified woman. So today women's rights movement and the sexuality rights movement are getting entangled with each other with issues of sex, gender and self-identification in a further complex way.

Point number six, while taking these interviews, the research team had experienced a unique incident happening recurrently. Many of our respondents in this category had asked us to shut the audio recorder down and spoke un-recordable things, and then went back to their politically correct stand after a while. It also happened that some of these transcriptions went for a content check to the respondents and came back with specific portions missing / deleted / changed. We had accepted the final versions, because after all we are trying to negotiate very turbulent water over a flimsy bamboo bridge. One of the well known LBT rights activists, who was quite enthusiastic about participating in this process as a respondent, decided against it later and wanted to withdraw her narrative which was very important to us as it gave useful insights for understanding within the community violence. We honoured her decision and did not include her portion in this research.

Point number seven is about the personal of the political, respondents of this category tried to intellectualize their statements as more political than personal. Violence and violation is an ideological issue that happens within a certain context and does not affect the individual activist as a person. We had two questions in this respect one whether she is a survivor or perpetrator of violence. Some have commented on the overarching role of violence of a woman's life, thereby recognizing her own experience of violence and violation to some extent, but only two entries are documented as perpetrators. The personal in this case has not been politicized.

6. Researchers' Experiences

As stated before in the Methodology section, the research team was hundred percent from the LBT community and all of them are members of Sappho for Equality. Three of them also participated as respondents in Categories I and III. This project has followed the feminist research methodology for mapping violence and violation on LBT lives and subjective identification and objective interpretation became an integral part of this research, especially because the researchers also belong to the same community that faces similar violence and violation.

For Category I (LBT persons) we had used peer interviewers to facilitate positive communication and understanding. Interviewers in this category were not only from the community they were also among the most popular, most dependable and most accepted persons within the group. They were from different age/experience category so that respondents from varied age and experiential domain could relate to them easily. These interviews were the most long drawn, most time consuming and emotionally draining for both the respondent and interviewer as they were talking, listening and discussing very painful, unsettling and haunting secrets.

Interviewers in this category often felt stories of violence and violation tugging at familiar chords within, bringing back memories of similar violence and violation, the principal investigator has experienced acute trauma by revisiting many of her own demons. And also in some cases these tales illuminated certain aspects of their own experience in a never before way. Reflection of one's own life and experiences in someone else's story questioned and challenged some decisions taken and reinforced many others. Sometimes it became frustrating, some of the interviewers recalled, because the respondent can not see the obvious violence and violation happening, because to identify some act or feeling as violence or violation one has to understand and define violence. Subtle forms of violence, especially rights violation are often not recognized, as the issue understanding is unclear.

Working with this category had been a very challenging one for us because as community persons we were continuously experiencing transference with the respondents. Since the research team is entirely comprised of community people closely associated with the respondents, we cannot but observe that many of them are showing clear indication of change in their perception of violence and violation as experienced by them or as an idea.

In Category II A (intimate circle), the very interesting interactions happened between interviewers and respondents. On one hand we had close family persons giving their account of their LBT family members and on the other hand the interviewer in many cases knew the interpretation given by the LBTs themselves referring to the same context. Often these were conflicting or complementary analysis of the same truth. This actually has helped the researchers develop deeper insight of the human psyche using the socio-cultural reality as a backdrop.

In some of the cases researchers have interviewed their own family, friends or colleagues. This in turn has helped the interviewers to initiate conversations on issues long suppressed. Respondents in this category knew about their LBT family members, friends, colleagues or neighbours, but knowing and foregrounding grievances, bewilderment, anxiety, fear, trauma and many other complicated mental states are totally different. The interviewers came to

know about the extent of trauma their loved ones faced and the respondents also understood the intensity of pain and hurt their loved ones had gone through. Some very strange secrets were revealed in this process like the incident of child sexual abuse faced by a 75-year old mother of a LBT by an unknown woman, which helped to bridge some of the gaping gaps of non-understanding. These were rewarding moments for both the parties and it opened new channels of communication.

Interviewers working with Category IIB (general society) experienced varied behavioural and intellectual inputs within the same sub group. In many cases people were unwilling to sit for the interview, those who were ready took trouble as to not use particular words like 'lesbian' or 'sex'. In one particular incident, the research team was trying to get hold of a suburban college teacher who turned them down saying she is afraid to take part in such a research as her marriage is already fixed! We don't know what she exactly meant by this statement but it can mean her would be husband may decline to marry her if he comes to know of her association with us or it may even mean that she is about to get married so there is no point trying to get her involved in lesbian activities.

While working with Category III (activists and organizations) researchers have gathered more analytical, eloquent and politically correct responses than other categories. But the inner feeling was of mutual mistrust and blaming. Interviewers as queer rights activists had to dissociate themselves and not take part in the blame game.

The principal investigator has expressed a strange yet pertinent feeling while she was analyzing the feedbacks and collating them. Closeness and too much exposure to so many raw patches of violence and violations had actually acted as self-inflicted violence which had been multiplied when she was compiling and collating all data collected. She being a scientist by profession, related to her experiences at a dissection table where a living object was about to be dissected. She narrated her feelings of abhorrence at the violence she would be doing to the living being and the excitement of knowing something that would help her attain her goal, somewhat similar to her experiences of working in this project. 'Emotions of human beings, secrets that are close to their hearts, feelings of helplessness, frustration, shame, fear, impotent or potent anger, self loathing, self questioning, confusion, clarity – all were pinned down in front of me, I with the dissection knife would cut them open to probe further, this knowledge would give me power. It was not a happy feeling, I felt like violating people's lives. But again as scientific researches and experiments, even this research is dedicated to serve humanity in general and the target population in particular. Those who have contributed their violence stories, their personal experiences of violation for this research had done that consciously, with a purpose. And I too, am contributing, with a purpose, in a way I can to make it work for all of us. Ultimately neither I the dissector/analyzer nor the contributors matter as individuals before a collective for whom we all are working.'

One of the researchers involved mainly in interviewing the LBT individuals have lots to share about her feelings and experiences. "It was different kind of experience. I was an ordinary student, never had any association with research as such. I had joined Sappho when I was 22, and Sappho has empowered me so much that I could become apart of this research team today. Through this research, I have learnt and understood what is violence and violation. As I started taking interviews, I realized that most of the respondents did not know what is violence or violation and obviously they are not aware about themselves as perpetrators. But now they know, at least to some extent. The respondents shared all their emotions and secrets with me, I felt responsible to keep those secrets confidential. I also felt that I should also be

able to provide them open, friendly, warm and non-threatening space. I felt I should be non-judgmental otherwise I will be inflicting violence on them. As a novice in this work, I realized that qualitative research depends also upon the interviewer's life-view, her depth of understanding of the issue and her own experience that can connect her with the respondent. I think I need to expand myself more. Learn more skills and technique and develop better understanding of the subject".

Another researcher who was also a respondent in the LBT category while re-reading her narrative, she could identify some lapses; she had forgotten to include some very critical experiences of violence and violation that could have been crucial to the overall understanding. 'I was feeling uneasy about it, and was planning to call up the team to ask what should be done. But as I scrolled down the list of violence and violations, I realized that almost all my expressed or forgotten experiences of violence are already there in the list! They are there as someone else's experience, things that I had talked about or the forgotten stuff that I was fretting about, all are there, experienced by many just like me. It is a feeling I am not being able to identify, somewhere it is creating a bond with other similar violence sufferers, but it is also making my special moments banal, my violence was unique to me, now I see them almost everywhere, they are not mine alone, no more!'

One of the interviewers who had worked specifically with Category IIB, the larger society, wanted to share her experiences here in her own words. "Apprehension as I faced ambiguities around my role as an interviewer and excitement at being associated with such a project coalesced on being asked to help with this project. The first challenge was to solicit respondents who were willing to donate an hour or two of their time. However, four gracious adults did volunteer to answer my questions. I had a stroke of luck of meeting a student when her books came crashing down, took a chance and she agreed for an interview. I was surprised at the ease with which the first interview went off. I had thought my first "trial" would probably be punctuated with mistakes that would later be improved. I was impressed with some of the suggestions of this young student, surprised at how comfortable I was conducting the interview and a little bit amused that this girl who had so confidently and readily agreed to be interviewed almost recoiled with trepidation on being asked to furnish her email id to enable her to cross check the contents of her interview. The interview with the housewife was a little surreal; it was conducted during the middle of the night, literally, since that happened to be the most convenient time for the respondent and though I was a trifle bugged at the time, I nevertheless obliged. Probably that was the reason why I felt to some extent I had failed to connect with the respondent and though I asked the questions and got the answers, I felt I had not done full justice to this interview. I realized that when I interviewed my friend, we were totally relaxed and to some extent, she was in control of the interview and I had lost the status of detached observer. This time, I not only became the listener, but also the student and she became the teacher. She answered each question with details that directly related to the question, and with her philosophies of life. I experienced a short inner struggle, "should I try to stick to the questions or should I abandon the prescribed role of interviewer and become the learner of her accomplishments?" I decided to let the conversation flow freely. I was fascinated with her insight and depth of understanding. Immediately afterwards, I reflected on the pattern of the interview and finally accepted my particular style. I concluded that the strength of the interview was rooted in my ability to relax the respondent and encourage conversation and not in the specifics of the questionnaire.

Unfortunately, the next interview with my partner's sister turned out to be a little traumatic, possibly due to the personal nature of it. For one I was shocked to learn some home truth on her views about our relationships and second after I interviewed her I slipped back into the past and relieved almost all the incidents that occurred vis-à-vis my relationship. While the experience was painful, in retrospect, I can say it was a catharsis. In the course of this work, I met four intriguing individuals who shared their thoughts with me. I have often wondered why these volunteers were so willing to speak. I concluded that they wanted to speak, they wanted to be heard and they wanted their experiences legitimized. The interviews fulfilled one predetermined objective, providing information for the project and two unanticipated outcomes, honouring the volunteers by allowing them to tell their stories and honouring me by letting me listen."

One of the research team members had to temporarily discontinue her association not only with this work but also with the organization as her orientation got exposed to her family, wanted to share her feelings of violation, trauma and helplessness in her own words. "The palms of my hands were stiff and cold like a corpse as I was moving errant down the street on a weekend afternoon. My vision was blurred with full of tears but I was trying hard to hide it before people could see me sobbing openly on the road. I was scared, hurt and bruised deep inside. And the only probable reason behind it is this – I am queer. It was December 29th, 2009. There started a huge turmoil into my family as soon as I returned from the residential workshop, organized by Sappho for Equality, the organization with which I am associated. I am not straight; this fact was evident to my parents clearly, by the time I got back to home after the workshop. I was denied any sort of communication with my parents except some heated arguments. I was directly asked about my orientation and I was informed that to have a gay child is nothing but a sheer misfortune. I was told that my identity would not even let my mother die peacefully. My mother kept crying, my father was numb, and I was standing in front of them unanswered, with my jaws compressed. I left my home that afternoon with some money and headed towards nowhere. I tried to contact my friends from Sappho. They were beside me all the while. But I was unsure about my research work to which I was committed at that time - the VioMap research conducted by Sappho for Equality. I lost my composure because nobody asked me to stop when I left home that morning. At midnight my parents gave me a call and took me back home from a cyber café. But I was not allowed to sleep on the bed beside my mother after that incident. For months I used to sleep initially on the floor, then on a separate bed. I believe I am fortunate enough to have these Sappho sisters right beside me during my thick and thin. It is due to them; I was able to rehabilitate myself again and was able to continue the work after a few months' gap. There was a time when I thought I would have to choose either my work or my family, because my movements were restricted and I was emotionally devastated. But I managed somehow to get over with it and completed the work for which I was assigned. I am highly privileged that I could be a part of this research work after surmounting all the hindrances. I never thought I would gain such an experience, that even during this research work. But I am thankful to God that it happened. I was more inclined towards the project after this, and was able to relate myself to every bit of it, thoroughly."

This section ends with the tale of one of the co-investigators involved in this project. She is a community person but married to a man for more than 25 years. She had been coping with her life in a peculiar manner by segregating her identity in two watertight compartments of the queer activist and the happy wife. This schizophrenia was taking a toll on her mentally as well as physically and her husband was also going through bouts of intense insecurity, frustration and trauma. Through the process of this project of taking interviews, transcribing, translating,

coding, analyzing all the violence stories and defining queer forms of violence and violation, this person had arrived at this realization after 12 years of emotional struggle that she cannot be both at the same time. These are not just two conflicting parts of a whole self but two different selves altogether. By living this dual existence she is violating her own rights as a queer person as well as her husband's rights to a heterosexual wife, who though knows and tries to accept her as a lesbian. That it is a form of self-inflicted violence and that she is also a perpetrator against her husband became apparent to her by looking back at her life through a vio-lens developed in the course of this research. She is now poised at a strange dusky dawn of her life and time only can tell us what is there in store for her and her husband!

7. Challenges Faced

Collecting oral narratives and analyzing them to create a database as well as understanding of certain social situations and/or practices, is a tried and tested method. At the same time, this process is not without it's inherent flaws and problems. It is a method that requires the researcher to depend heavily upon the respondent and her/his perception of the world around. That perception can be flawed, limited, one sided or even untrue! We have faced acute problems while talking to both the same sex partners or with a LBT person and her family separately, because often their narration and interpretation of the same incident were different. We finally decided to treat these accounts as separate and not conflicting inputs.

This method also has another loop hold; data collected through this process often depends heavily upon the interviewer's interpretation on a given situation. Especially because of the open-ended unstructured-ness of the interviews, responsibilities of the interviewers have increased manifold. They were given a through training on LFT methods as well as about the rationale and outcome of the research. The interviewer-respondent relationship, especially in the LBT category, was another complicated issue, because most of the respondents shared a lot of very personal and private stories, which were to be kept under full confidentiality. Many of the LBT respondents started looking up to the interviewers as therapists and expected positive input in their relational problems.

Instead of July '09 our project could only begin in August '09. Sappho for Equality (probably for being a LBT support group) was having problems with FCRA (the specific permission from India Government to receive foreign fund) clearance and subsequently not able to receive fund from Kartini. Finally in August we had to go for the alternative process of accepting fund in two individual core members' names.

The research topic being uncommon and tabooed, people in the larger society became reluctant in many cases to give interviews. In some cases they did not even turn up on the fixed day or declined our requests to give interviews.

Family members who are positive towards their intimate LBT relatives agreed to give only an interview and they were very few in number. So we faced a lot of problem to find out respondents in this sub-category.

Category II B (larger society) is so varied in nature that it became difficult to collate the data obtained. In fact this category itself provides the opportunity of another full-fledged research

work. The other problem faced was with the larger society respondent number. We could only gather 25 respondents that are in no way a proper representation of the larger society. The data gathered through these interviews are nudging us towards a deep diving into this category, which we may take up later.

In Category III (activists) the language of interview became an obstacle since in this section we had to select respondents from different parts of the country.

We worked with an inherent problem, choice of subjects both qualitative and quantitative in the 'others' category representing the family, friends, workplace and larger society, was limited. Those who were willing to give interview were either being politically correct or actually pro homosexuality. It was difficult to delve inside their psyche and bring out their actual unadulterated feelings.

One of our research team members' orientation got exposed to her family during the research period and thus she is being restrained by her family presently and hence unable to give full time. One of our research team members had to discontinue as her father was diagnosed with terminal illness. We could not appoint any more researchers because there was no time for orientation sessions. We have done the full research work with only 5 team members. The working hands became insufficient since all team members are volunteers and thus could not dedicate whole time to the research.

The number of interviews (75 nos.) we committed was extremely optimistic because time is very short for working with such a large sample size.

We have suffered some monetary loss in funding due to depreciating value of Euro.

8. Charting out Advocacy Strategies

Through this research certain gaps are identified in the existing situation that induces and enhances violence and violation in LBT lives.

i. Patriarchal values and norms internalized by LBT persons
ii. Homophobia internalized by LBT persons
iii. Hetero-phobia and refusal to interact open-heartedly by LBT persons
iv. Hetero-typical relational demand within LBT relationship
v. Lack of social security and acceptance, leading towards frustration, anger and relational violence
vi. Lack of knowledge on homosexuality both in the intimate circle as well as the general society
vii. Myths and misconceptions ruling high in general people's mind about homosexuality
viii. Sexuality without its reproductive purposes is banded immoral
ix. Homosexuality is aberration, wrong, deviation from the normal and unnatural
x. Homosexuality is a treatable mental disease and some psychiatrists use a bouquet of therapies and drugs to treat such people
xi. Women's rights activists expect the LBT rights activists to take the initiative for inclusion

xii. Sexuality is a personal affair happening in the private domain, does not fall within the purview of a rights movement
xiii. Violence is the only convergence point between the movements and celebration of sexuality is ruled out
xiv. Organizations are unwilling to look beyond their immediate agenda
xv. Both the movements (women's rights and LBT rights) otherize each other

8.2 Needs to be Addressed Through Advocacy

The gaps that are identified need to be bridged. We have recognized three basic forms of gap and intervention is needed to address those.

a. From the above list, points (i) to (v) indicate gaps that affect LBT lives from within and result in relational violence and violation mainly by giving her a faulty notion of the world around. To bridge these gaps, through gender understanding is needed to stop hetero-typical relational expectations. Rights awareness is also needed, whish rights can be claimed from the society or the state and what are the responsibilities that would come with those rights. Homosexuality in its proper perspective is not understood by not only the non-queer world, it is not understood by those who practice it also.

b. Points (vi) to (x) show us gaps in general understanding of the non-queer world about issues of homosexuality. Dialogue and positive engagement is needed to bridge this gap. Targeted intervention campaign can be taken up to address specific groups in the society like the Psychiatrist, the Gynecologist, the academia (both student and teacher), the lawyer and state machinery like the police (after 2 July 2009) and many more. Family awareness and intervention has to be designed separately and with greatest care as we have seen that family is site of most horrible violence and violation and can also become the most secured haven.

c. (xi) to (xv) point out to the bridges that has to be or been already halfway built between the women's rights and LBT rights movements. The main gap that exists here is about who should take the onus of bridging the gap and whose issues are more rights oriented and pertinent. The need is therefore to strike a balance somewhere, to harp on the fact that no issue or no movement can survive in void. And women's sexuality has women at the center. Not only just the women's rights movement, the LBT rights movement should network and build alliances with other rights based minority movements as well as the gay movement.

9. Conclusion

We had begun this research with background knowledge of gender based violence that is too common in Indian context. Our findings showed us that it is further supplemented by violence that inhabits the space of non-hetero-normative people and relations. Homophobic heterosexual people against people with same-sex orientation and gender non-conformation perpetrate this violence. In recent times there has been substantial coverage in the media of certain incidents of violence (targeted at both individuals and groups) perpetrated against people of non-normative gender and sexuality and these hate crimes are demonstrative of the daily perils lived by members of any marginalized group, more so, if they embody a non- (re) productive, non-heterosexual, non-familial/non-familiar way of life. The legally ambiguous status of homosexuality precludes the possibility of any formal public means of redress. The law makes even consensual sex look like sexual crime itself, without the possibility of regarding same-sex relations normal and natural. Thus, the overt violence of certain same-sex relations defies any legal conceptions of violence, as all same-sex relations are always already 'criminalized' so to speak. LGBT abusers utilize the legal and social institutions created by homophobia and heterosexism to unleash violence against people practicing non-hetero-normative sex. Thus the non-normative woman becomes the softest target, both for her gender and sexuality!

Our experience as a support group and as an activist platform has much too often brought us face to face with the issue of violence that pervades the lives of women who transgress given norms of gender and sexuality. Often this violence takes forms of murder, rape, battering, public violence or even forced medical treatment. But most often violence comes in more subtle forms, as in threats, forced marriages, sacking from jobs, denial of right to basic amenities of life etc. Visibility is an important factor that constitutes incidents of homophobic violence. The more visible you are as a non-conformist the more you are liable to attract violence. Women are forced to either live a life of invisibility or face violence on account of wanting to live life on their terms. There is an unwritten code that coerces women to conform to 'mainstream' ways of living, thinking and being, or be doomed. A lot of women belonging to this community show acts of both compliance and resistance to mainstream norms and standards. While resistance to dominant norms could attract overt violence from the side of the dominant, compliance or a quiet passing off as the 'normal heterosexual' may help in avoiding visibility and potential violence. The latter however inheres a suppression of selfhood and violence on self. Some of these women find it difficult to resist the pressure of family and peers to conform to the normative. Some declare an open war. In both cases the violence that follows needs to be recognized and resisted. We realized that violence and violation goes hand in hand in everyday lives of these women and young girls. Given the hardships faced by women encountering violence within heterosexual relations, the violence inflicted on women embodying same-sex desire is almost unimaginable. Added to it is the difficulty in articulating and communicating this pain to friends and family. There is also the greater possibility of having to encounter hostile agencies like the police, the law and the medical establishment in the aftermath of such violent events. No concrete services or institutional support systems are in place because there are no clear ideas about the legality of the act itself. Discussions and sharing on such issues of violence remain largely confined to the space of personal counselling sessions and support groups.

Among other things a woman's sexual orientation can determine her access to resources as well as her social status. Women suffer material losses, not being able to pursue education,

career options and facing desertion from family members and friends. They suffer emotional and psychological trauma having to struggle against discrimination and ostracization. Women also undergo immense self-depreciation and lack of confidence due to the constant exposure to a heterosexist worldview that leads to self-denial or self-doubt. Mis-recognition and non-recognition can become a very perverse source of violence as it seeks to naturalize the power held by the dominant over non-dominant modes of life. Families, friends and teachers refuse to recognize LBT women's need for acknowledgment as they are, as they desire to be. On the other hand, the inability to be recognized for what one is can cause depleted self-esteem and a sense of social un-productivity. This deliberate disavowal instils in some a feeling of pathological self-identification and they end up in the psychiatrist's clinic with discomfort and confusion regarding their gender roles.

Three levels of violence can be identified. The first is individual where harmful acts are perpetrated against people and property and would include acts like taunting, forced marriage to even murder. The second is identified as institutional where harmful acts are done by social institutions with the intent to obstruct spontaneous human potential, for example, offices denying promotion to its employee on account of sexual orientation or reproductive health programs that do not take into account lesbian sexuality. The third is structural-cultural or the ideological roots of religious and political beliefs for example, homosexuality is illegal and immoral. One could also identify domains of violence according to the areas where such violence takes place – the familial domain, the social domain and the institutional domain. Familial opposition, forced marriages have often led to suicides or home-leaving by LBT women. In the social domain neighbours, communities, office and educational institutions have harassed and discriminated against lesbian women. In the institutional domain, laws that have deemed homosexuality unnatural and therefore illegal, religious faiths that have considered it immoral, and mental health disciplines that have seen it as abnormal, at best alternative, have all participated in actively discriminating or tacitly condemning homosexuality.

Violence and violation is the central theme of this research. As explained in our proposal, we had a primary intention/goal of documenting violence and violation happening to women with non-normative sexual orientations. This was necessary because anecdotal stories of violence and violation were always floating in the air since the inception of our organization but to work with conviction for eradication of such violence it was becoming imperative to collect and document them and build a 'violence repertoire', however strange that may sound.

We all know violence and violation happens, we all have certain degree of exposure towards that mostly as receiver and sometimes perpetrator. But though this research, that commonplace occurrence that we had got so used to have, opened up layers of layers of questions, comments, challenges in front of us, the research team. We need to share this with as many people as possible because it is not just about one horrible incident or a series of incidents or even a particular kind of mindset. Violence and violation covers an area much broader than the physical or psychological harm done to one or many or similar kind of persons. It is a specific form of reading the society, the way we use gender reading or subaltern reading or even sexuality reading to understand a text or an issue, we can use 'violence reading' of a phenomenon, a time frame or a particular mind set prevalent in the society.

One of our immediate goals is to present the 'violence repertoire' in the form of a publication with an analysis of 'violence reading' of non-normative sexualities movement happening in India at this point in time, beginning with the 'Fire campaign' through 'Delhi High Court Judgment against IPC377' towards a 'brighter' future. This documentation is one of its kind, as violence mapping of LBT persons has never been done on this scale and intensity before.

Another goal that has also been explained in our original proposal is the advocacy manual. It will be designed on data collected from our core resource of LBT person's violence repertoire; will include the intimate spaces where her/his rights are most severely violated and the non acceptance, indifference and double standard practiced by larger society towards her/his issue that makes her/his more susceptible to violence and violation. These will then be analyzed through data collected from activists, both women's rights and queer rights, and thus the actual 'fill in the blank' between rights based movements will take place. The advocacy manual will carry the insight that is developed from this in depth research.

A dissemination program for the outcomes, the violence repertoire and the advocacy manual is also planned. Both of these products have specific target audience and specific usage. The advocacy manual will be designed keeping field based organizations in front, a basic document on which they can tailor-make their own anti violence intervention program. The dissemination will be planned accordingly with the rights based organizations and individuals who will have a ready use of the manual.

The violence repertoire will have a slightly different clientele. We are trying to aim it for a more general category in one hand, people who are interested to know about things happening around them and take a proactive step against violence in any form and also for those who would want to know more about the root cause of violence other than obvious homophobia. On the other hand, this publication will be specially targeted at the educational and government institutions, with psychiatrists and lawyers as special categories, as a preparatory step to initiate a long term process of curriculum/policy designing.

The next logical step after this research would be to translate our leanings into actual intervention program. Through this research and the manual and repertoire we have gained invaluable knowledge about causes, forms, expressions, reasons of violence directly at three different levels, the LBT person at the eye of the storm, the intimate circle around her affecting and effecting her the most and the larger society further beyond that has direct/indirect impact on her life. We are going to pan anti violence targeted intervention program specially designed to address these three areas on the basis of hard-core data collected from this research. Film, theatre, music, storytelling and other creative methodology will be used in our program to make it as effective as possible.

We began this research on the premise that no movement can survive in void. The relationship, more often negative than positive, between LBT rights and women's rights movements were therefore explored thoroughly to look out for new avenues of networking and dialoguing and also to de-rust the existing channels. We had in depth interviews from activists who double up as both queer rights and women's rights people and all of them expressed the need to have many open channels not only between the LBT and women's rights movements but also between the LBT rights and LGBT rights movements. A queer woman is woman and queer, both, is a position we need to consolidate in our long term strategizing.

The most ambitious long-term goal for us is to initiate a dialogue with the Government. The process with the educational institutions has already begun, and we have already been able to forge a bond with some of the premier institutes that has included queer studies into their curriculum. But till date we do not have a consolidated database with which we can begin a negotiation with the government towards new policy designing. Especially, homosexuality, before the Delhi High Court Verdict on 2nd July 2009, was not an issue that could be openly raised other than in the context of HIV/AIDS. Today, we have a database and we do have a Court Verdict with which we could at least begin an ice breaking process, using the pro woman legal stand of the Indian Government as the facilitator of the process.

The project is an overall success for us. It is actually beginning of a process of mapping and documenting violence and violation in the first phase and bringing out an advocacy manual along with a violence repertoire in the second phase and developing intervention program, networking with educational institutions, psychiatric and legal networks and finally lobbying with government for policy development towards a discrimination free violence free environment for LBT persons in the country.

10. Annexure

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS IN CATEGORY I (THE LBTs)

Code Orientation Age Educational background Marital status Socioeconomic class Profession Location
LBT1 Lesbian 27 Graduate Single Middle Student Sub urban
LBT2 Lesbian 32 Graduate Single Middle Apparel designer Urban
LBT3 Transperson 33 Higher Secondary Single Lower middle Tailoring Urban
LBT4 Lesbian 35 Graduate Divorced Middle Service Urban
LBT5 Lesbian 32 Post Graduate Single Middle Teacher Sub urban
LBT6 Bisexual 32 Post Graduate Married Middle Engineer Sub urban
LBT7 Lesbian 34 Graduate Single Middle Self employed Urban
LBT8 Lesbian 38 Graduate Single Middle Film Maker Urban
LBT9 Lesbian 38 School Final Married Lower middle Service Urban
LBT10 Lesbian 42 Graduate Divorced Middle Service Suburban
LBT11 Bisexual 24 Diploma in Classical Dance Single Middle Student Sub urban
LBT12 Lesbian 23 [when died] Masters 1st year Married Lower middle Student Sub urban
LBT13 Transperson 34 Graduate Single Lower middle Physiotherapist Urban
LBT14 Lesbian 21 Graduation 1st year Single Middle Student Urban
LBT15 Lesbian 30 Graduation 2nd year Single Lower middle Service Urban
LBT16 Lesbian 33 Post Graduate Single Middle Teacher Urban
LBT17 Queer 63 Post Graduate Single Upper middle Health Professional Urban
LBT18 Queer 48 M. Phil Married Upper middle NGO Activist Urban

Beyond the tabular format here we would like to present a brief introduction to all our respondents as full-blooded human beings.

LBT1 – Young, chubby, serious, has a husky melodious voice, sings country songs really well. She tried to enter the electronic media after graduation and got a very raw deal as a lesbian. Tried to cope for about 3 years, then finally left and enrolled for a management course to start afresh. Sounds of her shattering dreams are still ringing through her interview.

LBT2 – She is a survivor, who survived her family's son preference, her parent's rebuke, ill treatment, lack of care, ultimate disowning, partner's physical and mental abuse, close relative's attempt to rape. She also survived a rescue home, mental distress leading to physical illness, open hatred by people around, loneliness in the city. She was determined to get her a job, a home and stability that were refused to her. Today she is tying those flimsy knots around her life, through work, friends and a rental place that she calls home.

LBT3 – She never 'wanted' to be a man, because she 'is' a man. An apparently happy go lucky person with a 'couldn't care less' attitude worn on her/his sleeves, she/he used to bike around the neighbourhood with the choicest of girls, till she got involved into a serious affair with a married woman with children. And those children just hate her/him, the way she/he hated her/his mother and her illicit lover in her/his childhood days. To her/him, the circle is complete now!

LBT4 – She knew she is a lesbian, she knew she had to marry; she knew marriage means having peno-vaginal penetrative sex. She was ready to sacrifice herself, because she simply could not conjecture an alternative. She went to the psychiatrist for help who reaffirmed her belief that she is abnormal and everything would get normal once she marries. It did not and she after a long period of 7 years finally accepted herself, divorced her husband and settled down with her partner.

LBT5 – She today is this integrated, confident and totally grounded person. But what a checkered life she had been living! The most inconspicuous girl, quietly obedient from the suburb, who had gone through series of sexual abuses from male relatives that she could never talk about, because she was a good girl and bad things never happen to good girls. She in turn fell in love with her female batch mate, and broke away from her family, for the first time raising her voice, for her rights. Today she raises her voice over and over again for the rights of LBT persons.

LBT6 – She has everything that is expected from a person with the right kind of family, right kind of education, right kind of job. But 'wrong' kind of orientation spoiled everything. Her bisexuality had put her in severe mental distress coupled with her internalized hetero-patriarchal familial/societal values. She had married, because she wants security and respect from society and her family to be happy. But she cannot leave her same sex lover, and keeps her tied down to this relationship without a future, violating rights and getting violated at every step.

LBT7 – She was worse than the family pet dog! Her family after knowing about her orientation expressed their feelings in these simple terms. She had the most loving, compact family, which fell down to pieces as they came to know about her. To make her come back to them, to tame her, they went to her employers place and told them about her orientation and how she is a nuisance to the society. She lost her job, not once, but twice.

LBT8 – A filmmaker, acclaimed for her creative approach, she is accepted in her circuit, but within the intimate relationship she gives a unique twist to the tale of violence. She sees knowledge as a tool for violence, intellect as a twisted device for disempowering a person and thereby violating her right to self-determination.

LBT9 – This is one of those strange tales that leaves one wondering. She was a married woman with two children, living happily/unhappily with her husband as anyone else, busy with household chores and children and getting beaten by husband now and then, a very routine existence, so to speak, for 8 years. Then she fell in love with a neighbourhood woman, and when her husband's physical violence became unbearable, left home and eloped with her lover. She came back for her children and is continuing with both the relationships today, but her life has changed forever, for better or for worse.

LBT10 – She is a mountaineer, a dare devil adventurer, a spirited woman who internalized the societal norms and decided to marry and live happily ever after. She could not live happily or even unhappily with her mountaineer husband, continued to fall in love with women and faced lots of violence from her husband in the process. Finally she divorced her husband but internalized norms are still playing strange games with her, she cannot talk about her divorce in public, she feels uncomfortable with society's gaze at a divorced woman.

LBT11 – A young dancer with a graceful body and a spirited mind, she is an illegal child, a stigma that she is carrying since birth. Her bisexuality adds up to that, so is her youth, lack of awareness and spontaneity. Series of sexual abuse dot her young life, from the society that is outside, family that is intimate and same sex lover that is inside. Strangely the degree and extent of violation and violence are similar in all these areas. She today is in the process of coping up and gathering her pieces together.

LBT12 – She is already dead. Died at 23 after 4 months of married life, charges against husband are either abetment to suicide or murder. An orphan, who only had an elder brother to call her own, was grown up in a foster family or unkind relatives. Her cousin brother along with her own elder brother used to blackmail her for sexual favours as they came to know about her secret relationship with another girl. She lost all hope, and finally decided to marry, to cope with this unbearable situation. She tried to live, and died in the process.

LBT13 – She was abused, ridiculed, taunted by family, neighbourhood and others for her dress code and un-feminine behaviour. More than once she was compelled to dress like a woman, which she hated. Her immediate and extended family created immense marriage pressure and neighbourhood hoodlums organized mob violence against her. She tried to commit suicide and fortunately survived and gave herself that strong hard look at mirror and bounced back with full faith and vigor. It is one of the positive cases in this section.

LBT14 – She is all of 21, fresh, eager, excited to explore life, who had survived aloofness from mother, lack of interest and care from father, victimization by school authority, mistrust and hatred by friends and class mates and severe physical abuse and humiliation in public by girl friend's mother. She is still fighting and will continue doing so.

LBT15 – Her family has dictated her terms of life forever in the name of love and bonding. They were not against her same sex orientation; it was only obvious that she should be a lesbian because she was brought up in such a way! Today she is questioning her upbringing as the 'man' of the house, of not giving her any option to marry and not even letting her be happy in her same sex live-in relationship.

LBT16 – Violence in her life began very early as the daughter of a mentally ill father, who later committed suicide. It continued throughout her life and she was made responsible for her father's death. Her internalized homophobia held her back for a long time to accept herself as a lesbian and profession as a teacher in a suburban lower middle class vernacular girls' school brings her face to face with fear and insecurity by her colleagues' remarks against homosexuality.

LBT17 – The most fantastic tale of a nun turned queer! She was in the convent for 17 years and all these years in a same sex relationship inside the convent. The convent gave her chance to grow professionally and curbed her freedom personally giving no space to express any of her desires. She came out of the convent with her partner and is now living together but still cannot call herself lesbian because of negative religious connotations attached to the word.

LBT18 – Floating in the sexuality continuum, she violated her rights as well as people around her. A love marriage to 'the most wonderful husband' as a heterosexual, she went through a bisexual stint in between when she fell in love with a woman after 15 years of marriage, then a still continuing homosexual phase when she is deeply involved in a same sex relationship. She is in a continuous conflict within as well as with the outside.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS IN CATEGORY IIA (THE INTIMATE CIRCLE OF LBTs)

Sub-Category Sl. No. Name Gender Age Occupation Family
1 Mother 1 Female 52 Marketing Job
2 Mother 2 Female 75 House Wife
3 Brother Male 44 Service (Government Sector)
4 Sister 1 Female 21 Student
5 Sister 2 Female 48 School Teacher
6 Sister-in-law Female 40 House wife Friend
7 Friend 1 Female 43 Post Doctoral Researcher
8 Friend 2 Female 42 Consultant
9 Friend 3 Male 52 Lecturer Colleague
10 Colleague 1 Female 48 Service (Government Sector)
11 Colleague 2 Female 42 Service (Corporate Sector)
12 Colleague 3 Female 49 Mental Health Activist
Neighbour 13 Neighbour Female 70 House Wife

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS IN CATEGORY IIB (THE LARGER SOCIETY)

Sl No. Category Code No. Gender Age Educational background Economic background Location
1 Student 1 Female 23 Post Graduate Middle class Suburban
2 Student 3 Female 18 12th Standard Middle class Suburban
3 Student 15 Female 20 Graduate Middle class Urban
4 Teacher 4 Female 35 Post Graduate Middle class Urban
5 Teacher 13 Male 57 Ph. D. Upper-middle class Urban
6 Teacher 22 Female 42 Ph. D. Upper-middle class Urban
7 Housewife 12 Female 31 12th Standard Middle class Suburban
8 Housewife 2 Female 40 Graduate Middle class Suburban
9 Housewife 16 Female 32 Graduate Middle class Urban
10 Working Woman 14 Female 45 Ph. D. Middle class Urban
11 Working Woman 18 Female 45 Graduate Middle class Urban
12 Government Clerk 7 Male 52 Ph. D. Middle class Urban
13 Government Clerk 9 Female 58 Graduate Middle class Urban
14 Government Clerk 10 Male 58 12th Standard Middle class Urban
15 Police 5 Female 24 Post Graduate Middle class Urban
16 Police 11 Female 30 Post Graduate Middle class Urban
17 Psychiatrist 19 Male 52 Professionally qualified Upper-middle class Urban
18 Psychiatrist 8 Female 32 Professionally qualified Upper-middle class Urban
19 Media (Print) personnel 6 Male 59 Post Graduate Middle class Urban 20 Media (Electronic) personnel
20 Female 38 Professionally qualified Middle class Urban
21 Creative Person 21 Female 48 Post Graduate Middle class Urban
22 Creative Person 25 Male 40 Post Graduate Middle class Urban
23 Scientist 23 Male 54 Ph. D. Upper-middle class Urban
24 Lawyer 24 Male 38 Professionally qualified Middle class Urban
25 Political Party Cadre 17 Female 40 12th Standard Lower- middle class Urban

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS IN CATEGORY III (THE ACTIVISTS AND RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS)

A1: A woman centred woman, feminist activist, a socialist feminist, very much rooted in the community that is excluded and deprived socially, politically, sexually, economically and culturally. She feels exclusion and inferiorisation by exclusion faced by women is an important issue to address.

A2: Gender rights activist, working on violence against women.

A3: Queer feminist activist. Her politics is around feminism and that is very rooted within the women's movement. Her idea of feminism has an angle of gender and sexuality along with caste, class, religion etc. And she also looks at queer activism from a feminist point of view.

A4: She identifies as a queer rights activist

A5: Working with women mainly on the issue of right to work and livelihood, which also includes identity of a women worker and the kinds of marginalization women face in work field. She recognizes sexuality as a tool of marginalization and as an identity of a woman and tries to include sexuality along with gender in the trainings organized for the rural women's groups that her organization work with.

A6: Queer feminist activist who not only relates to sexuality as sexual violence within the context of marriage as the predominant practice is with mainstream women's movement, but also how without sexuality the understanding of feminism is incomplete. And sexuality is just not about violence it is about pleasure and feminism is not just about victim hood, it is also about subverting and challenging patriarchy.

A7: A human rights activist, with special focus on sexuality rights and further specifically on LBT rights. Basically a rights activist fighting towards a discrimination free society.

A8: A women's rights activist, working with rural women, interested in intersectionality of gender and sexuality.

A9: A sexuality rights and a women's rights activist, both because it is not an either or situation. But she is uncomfortable with the term 'woman'.

A10: A queer feminist legal rights activist, who is not a full-fledged law professional and finding the intersectionality quite intriguing between activism, identity and professionalism.

A11: A queer feminist activist, where all the three components are integrally related, is how she identifies personally as well as professionally. Though there is no clash between them in the inner world, in the outer world there still is some dissonance with the identity of a queer.

AG1: Women's rights organization, working for women from the lower income group, mainly from Muslim community but religious identity is not important, fighting against gender based oppressions and for equal opportunities

AG2: A feminist group working for women's rights

AG3: A feminist group, a women's rights organization, member of Voices Against 377. It has been a part of the Fire demonstration and always felt that LBT rights are a part of larger women's rights movement. Violence against LBTs is a visible reason of this organization's getting into LBT rights. Control of the patriarchal notions is another common threat. As a feminist group one should not question and challenge these set norms, structures, stereotypes, remaining within the safe boundary of heterosexuality. If norms are to be questioned and patriarchal notions to be challenged then compulsory heterosexuality is also a norm, another patriarchal notion that should be challenged as well.

AG4: LBT rights organization and support cum crisis intervention group.

AG5: A women's rights forum that was formed by people from the leftist political movement who wanted to work on issues like gender and nuclearization from a different context. Today they identify themselves as social feminists, not totally disassociated from left political thought. They are looking at structures of society that discriminate against women holding the state accountable, looking at laws relating to women and visiblizing violence against women at all levels, especially within the four walls of home and family, breaking the enormous silence in which women became victims because they were women.

CODES AND THEMES FOR CATEGORY I
(THE LBTS)

1. Understanding violence and violation
2. Issues of violence and violation faced
3. Instances of physical violence and violation
4. Instances of psychological violence
5. Instances of verbal abuse
6. Any other form of violence and violation [education/work]
7. Gender based violence and violation
8. Source of violence and violation – immediate family
9. Source of violence and violation – extended family
10. Source of violence and violation – friends
11. Source of violence and violation – workplace/ educational institute
12. Source of violence and violation – neighbour
13. Source of violence and violation – other
14. Source of violence and violation – support group
15. Violence and violation within the LBT Relationship
16. Respondent as perpetrator
17. Self inflicted violence and violation
18. Coping technique for self
19. Suggestions for combating violence and violation
20. Special comments/realizations

CODES AND THEMES FOR CATEGORY IIA
(THE INTIMATE CIRCLE OF LBTS)

1. Understanding of violence and violation
2. Positive responses towards her/his LBT relative, friend, neighbour, colleague

3. Positive responses towards LBT /Homosexuality issues
4. Negative responses towards her/his LBT relative, friend, neighbour, colleague
5. Negative responses or lack of understanding on LBT or homosexuality issues
6. Mixed responses towards her/his LBT relative, friend, neighbour, colleague
7. Mixed responses towards LBT /Homosexuality issues
8. Indifferent responses towards her/his LBT relative, friend, neighbour, colleague
9. Indifferent responses towards LBT issues/Homosexuality
10. Fearing for social ostracization
11. Practicing double standard in dealing with LBT issues
12. Respondent as a victim of violence /violation
13. Respondent as perpetrator of violence /violation
14. Coping techniques
15. Suggestions from the respondents

CODES AND THEMES FOR CATEGORY IIB
(THE LARGER SOCIETY)

1. Understanding of violence and violation
2. Knowledge about LBT/Homosexuality related issues
3. Whether come across any LBT
4. Awareness around violence and violation on LBTs
5. Positive responses towards LBT persons
6. Positive responses towards LBT issues
7. Negative responses towards LBT persons
8. Negative responses towards LBT issues
9. Mixed responses towards LBT persons/issues
10. Indifferent responses towards LBT persons/issues
11. Indifferent responses towards LBT issues
12. Respondent as victims of violence and violation
13. Respondent as perpetrator of violence and violation
14. Suggestions from the respondent
15. Special comments from the respondent

CODES AND THEMES FOR CATEGORY III
(THE ACTIVISTS)

1. Understanding violence and violation
2. Respondent as a victim of violence and violation
3. Respondent as a perpetrator of violence and violation
4. Understanding violence and violation on LBT persons
5. Organizational stand vis-à-vis LBT issues
6. Positive cohabitation with main stream women's movements
7. Negative reactions within the movements
8. Mixed reaction within the movements
9. Shift in the understanding
10. Strategies/suggestions by the respondent
11. Special comments/points not covered above

LIST OF UNDERSTANDINGS OF VIOLENCE AND VIOLATIONS FROM ALL CATEGORIES

1. Violence is intentional acute physical and/or mental torture, otherisation, rejection, emotional or social aggression on individuals or groups.
2. Violence is reducing a human being as a sexual object, considering her sexual orientation as the only identity.
3. Silence can be a form of violence
4. Knowledge can be used as a tool for violence and violation
5. Violence can be ideological
6. Violation of an issue is trivialization, reducing its importance
7. Violation means violation of rights as human beings, particularly as woman.
8. Violation can be unaware but violence is purposeful
9. Violation is also violence, when a person's existence is threatened by violence then that is also violation of rights
10. Violence is violation of rights which stems from gross ignorance
11. Power hierarchy is violence through which the society is controlled
12. Construction of normalcy by selective removal of homosexuality is violence
13. Lack of time and interest to know about other can lead to violation
14. Media violence by portraying homosexuals as criminals or perverts and/or sensationalizing the issue
15. Violence carries different meanings in different contexts and constituencies
16. Violence is related to masculinity
17. Psychological violence is actually extrapolation of physical violence
18. Violation is a legal term and violence is a social term.
19. Violence is coercion and denial
20. Violence begets violence.
21. Violence is non-recognition of violence as violence.
22. Violence has 3 categories, overt or physical, covert or psychological and structural or standardized through socialization
23. Invisiblizing the person is violence
24. Violation is concept; violence is act. Violence is obvious, violation is subtle.
25. Violation can continue over a period of time in a continuum while violence is usually one act or repeated acts at a time
26. Concept of violation is embedded in the psyche of the victim and the perpetrator

INSTANCES OF PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION FACED BY LBTS

1. Physical violence like beating by immediate family
2. Physical violence like beating by partner
3. Physical violence like beating by partner's family
4. Mob violence
5. Sexual harassment using her un-feminine attitude as guard
6. Stone pelting
7. Sexual abuse by maternal uncle
8. Child sexual abuse by cousin
9. No meal as punishment by mother
10. Fir against her with charges of abduction by partner's husband
11. Jumped from a 3 storey building to teach mother a lesson

12. Severe beating by husband
13.Physical abuse like throttling by husband/partner
14. Sexual abuse
15. Attempt to marital rape
16.Marital rape
17. Series of child sexual abuse
18. Attempt to murder by husband
19. Taking part into heterosexual act of sex with continuous uneasiness
20. Police case lodged by husband
21. Physical abuse like using teeth, nail, sharp objects, cigarette burn to cause physical harm by partner
22. Tearing down one's clothes in public by partner
23. Compelled to have unwilling sex by partner
24. Compelled to have contraceptive pills by partner
25. Physical captivity by partner
26. Rape by cousin
27. Rape by own brother
28. Murder by husband
29. Physical abuse in public
30. Head to foot examination, including vagina by male doctor after learning about her orientation
31. Male suitors of partner used to throw human excreta in her hostel room every other day

INSTANCES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE FACED BY LBTS

1. Psychological abuse resulting in loneliness, frustration
2. Emotional pressure, torture, stress and blackmail by family
3. Open hatred resulting in fear, anxiety
4. Negative campaign resulting in helpless anger and frustration, humiliation
5. Verbal abuse resulting in humiliation
6. Public shaming
7. Otherisation and rejection by society at large
8. Fear and anxiety around professional non-acceptance as an un-feminine woman
9. Discrimination based on gender non conformation in workplace resulting in inferiority complex
10. Discrimination at workplace due to her orientation as a lesbian resulting in frustration and mistrust
11. Discrimination in school as a lesbian and facing the ire of entire school resulting in depression, sadness, hopelessness, nervous breakdown
12. Non acceptance by her extended family for her un-feminine attitude resulted in hatred and rejection
13. Fear, anger, helplessness, frustration for being seen as an object of ridicule for her non-feminine get up and attitude by society at large
14. Mental torture
15. Emotional blackmail
16. Psychological pressure resulting in trauma, self doubt, dejection
17. Disowning by the family when she was young and without any financial support
18. Cruelty by family
19. Silence in the family

20. Indifference by family
21. Family had refused to take care of her educational/financial needs when young
22. Marriage pressure by family
23. Psychological trauma resulting in physical illness – asthma, panic attack, suicide attempt
24. Was perceived as a sexually pervert, mentally ill person by school/college friends, thus unaccepted by friends
25. Open hatred by family
26. Pressurizing for ideological compromise by partner
27. Psychological pressure by school authority by disallowing promotion
28. Anger and discomfort rising from harassment, taunt, indecent behavior of neighbourhood people
29. Wrong medical information about same sex behaviour created discomfort, stress, and fear
30. Mental torture by appointing tantric [parareligious priest who practice black magic] by family
31. Psychological turmoil and stress created because of non acceptance of her partner by her family
32. Humiliation by partner's daughter
33. Violent threatening by her partner's husband
34. Childhood trauma from mother's illicit relationship with a man
35. Psychological break down erupting in the form of extreme anger and hatred against mother for her illicit relationship
36. Marriage pressure – self inflicted/ by family
37. Confusion and self doubt created by wrong information given by psychiatrist
38. Threat of curbing financial independence, mobility, education
39. Threat of suicide by mother
40. Threat of vilifying her same sex partner at her [partner's] home
41. Threat of taking away her [partner's] job
42. Mental pressure resulting in self doubt
43. Lack of exposure about homosexuality leading to lack of confidence, leading to helplessness/hopelessness
44. Frustration, anger rising from words and expressions used by close relatives about same sex relationships
45. Inability to confide about child sexual abuse history to anyone resulting in deep distress, trauma, pain
46. Silence about her same sex relational problems with anyone led to claustrophobia and pain
47. Public shaming in hostel
48. Not letting her develop independent thought process by parents
49. Teaching her to live for others according to norms by parents
50. Not allowing her options
51. Blackmailing into marriage by husband
52. Guilt feeling for not being able to fulfil her parents' expectations
53. Loss of self worth
54. Lack of initiative or interest about herself even medically
55. Moral outcast by larger family
56. Violence in the name of love, care and protection
57. Ugly offensive language
58. Extreme form of otherisation
59. Indecent enquiry about personal sexual life
60. Psychological trauma by degradation as pervert, abnormal, dirty, immoral

61. Intrusion into her private space by breaking down boundaries of decency generally practiced in a middle class household
62. Stress and helpless anger due to victimization faced in the support group
63. Hurt and emotional distress due to misunderstanding in the support group
64. Emotional violence in same sex relationships
65. Insecurity and fear as mental pressure due to same sex partner's bisexuality
66. Humiliation through sex talk involving lesbians in general
67. Deep emotional violence by partner leading to trauma
68. Claustrophobia from space encroachment by partner
69. Lack of physical proximity gave rise to insecurity
70. Helplessness before knowledge as a tool of violence
71. Indecent inquisitiveness in public about her sexual orientation
72. Receiving meaningfully negative statement in workplace about lesbians in general
73. Sense of loss and humiliation by making a public display of a private relationship
74. Sense of loss and humiliation because of being used as a tool for immigration to a first world country
75. Helplessness for getting into a heterosexual marriage because of family pressure and financial problems
76. Inability to come out of marriage because of family pressure and financial problems
77. Lack of options
78. Lack of support from natal family
79. Lack of love in marital relationship
80. Indifference and aloofness from husband
81. Husband has vitiated her children against her
82. Indifference of her natal family towards her physical and mental abuse by husband
83. Trauma because of husband's threat of 'anal rape'
84. Distress by her husband's sneaking into her private life
85. Lack of security at home
86. Confusion and hurt by rejection as a woman and acceptance as an asexual person by society at large
87. Discrimination and marginalization because of her status as an illegal child
88. Falsity within the same sex relationship
89. Extreme kind of psychological violence by her same sex partner, demand of heterotypical relationship, no recognition of her needs, likes or dislikes
90. Extreme kind of psychological violence by her same sex partner's family by calling her an illegal child in public
91. Desertion by her father leading to feeling of extreme rejection and hatred
92. Feeling of humiliation and frustration because of repeated sexual abuses
93. Humiliation and pain due to usage of phrases like 'work as a whore' by mother in public
94. Helplessness for getting blackmailed into sexual act by cousin and own brother using ipc 377
95. Lack of willingness to reach out for support
96. Panic and paranoia
97. Distress arising from inability of getting socio-legal benefits in her live-in same sex relationship [joint property, naming each other as insurance or savings nominee]
98. Distress arising from inability to accept her own female body and specific functions like menstruation
99. Feeling of discomfort, humiliation, helpless anger by being compelled to wear feminine clothes
100. Feeling of rejection, lack of care and love by father resulting in anger and disrespect

101. Public humiliation by school authority by taking away her class captaincy and not letting her take part in school sports
102. Emotional stress and negative feelings as girl friend supported her parents in a police case where she was falsely accused by girl friend's parents
103. Insecurity within same sex relationship as a transperson
104. Helplessness and hurt for parents' disinterest in her wellbeing
105. Fear of being labelled as deviant
106. Living a closeted life
107. Discomfort with own woman's body and physiological occurrences like menstruation
108. Threats of separating 'special friendship' practicing friends by convent authorities
109. Stifling convent life
110. Lack of option as a daughter [marriage or convent]
111. Guilt feelings for being in a forbidden lesbian relationship inside convent
112. For 12 years had been in a relationship without getting sexually intimate because of moral and emotional pressure
113. Media sensetionalized her story and exposed her as 'nuns as lesbians' even after vouching for confidentiality
114. Brain washed to think that convent life is a noble vocation, sacrificing the pleasures of life for others
115. All bodily pleasure was denied inside the convent, even tasty food
116. Curbing every expressed desire [she wanted to learn medicine but she was sent to learn nursing, to make her humble]
117. Brain washed into not questioning and obeying superiors
118. Convent life gives one security by taking away autonomy
119. Stigmatization
120. Considered untouchable
121. Mobility restraint
122. Psychological pressure to live a dual existence
123. Psychological pressure to hold back all spontaneous expressions
124. Internalized hetero-patriarchy
125. Psychiatric violence leading to suicide attempt
126. Conflicting emotions leading to stress and trauma by obeying the family on one hand and living for herself on the other
127. Internalization of family as the supreme ruler
128. Infantilization within the same sex relationship
129. Family values as understood by her has created a structure inside her psyche which is controlling all her adult intimate
relationships outside the family
130. Lack of confidence resulting from conflicts between intimate relationships [mother and same sex partner]
131. Discrimination and marginalization since her father was mentally ill
132. Feeling of suffocation since she has been compelled to opt for pretending as a heterosexual in order to survive within
the system at her workplace
133. Constant pressure from colleagues to fit her in the heteronormative paradigm through marriage
134. Humiliation by the superintendent of the hostel
135. Humiliation by the university teachers
136. Open hatred and resentment by classmates, teachers and hostel authority
137. Robbing someone off her name at her in-laws place after marriage

138. Insult by husband because of orientation
139. Claustrophobia inside a feminist structure created by partner

INSTANCES OF VERBAL ABUSE FACED BY LBTS

1. Using slang words denoting sexual act in a most dirty way
2. Using hateful words meaning sexually pervert, sick
3. Humiliating statement about her parents by partner
4. Derogatory words and expressions regarding her sexual orientation by family, husband, larger family
5. Abusive words and gestures
6. Indecent proposals
7. Indecent comments and gestures with sexual undertones
8. Wrong medical information about same sex behaviour
9. Intelligible words and indecent gesture by her partner's husband
10. Objectionable abusive words against her partner by her mother
11. Abusive words denoting childless woman
12. Humiliating and degrading words
13. Lurid comments by young neighbourhood boys
14. Abusive words denoting immoral behaviour
15. Abusive words expressing hatred and negative feelings about lesbian
16. Ugly and offensive language used to humiliate
17. Indecent enquiry about personal sexual life
18. Ugly words meaning pervert, abnormal, dirty, immoral
19. Negative campaign about lesbians in general
20. Abusive words used against same sex practice
21. Negative campaign on the basis of sexual orientation
22. Sex talk involving lesbians in general
23. Indecent inquisitiveness with derogatory words
24. Usage of meaningfully negative statement about lesbians in general
25. Abusive words generally denoting sexual act
26. Sexual demand using slang
27. Abusive words denoting her sexual relationship in front of children
28. Whore [khanki pana(acting like a slut)]
29. Usage of very dirty term for anal sex [pond mere debo(fuck your ass)]as punishment for alleged same sex behaviour
30. Usage of derogatory terms meaning illegal child [jali rakta (contaminated blood)]
31. Usage of phrases like 'taste of real sex with a man to cure' to justify rape
32. Slang denoting mixed gender identity [hijra, chhakka(transvestite), two-in-one]
33. Abusive words denoting illicit birth
34. Abusive words denoting sexual orientation
35. 'You are just like your father' is a form of verbal abuse for a person having huge issues about her father
36. Phrases that hold her responsible for her father's suicide [father was mentally ill] by close relatives
37. Mother using filthy language indicating sexual relationship with her daughter

ANY OTHER FORM OF VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION [EDUCATION/WORK/SUPPORT GROUP] FACED BY LBTS

1. Family had refused to pay for her education
2. Economic insecurity created by family
3. Was refused a job as she declined to wear feminine dress
4. Threat of not letting one continue with her job
5. Threat of not letting one continue with her education
6. Threat of rusticating from the hostel [education/shelter]
7. Family disclosed her sexual orientation at the workplace and thereby she lost her job - twice
8. Threat to rusticate partner from college
9. Husband tried to create problem at her workplace
10. Education got disturbed because of father's violence and abusive same sex affair
11. Could not attend college regularly as a result could not pass because of negative campaign by partner's mother
12. Had to change school for not being able to deal with adverse atmosphere
13. Was an outcast within the support group because of relational dynamics
14. Intrusion inside personal domain
15. No space was provided to share her heterosexual encounter and subsequent guilt, trauma, discomfort around that
16. Misunderstanding around relationships
17. Victimization by individuals
18. Otherisation within the group by creating a divide between seniors and juniors
19. Mutual lack of patience
20. Inability to connect to the safe space

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION FACED BY LBTS

1. Sexual harassment using her un-feminine attitude as reason
2. Pronounced son preference – gender factor complicates the sexuality factor
3. Sexual abuse by close relatives
4. Child sexual abuse by relatives
5. Sexual abuse by neighbours
6. Rape
7. Marital rape
8. Neighbourhood guys create problems as they are jealous about her being a woman yet competing with them
9. Was refused a job as she declined to wear feminine dress
10. Had to marry because of family pressure as a woman
11. Had to leave her job after marriage
12. Taunted by in laws for not bearing a child
13. Had to face abusive words as a barren woman though her husband was impotent
14. Had to wait till all her sisters got married for leaving her husband
15. Not allowed to think and had to obey others
16. Had to follow the gender norms
17. Gender driven expectations and non fulfilment of those leading to deep psychological trauma

18. Violence as a married woman by her husband even before her same sex involvement began
19. Local police station did not pay importance to the everyday physical violence she was facing from her husband
20. Indifference of her natal family towards her physical and mental abuse by husband
21. Cannot talk about her divorce as divorcee women are highly stigmatized in the society
22. Was deterred from taking part in active mountaineering for being a woman
23. Own understanding of gender norms violated herself in many cases
24. Non-typical looks and behaviour often allow people to see one as an asexual person thereby violating her right to be a woman
25. Deserted by father as an illegal girl child
26. Lack of option as a daughter [marriage or convent]
27. Double discrimination [as woman and as same sex loving woman]
28. Family never wanted her to get married as she is playing the role of a son
29. Robbing someone off her name at her in-laws place after marriage

SELF INFLICTED VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION BY LBTS

1. Tried to enter into a heterosexual relationship to cope with societal pressure thereby violating her own rights
2. Jumped from a 3 storey building to teach mother a lesson
3. She is unable to understand the impact of violence and violation happening upon her, thereby inflicting violence upon herself
4.Marrying a man after knowing her orientation for internalized patriarchal notions
5. Internalized homophobia
6. Psychological violence on self by engaging sexually with a male just to check out own orientation
7. Mental torture on self by forming heterosexual relationships and rejecting them
8. Though economically independent and educated yet never mustered courage to speak her mind
9. Allowed husband to blackmail her into marriage by letting her parents know about her secret same sex relationship
10. Allowed her parents to blackmail her into marriage by suicide and other emotional threats
11. Never question the hetero-patriarchal structure of the society and its inherent violations
12. Accepted and internalized all the gender typical norms thereby violating her own rights
13. Still wants to give in to parents' wishes of child bearing though she herself does not wish a child by her husband
14. Though in a medical crisis, does not want to anything about it as she feels she is not worth it
15. Continuing for a long time in an abusive relationship
16. Suffering from self hatred for allowing herself to be a victim of relational violence
17. Self degradation for the grievous lie used by her
18. Guilt and self degradation for coming between the couple and violating that space
19. Marrying a man after having some idea about her same sex orientation thereby bringing down a whole lot of violence on herself
20. Living within the married relationship without ever enjoying the sexual part
21. Living within the married relationship that is sexually physically and mentally abusive
22. Wounding herself with sharp object when angry with same sex partner
23. Carrying on with a same sex relationship that is physically and mentally abusive

24. Violating own gender rights by internalizing the gender-typical structure of the society and putting oneself in that box
25. Being in love she had neglected education
26. Suicide
27. Attempt to suicide
28. Trauma created by inability to accept her own female body
29. Self harming because of incontrollable anger
30. Got involved in street brawls many times when teased by people for non conformity and same sex orientation
31. Internalized fear resulted in living a closeted life
32. Feels uncomfortable calling herself lesbian after 30 years of being in a lesbian relationship as the word is loaded with negativity in Christian religious context, prefers 'queer' as a gender identity
33. Still burdened with guilt feelings for being in a forbidden lesbian relationship
34. Still feels her decision to join convent at 17 was voluntary thereby the violence was self inflicted, rather than making her father the perpetrator
35. Names all the violence and violation as 'injustice'
36. Living openly outside closet brings down whole lot of familial and societal violence on the person
37. Fear of losing intimate persons gives rise to violence on self
38. Self negation
39. Conflict between the politically correct self and emotionally raw self causing violence

LBTS AS PERPETRATORS

1. Tried to enter into a heterosexual relationship to cope with societal pressure thereby violating her boy friend's rights
2. Physical abuse in the heterosexual relationship
3. Disclosing one's secrets in the support group
4. Entering into simultaneous relationships
5. She had left her partner for another woman then came back when the other woman left her making her partner's life miserably sad and insecure
6. She had formed relationship with a married woman with two children thereby violating the hetronormative family space
7. She had used slang abusive language towards her partner's husband
8. Expectation of heterotypical relationship and internalized patriarchal notions results in conflict and violence
9. Marrying a man after knowing her orientation thereby violation husband's rights
10. Left her same sex lover because of internalized homophobia
11. Came between two persons in an intimate relationship, thereby causing break up
12. In the attempt to temporarily put an end to her relationship, had violated partner's rights.
13. Entered into a relationship with a male cousin to get even with someone else in the family
14. Used male cousin's sexual interest to check own orientation
15. Attitude towards men in general is abusive in nature, had allured men and when they became deeply involved, had left them
16. Married and also has kept the same sex partner attached without any proper future plan thereby violating partner's rights
17. In the process of appeasing parents and the society at large, had violated partner and husband's rights

18. Practicing double standard by continuing with a secured, respectable, married status and having a lover at the same time
19. Has violated family's rights because they had to face many problems for her orientation in the society
20. Had misused support group's faith and dependence upon her
21. Had lied to many people who are close to her and who had placed their faith upon her
22. Had been unfaithful and disrespectful to her relationship
23. Violence setting off a chain of violence in intimate relationships including license of promiscuity
24. Told a grievous lie to a very close person to save her own skin
25. Came between a lesbian couple and thereby violated one of the partners
26. Eloped with same sex partner leaving her two young children
27. Violation of husband's rights for getting into extra marital same sex relationship
28. Marriage and subsequent divorce even after knowing one's orientation
29. Walking out of a same sex relationship without giving much explanation to the partner
30. By trying to pay colleagues back in the same coin for their gender insensitivity by doing things their way thereby sometimes unwillingly perpetrating some of those violence
31. Violation of the safe space provided by the support group
32. Had been deceptive in relationship
33. Had been in relationship with two persons [male and female] at the same time without being transparent to any of them
34. Got involved in street brawls many times when teased by people for non conformity and same sex orientation
35. Violence upon her sister by trying to rule her sister's life according to her own understanding of right and wrong
36. Violence due to internalization of patriarchal values like possessing a person
37. Internalised aggression expressed by physical violence towards father
38. Lack of ability to adjust
39. Lack of tolerance
40. Very strict narrow ideas about right and wrong and lack of flexibility
41. Perpetrating violence on partner by creating pressure for leaving her natal family and slapping her in public

VIOLENCE AND VIOLATION WITHIN LBT RELATIONSHIP

1. Partner wanted to see her as a man and disregarded her gender fluidity, in sexual and social activities
2.Lack of social recognition and legal bonding resulting in insecurity
3. Psychological incompatibility
4. Misunderstanding
5.Domination
6. Miscommunication or lack of communication
7. Lack of faith and trust
8. Suspicion, disrespect
9. Financial factors like taking each other financially for granted or plundering one's hard earned money
10. Emotional blackmail
11. Psychological torture
12. Humiliation and harassment

13. Physical abuse
14. Sexual abuse
15. Over possessiveness
16. Lack of space
17. Over dependency
18. Her first girl friend from school did not take a stand for her when she was given tc from the school
19. Had left her partner for another woman then came back when the other woman left her making her partner's life miserably sad and insecure
20. Physical abuse, psychological pressure, jealousy, misunderstanding, attempt to suicide, self inflicting pain
21.Expectation of heterotypical relationship and internalized patriarchal notions results in conflict and violence
22. Mental abuse, trauma resulting from desertion, rejection
23. Lack of exposure about homosexuality leading to lack of confidence, leading to helplessness/hopelessness
24. Incompatibility of experiences and expectations leading to misunderstanding
25. Psychological violence on partner by her sexual engagement with a male just to check out her orientation
26. Violence bringing in violence creating a chain of violence
27. Inherent violence of heterotypical relational expectations
28. Insecurity and fear as mental pressure due to partner's bisexuality
29. Lack of trust and information about bisexual women
30. Lack of mutual trust and respect
31. Encroachment upon each other's space to negotiate the physical distance between the partners
32. Emotional violence in the name of spirituality, greater philosophy, larger world view and belittling the other person in the process
33. Using knowledge as a tool of violence
34. Public display of a private relationship by the partner
35. Being used as a tool for immigration to a first world country by the partner
36. Self wounding
37. Promiscuity
38. Desertion and jealousy
39. Physical abuse like using teeth, nail, sharp objects, cigarette burn to cause physical harm
40. Tearing down one's clothes in public
41. Compelled to have unwilling sex
42. Compelled to have contraceptive pills
43. Physical captivity
44. Hypocrisy
45. Psychological incompatibility
46. Incompatibility in lifestyle
47. Economic incompatibility
48. Girl friend ditched her to marry a man
49. Partner does not give recognition to the relationship to her [partner's] family

COPING TECHNIQUE FOR SELF BY LBTS

POSITIVE:

1. Giving herself some more time to reach a position of authority so that she can fight back more constructively
2. Economic independence
3. Attaining financial stability
4. Joining a support group
5. Taking help of women's organization working on violence against women issue to combat police procedure against her on the basis of her partner's husband's charges
6. Involving women's rights organization positioning her as a domestic violence victim
7. Joining the women's movement helped her to accept herself as a woman
8. Gathering knowledge and information
9. Being been vocal about gender based rights violation and demanding those rights
10. Continuing dialogue with family
11. Gradually starting dialogue on the issue of lesbianism with her mother
12. Getting into a job ensuring some amount of economic independence and mobility
13. Trainings addressing violence
14. Trainings on psychological skills building
15. Keeping safe distance between her profession and her personal sexual orientation [a ladies tailor by profession, she runs a tailoring business]
16. Lodging an FIR at the local police station before leaving husband's home
17. Vouched to discontinue her same sex relationship to appease her immediate family to be able to continue with her studies and job but kept contact behind their back
18. Living a life outside closet openly with conviction
19. Using social work as a worthy cause, culturally accepted in her religious community for leaving convent and staying with her partner
20. Secretly throwing away medicines and taabeej (sacred metallic armlet believed to be of supernatural power) which had been given to 'cure' her
21. Co adopting a child [legally by the partner as a single parent]
22. Has decided to carry feminine dresses within the in office so that in extreme necessity she can use those
23. Changing work sector and trying to begin from the beginning
24. Completing higher studies through convent
25. Getting job placement through convent
26. Entering convent was an acceptable alternative to marriage
27. Building a safe space for her and her partner

NEGATIVE:

28. Tried to enter into a heterosexual relationship
29. Marriage and preparing herself for peno-vaginal sex
30. Used silence as a coping technique
31. Apparent patch up with husband but continuing with her same sex relationship
32. Marrying a man with shared passion
33. Trying to pay colleagues back in the same coin by doing things there way, showing the crudeness and ugliness of such acts to deal with their gender insensitivity
34. Getting into another relationship which is seemingly safer
35. Introducing partner as sister to pacify neighbours

36. Living inside closet
37. Violence upon her sister by trying to rule her sister's life according to her own understanding of right and wrong
38. Violence due to internalization of patriarchal values like possessing a person
39. Pretending as a heterosexual by making up stories about her relationship mentioning her female partner as a male

Chapter 5

Breaking the binary: Understanding concerns and realities of female assigned/born persons across a spectrum of lived gender identities

Prepared by:

Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), India

The Research Team

Chayanika Shah, Georgina Maddox, Hasina, Kranti, Meena Gopal, Meenu, Raj, Sabala, Shalini Mahajan, Shruti and Smriti Nevatia

The Writing Team

Chayanika Shah, Raj, Shalini Mahajan and Smriti Nevatia

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Background of LABIA

Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), formerly known as Stree Sangam, is an autonomous, non-funded collective of lesbian and bisexual women and transgender (LBT) persons. LABIA is a campaign and activist group with a focus on queer and feminist activism. We have been in existence in Bombay since 1995. Our activities have included networking with individual queer women as well as queer groups in India and in other countries, campaigning for the rights of peoples and communities of marginalized genders and sexualities with other like minded groups, and organising jointly with the struggles of other marginalised groups, feminist and people's movements. We publish a zine, *SCRIPTS*, and see it as a vibrant space for multiple conversations of queer/feminist/activist/creative voices. We also run a phone line for LBT women to connect, interact and talk about their concerns with other LBT women and also run a film club called CineLabia.

We started in 1995 as a collective of and for lesbian and bisexual women with two clear agendas: the first was to support and network with other women like us and to together create safe spaces for women to talk and express themselves; and second, to work towards change in larger society along with other groups and movements. Over time we have worked extensively in both these broad areas, and in the process have undergone many changes.

In 2001 we started having conversations amongst ourselves, and with other activists, on transgender issues and concerns. In 2003, our collective reformulated it self as Lesbians and Bisexuals in Action (LABIA), a queer-feminist collective of lesbian and bisexual women and trans persons. This meant not just a change in our membership, but an even deeper change in our focus areas of work, our politics and our strategies.

Since then, we have tried to integrate issues of gender identity and sexuality, and those of 'marginalized genders and sexualities' in our work. This has been reflected in the various campaigns that we have been part of, in events that we have organized, and discussions with other groups and movements, and our publications. We have also been working more consistently with other groups that work on trans issues on all points in the spectrum. For the last couple of years we have also been raising the issues of intersexed persons.

Our major work has been in the following areas:

- **Campaigning around issues** specific to the LGBT community as well as with women's groups. We jointly organized the first National Workshop on Strategizing for LGBT Rights in India in Bombay in 1997. We have also consistently organised sessions and workshops on 'marginalized genders and sexualities' in various national conferences, including that of the autonomous women's movements (1997 and 2006), women's studies (2005 and 2008), and other such platforms.

- **Building solidarity** with various LGBT groups and other social movements in the country and also internationally. LABIA works actively with several women's groups and networks. We are part of the national campaign against Section 377 (the section of the Indian Penal Code that criminalizes adult homosexuality) and were part of

organizing the *Queer Azadi*, the first ever LGBTIH parade in Bombay on 16 August 2008.

- **Supporting individual lesbian and bisexual women and transgender persons**. We have provided support and counselling in person and over the phone; we have also intervened in family situations where women have faced oppression and violence, including dealing with the police where families have used such agencies to threaten the women. We have aided queer persons in crisis situations to find shelter and livelihood, and assisted them in pursuing further vocational and academic studies, for which we have raised funds through feminist and queer community networks.

  Besides interacting with individuals in crisis and non-crisis situations, we have also been active in organising three national level retreats and meetings for LBT women, especially those who do not have access to queer groups in their own cities, towns, and villages. In Bombay we worked with a human rights NGO, India Centre for Human Rights and Law, to start a helpline for queer women in the city. We have been running a phoneline for LBT women for the last two years.

- **Creating spaces for queer expression**. We have been publishing a small zine called *SCRIPTS*, since 1997, and have brought out a dozen issues thus far. This, too, is a completely non-funded and collective endeavour and we hope to go online this year. We have organized open mics and readings for queer persons in safe spaces in the past and also run a film club with monthly film screenings.

We can be reached at: stree.sangam@gmail.com

Our website: www.labiacollective.org

1. Introduction and context

The first time we had to answer the seemingly innocuous and yet destabilising question, "Why are you a woman?" was in 2001. A bunch of us were working on organizing a workshop (interestingly, all four organizers are part of this research team as well, and also one of the participants) on gender and sexuality for "people like us" who were, from that particular point of view, friends and fellow feminists. Some identified as lesbian, some straight; all of us either part of organizing within the feminist movement or the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement, and interested in finding space and time to discuss our ideas and work on sexuality and gender. One of us had attended the Sexuality Institute in Amsterdam and had returned with a head full of meetings with transpersons who spoke of their experiences and with a bag full of new papers and books, and we were all eager to read and discuss these ideas and connect them to our work and contexts.

This question, both in the preparations and later in the workshop, had provoked some intense discussions, even some resentment. We were, after all, all of us feminists, who had struggled all our lives and in our work almost continuously with being and becoming women in our own right. We had broken several norms of society and had often had to fight tooth and nail to be able to be the way we wanted to be. Few of us had married, several identified as lesbian, most of us were part of feminist and/or lesbian and bisexual women's collectives or NGOs and collectively had probably broken every norm imposed by society and families on women. In our lives, work, and politics we had intensely questioned social and cultural constructions of gender and sexuality. We understood patriarchies and the ways in which they operate; the construction of gender binaries and the imposition of norms; the complex interactions of family, class, caste, gender, and society in the creation and protection of gendered hierarchies and power.

Yet this question, in the context that it was asked, shook us. The answer to why it did so lies not just in our personal journeys but also in the twin contexts of feminist and LGBT organizing and politics within the country.

LABIA, then Stree Sangam, started in 1995 as a collective of and for lesbian and bisexual women with two clear agendas: the first was to support and network with other women like us and to create safe spaces for women to talk and express themselves; and second, to work towards change in larger society along with other groups and movements. Gender and the imposition of gender norms were a large part of our discussions from the start. Several of us identified either as 'butch' or 'women who look different' and spoke of continuously facing violence or oppression because of the way we looked, dressed, and the way in which we were perceived by both men and women. Some of us found it easier to see ourselves as androgynous and some even spoke of 'our masculinities', though that was a contested space. It was clear even then that often for some of us, gender-segregated women only spaces were not necessarily safe spaces. Some of us went to great lengths, in fact, to avoid travelling in, say, women's compartments on the local trains and suchlike.

The political and feminist space of 'being women' and of celebrating 'difference' was precisely that which gave us the strength and courage to fight our continuous gender battles. The women's movements in India, where most of us located ourselves, was itself one where the question of difference was a primary one. The categories 'woman' and 'sisterhood' were not monolithic; discussions around differences of caste, class, work, location, and others took

centre stage. [28] Sexuality had been part of these often volatile discussions since the 1990s.[29] Issues around inclusion and exclusion were very much part of these debates, only they had not yet entered the arena of questioning the entity 'woman' itself (see Mahajan 2008).

The 1990s were also an intense period of growing activism in lesbian and gay organizing. At one level there was the growing work on HIV/AIDS which spoke of sexual behaviours and focused on men who had sex with men (MSM) and, within that framework, started providing services and spaces for men; there were also many groups that formed around 'gay' identity in the metropolitan areas as well as a smaller but vocal number of groups for lesbian and bisexual women. This history has been documented elsewhere and so we will not go into details here, but suffice it to say that this period also saw the beginnings of what would soon become the LGBT movement in the country. It saw the first coming together of the women's and human rights groups on LGBT issues, whether with the conferences and workshops in Bombay or later in the formation of Campaign for Lesbian Rights (CALERI) in Delhi fuelled by the release and subsequent 'ban' of the film ***Fire***. Another crucial coming together of disparate groups was during the countrywide protests and campaigns around the arrest in July 2000 of HIV activists working with MSM in Lucknow.

At that particular moment in history, though, the stress was much more on sexuality, and issues around gender were not being addressed as clearly. In fact, the first national meeting in 1997 to talk of 'our' rights was called ***Strategies to Advance Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Rights***.[30] Work around the concerns of *kothis* had been growing in the 1990s and so some understanding of gender transgressive behaviour and identity was also being formulated, although this largely used the language of 'sexual behaviours' and was mainly in the context of HIV/AIDS. By and large, though, the understanding of transgender was limited to our notions of *hijras*, the most visible marginalized gender, who were also being 'targeted' by the HIV interventions under the MSM umbrella, or to a few persons who were transsexual.[31]

So, intense discussions on gender, gender transgression, the construction, de-construction of the binary of gender, and the marginalisation and violence people face because of this binary entered the spaces of LGBT organising only in the 2000s. Even then it was a struggle and transgender concerns (along with concerns of lesbians and bisexuals) often had to really fight for space. Interestingly though, at some level, the concerns around gender were also swiftly integrated with those of marginalized sexualities very early in the decade. By the time the World Social Forum rolled in (January 2004), the Rainbow March that happened within it was visibly addressing issues of gender along with sexuality. Prior to that, the first international film festival of its kind in Bombay, ***Larzish*** (October 2003), was tagged as a festival of sexual and gender pluralities. This is not to say that the shift in politics was either smooth or universal, but that for a lot of people and, more importantly, for groups, gender became as crucial an issue as sexuality.

Stree Sangam itself saw a transition, in 2002, from being a "*lesbian and bisexual women's group*" to becoming LABIA, a *"queer and feminist collective of lesbian, transgender and*

[28] The Indian women's movements have been documented quite extensively, but for a brief history of the autonomous women's movements, please refer to Kalpana Mehta 2008.

[29] For an insider perspective on the relationship of the feminist movement with queer issues please refer to Chayanika Shah 2005.

[30] This meeting was organised by Forum Against Oppression of Women, Stree Sangam/LABIA, Human Rights Law Network and Counsel Club on 7-9 November 1997.

[31] *Kothis* are male-bodied person who take the feminine role in male-to-male sexuality. *Hijras* are members of communities consisitng of intersexed, transgendered and-or emasculated persons classified as male at birth. They used to be more socially and culturally accepted than they are nowadays.

bisexual women." Our language was still quite uncertain, but in this period many transgender identified persons joined various LBT organisations and many of us also found the words to voice our concerns in a manner that made more sense. Another important shift that happened in the early years of this century was the increasing use of the word 'queer' as both politics as well as identity. At one level there was a realisation that the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, and even transgender did not begin to encompass the lived realities and the multitude of identities that people lived with; at another, the growing maturity of a politics that was invested in contesting the heteronormative constructs of both gender and sexuality (see Narrain 2004).

So, one might say that, though destabilizing, the question "What makes you a woman?" was very much part of this growing change in our collective politics and work. At the same time, it took a long time for the simple thought "because that is what I feel like" to sink into our collective consciousness. At some level this answer presupposed an innateness of gender identity, which feminist thought had been deconstructing all along. We were socialized into becoming women according to what society, family, law, religion, and other such structures dictated. It was our experience of being treated like women that made us women (even then some of us had avoided the biological fallacy – it was not our bodies but our embodied experiences that made us women). So it was, and for some still is, a difficult thing to wrap our heads and politics around that many of those who were not socialized as women also felt like women. And the next logical step, that their lives and concerns were also as valid a concern for our work and movements as those of women who were socialized into being women, whether or not they could actually be spoken of as one monolithic entity, was even more difficult.

Similarly difficult to grasp, but also more problematic then, was the reality of those who may have been socialized as women but felt that they were 'men' since this also took us into the tortuous arena of accessing or wanting to access 'male power and privilege'. While these concerns were being raised and discussed at one level, those being questioned in this way, several of whom were also feminist, were also searching for a language. The language we have, much like every other thing, is extremely gendered and in our expressions it binds us again and again into categories that we might otherwise completely defy. For a while some people might have used the language of 'trapped in the wrong body', but many did not find this useful, and there were several other articulations.

Both in the queer movement and the women's movements, these questions around gender were articulated from multiple locations as more and more persons who questioned the gender binary in their lives and work began to speak. But this did not mean that there was, or is now, any uniformity to this articulation or to the identities being taken. Just as the women's movements' trajectory in the subcontinent has been very different from that of the West, so has that of the queer movement, though we can always draw specific parallels. For one thing, there is the social and cultural history of the hijras in India. They have not felt comfortable organizing under the rubric of 'transgender' although alliances are continuously being built around different terms, and MSM has been one such troubled term. The specificity of hijras and the cultural space they occupy needs a different articulation, as does the experience of those persons assigned gender male at birth who do not see themselves as either men or hijras. Yet, because of the highlighting of these identities in the HIV/AIDS context, several of these locations have had some visibility, if not adequate space, in LGBTKHQ organizing.

Such is not the case with those who have been assigned gender female at birth but find it difficult to occupy the space 'woman'. There is neither any historical nor cultural space, howsoever marginal, for such persons. The few queer women's spaces that exist began largely

as spaces for lesbian and bisexual women and only in the last few years have begun talking about issues of marginalization because of gender. Here, too, there is no uniformity in either the language of identities or the articulation of issues. And often those who identify as 'trans' have not always felt comfortable being identified with 'lesbian' spaces. There have also been internal and external contestations on who can legitimately occupy the 'trans' space since there are broad differences in our lived experiences and the marginalizations we have faced. The realities of persons assigned gender female at birth are often overlooked in the larger queer movement when issues of transgender persons are raised. This invisibility and lack of space has meant that organizing, coming together, and articulation of concerns have been relatively tricky.

It is in these multiple contexts then that we located our study. At one level there are these discussions on gender, and on the other this invisibility of people's lived realities and beginnings of multiple articulations. This study aimed to fill this gap in our understanding, our politics, and our interventions. We have sought to bring to our collective knowledge people's lived experiences and their articulations.

We have sought to understand the lives and experiences of those who have been assigned the female gender at birth and identify as queer in some manner, but whose life trajectories reflect a constant tension with the binary definition of gender as just female or male. We have tried to understand the circumstances and situations of those who are made to, or expected to, fit into the female gender, but who see themselves as different in terms of their gender identity, perform different gender roles, possess or cultivate different gender attributes from those imposed by societal norms and conventions, and who may or may not have a dissonant relationship with their bodies. How have they mapped their lives through these several domains; how do they continue to negotiate private as well as public spaces; what have been the struggles and searches, the lacks and needs? In this study we have attempted both to understand the lives of persons in gender locations marginalized by society, as well as to articulate areas of concerns and interventions.

A few brief notes on the report

Pronouns

In our use of pronouns in this report, we have tried to be faithful to the gender identities that people espoused for themselves. So all those who have identified as men or women have been referred to by the appropriate gender pronouns. In all other cases we have used hir and s/he. In places where gender is not specified, we have either used hir and s/he or the generic plural. This does not mean that the respondents are necessarily using these pronouns for themselves, in fact with the exception of one respondent who is searching for a new way to speak of hirself, most use either the male or female pronouns. But by using these three sets of pronouns we are also indicating the way in which the respondent identifies hir gender instead of mentioning the specific gender identity each time.

Names

All names of persons in the report have been changed. All markers of location and other specificities which might indicate where the person is from have also been changed.

2. Methodology

2.1. How did we do this study

This research was guided by feminist research methods and ethics. One of the crucial contributions of feminist research is towards challenging the notion of the 'objectivity' of 'neutral' researchers in the research process. The work of feminists like Sandra Harding (1987), and Donna Haraway (1988) among others has today made it almost imperative to state the location and subjectivity of the researchers, and not invisibilize them under the garb of objectivity. As Shulamit Reinharz says in her section on 'Involvement of the researcher as a person' in her review of feminist research methods:

> I conclude from this section that the connection between the researcher's experience and the research project remains a matter of contention between feminist researchers. I, for one, feel most satisfied by a stance that acknowledges the researcher's position right up front, and that does not think of objectivity and subjectivity as warring with each other, but rather as serving each other. I have feminist distrust for research reports that include no statement about the researcher's experience (1992).

Since we identify with this school of thought, when we speak of how we did the research, we want to talk about who this 'we' is that is doing the research, as much as we want to talk about the process through which we arrived at the way data collection and analysis was finally done.

So, we begin this section with a few words on who we the researchers are, and then trace the journeys, both intellectual and actual, that we went through in doing this study. As with most planned but flexible and not custom-made journeys, we changed our paths, sometimes even our mode of moving, assisted by what we were learning from the landscape around us. What has been constant in these negotiations and decisions is our commitment to the basic questions with which we began this work and to the broader queer feminist politics to which we all subscribe.

2.2. 'We' the research team

The eleven members of the research team have many common connections and yet many diverse locations. We are all part of a voluntary feminist collective[32] in the city of Mumbai, through which we have been actively engaged with the autonomous women's movements in the country. Nine of us are also a part of LABIA and have been involved with queer organizing in the city and the country. So we do have a shared political background within which we have located our research.

[32] **Forum Against Oppression of Women (FAOW)** is the oldest non-funded, autonomous collective of women active in Bombay in existence since 1980. It has been involved in campaigns against sexual assault, domestic violence, communalism, reproductive technologies, sexuality, growth of the right wing politics in India and its impact on women and many other such issues. It has worked towards supporting other autonomous women's groups like those of Muslim women, tribal women, lesbian and bisexual women and has actively supported other struggles and movements like those of workers, against the big dams and large development projects.

Individually we all identify as 'queer', although each one of us may identify with the term in different ways. Our gender locations are also mixed. We are all assigned gender 'female' at birth and share the political location of 'woman'. Being deeply entrenched in feminist politics, we have interrogated the social construction of 'woman' and redefined it in many ways in our personal lives. For some of us, such redefinition was enough to let us feel a comfort with ourselves and our lives. But for others it has been an uneasy acceptance of the identity 'woman' – more political than personal.

Queer organizing and politics, along with engagements with other marginalizations around gender and sexuality, have complicated our personal understanding of the binary gender system. None of us identifies as 'man', but we believe (and this research further confirms our understanding) that there are many other gender locations, and some of us would choose from among those over 'man' or 'woman'. We also realise that those of us who do say we are 'woman' are also complicating that identification in different ways.

Professionally, we come from very varied backgrounds, and we have tried to make this our strength in this study, just as we have done in our political campaigns. Some of us are trained in social science research and others in the natural sciences; some in the humanities and literature, while others in diverse fields like social work, journalism, and management. Some have years of experience of informal education and self-help trainings; others, of organizing around issues of women and other marginalizations.

We have worked with each other in smaller teams, in the contexts of campaigning and activism through LABIA and FAOW, and so we have a shared culture of collective functioning and working with each other. Yet, a formal study of this nature in such a large team was a unique experiment that we embarked on consensually. As a team we decided that we were all equivalent if not equal members in the research process. Specifically, we did not have a core team, or any specialized tasks that only a few people did. We were all involved in each of the tasks needed for the entire research, although some people took more responsibility for some tasks. The final writing of the report is the only task that has been allotted to a group of four, and this, too, was decided on the basis of the availability and inclination of the individuals.

Another important thing we are aware of is that this is a study of people like us, and thus, it is also informed by our own individual experiences as well as by LABIA's intense and varied experience of working with others like us. It is a situation similar to that described by a disability rights activist and scholar:

> Working together, we decided to research a book which covered the range of issues in a coherent and fairly comprehensive way. This involved drawing up a loose schedule of areas to be explored in interviews with as many disabled people as possible. We looked at what little was already available, and we brainstormed from our own experience: we felt that our own lives and feelings were very relevant to the process. Rather than trying to achieve some spurious objectivity or distance, we acted as key informants and research participants (Shakespeare 1977).

We are aware of the advantages that we have in doing this study. The background information for the study is part of our collective knowledge, acquired through long years of work. Our own lives have informed us a great deal in figuring out how to ask the questions and in deciphering which questions are important enough to ask. At the outset, we also broadly knew that we were going to talk to persons assigned gender female at birth (PAGFB).

These persons are very much a part of the social and political community that we inhabit, and gaining their trust and consent to be part of the study has therefore been easy. At the same time, this put a huge responsibility on us as researchers: in this study. We are very aware that we are treading the fine path between being 'insiders' to the community that we are studying and maintaining the 'outsider' status necessary to the process of research. Being insiders means having the perspective and understanding with which we come to the study. However, this position also carries the risk of well-entrenched, pre-conceived notions making us deaf to some things we actually hear from the respondents.

While we are clear that this is an issue before all researchers, our particularly partisan position made us very conscious of it. We have tried to use our subjective locations to the advantage of the study. Our commitment to the process of really finding a way to talk about the subject in all its complexities without simplifying or unnecessary generalizing has helped us maintain this balance. The fact that we did this study as a collective, that we are a diverse group of eleven researchers, who have a common understanding and yet finely nuanced differences, has also helped in keeping this study an open-ended multi-dimensional exploration. Our process of arriving at how actually to go about the study indicates the ways in which we were doing this balancing act even before we actually selected our respondents and formulated our final research questions.

2.3. The beginning

Our first proposal, when we started thinking about the study, very clearly stated that:

> This research will focus on the trans identity and politics as it is emerging in India today, with specific reference to transpersons who seek to connect with other queer women. This includes all those who identify as FTM (with or without medical/surgical intervention), trans-men, trans-women who connect with queer women's spaces (as opposed to gay spaces), people who do not use the term 'trans' but do not see themselves as women attracted to other women…. the list cannot be exhaustive, since the language of challenging binary gender is still a growing one, and identities and terms are still emerging.
>
> This study will, through exhaustive interviews and focussed group discussions with individuals and collectives, aim to bring the specific concerns and articulations of such trans persons into the queer movement. The more specific aim is to arrive at detailed strategies and interventions that the queer movements needs to take up to foreground the issues of people who have, till date, received very little attention or visibility within the larger queer movement.

We had begun with the idea of looking at the lives of all trans persons who seek to connect with other queer women. This included trans women who connect with queer women's spaces. As we started concretizing our research questions, we realised that we were taking on too many varied lived experiences. The life experiences of those brought up as 'women' tend to be very distinct from those of persons brought up to be 'men'. Moreover, in a society where there is a visible community of hijras and a very strong culture around being hijra, trans women or persons assigned gender male at birth (PAGMB) had a very different lived experience from PAGFB.

With this in mind we decided to include only those trans persons who were PAGFB. Other reasons for this choice were the fact that we were most familiar with this section and this was the group whose lives and concerns were not being foregrounded in the larger queer organizing in the country. Accordingly we named the study 'Understanding lives and concerns of transpersons across a spectrum of identities loosely clustered under FTM'. We identified the main concerns, which spanned people's lives from childhood to the present, and also involved their complex interactions with very intimate spaces and relationships (familial, sexual, and other such intimacies) as well as public spaces. We were interested in seeing how they negotiated and understood their gender, and also how they accessed spaces which had others like them and what they expected from these spaces, as well as from society.

We decided on the following methodology to do this study:

- A preliminary quantitative questionnaire will be prepared and then piloted in Bombay and then it will be administered to 60-80 individuals all over the country.

- This questionnaire will be followed by focused group discussions with individuals and with collectives where collectives/groups exist.

- After analysing the results of these quantitative questionnaires and discussions, 15-20 individuals will be selected for qualitative interviews keeping in mind the diversity of situation, location, and experience and these interviews will be then taken.

Our first discussions, then, started us off on the making of the quantitative questionnaire. We formulated a draft questionnaire and tested it on one of the persons (from a group other than LABIA) who we thought could be part of the study. This first experience was an eye-opener. The quantitative questionnaire was getting many long answers. It was impossible, we realized, to get anything substantial on such intimate concerns as one's gender through a quantitative tool. The intricate ways in which a person lived hir gender cannot be articulated or contained in one-line answers when even the language around this is as yet unarticulated. As we talked more, we understood that using a quantitative tool would lead us to a very stereotypical, non-nuanced naming and understanding of gender.

We realized that we need to understand each and every experience in the light of the omnipresent binary system that enveloped every part of our existence. This was impossible to do through short answers when the binary system is so deeply entrenched in language itself, our only means of communication, and when there has been so little conversation or shared knowledge about the lived realities of people who were 'transpersons across a spectrum of identities loosely clustered under FTM'.

We decided to change our methodology and do qualitative interviews with about 50 respondents whom we would access through our political and social spaces. We also planned to do focused group discussions with LBT groups (primarily working with lesbian and bisexual women and transpersons) to get a sense of each group's collective understanding around these issues, as well as to get some ideas on how they looked at their own present and future work on issues of gender.

For the qualitative interviews we decided to use the guided life history narrative method. We needed a questionnaire for this. Since we were all going to be conducting the interviews, we worked collectively towards creating a fairly detailed questionnaire to ensure uniformity in

the nature of the data collected from the different interviews. At every meeting we found the questionnaire growing in size – both in depth and in breadth.

2.4. How to select the respondents

Alongside, we started discussions around how to choose our respondents. This became a point of extensive debate and discussion. The study aimed to understand the nature and degree of discomfort that people have with their birth-assigned gender and also the ways in which they negotiate around this. The question before us was: how are we to know who is discomfited by their assigned gender and in what way? We had three options before us. One was to consider persons whom we perceived as transgressing gender norms; the second was to ask people to self-identify. The third, a radically different option, was that we assume that every person has something to tell us about their discomfort with and negotiations around their assigned gender, and so open up the study to include all PAGFB.

Since we were approaching known groups and networks for the study, the first or second option or both in conjunction with each other, were easily possible. The third option meant redefining our study in some ways, because here we were changing something fundamental. Up until now we had focused on hearing from and about only those who explicitly transgressed the binary system. We were now moving towards the premise that to understand what is beyond the binary we need to look beyond the transgressions. We spent many hours trying to understand the implications of all these choices and trying to make the 'right' decision. We read, we discussed, we talked about our lives and our lived experiences of our own gender and sexuality.

If we chose option three we feared that we were in danger of altering the study too much. Had we not begun with wanting to look at the lives and issues of people who transgressed? Would not the lives of those who identified as 'women' be very different from those who said that they did not identify as women? How could we have both kinds of people in the same sample? Was there not enough written already on the lives of 'women' and how they understand gender? What new thing would we get from there? And if we said 'people assigned gender female at birth', would we not be expanding our universe too much?

On the other hand, we felt that, even if by making this choice we would change the study that might be a good thing in the final analysis. There was no certainty, but there was a sense that many people who might not say they were trans might still have many things to tell us about gender. What if some people were not identifying as trans because they were not yet used to the language? Would we not then miss out on the realities of all such people? If we looked at people who already identified trans then would we not start getting very boxed answers even before we articulated the emerging understanding on trans itself?

We went back and forth on this over many meetings. Meanwhile, a fairly detailed draft of our questionnaire was ready. We decided to each try and answer whether we considered ourselves respondents for this questionnaire and persons whose lives could contribute to such a study. We were surprised to discover that in our group where everyone identified as 'woman' politically or otherwise, there were many who said that in principle they thought they could be part of the study. This self-identification as suitable subject for the study was coming from people who did not identify with the category 'transpersons across a spectrum of identities loosely clustered under FTM'.

We realized that slowly we had moved towards a common understanding of what exactly we were looking for, and that this was a little different from where we had begun. We renamed our study 'Breaking the binary: Understanding concerns and realities of female assigned/born persons across a spectrum of lived gender realities.' In keeping with this focus, the questionnaire was tweaked some more. We added sections on gender trajectory and other related issues around naming and identities. (The final sections of the questionnaire are attached to this report as Appendix 1).

We further decided to narrow our universe by choosing our respondents from amongst 'queer' PAGFB. In our understanding, all such persons are at least transgressing some norms of the binary by challenging societal gender norms of who they are supposed to be sexually attracted to. Gender and sexuality are also very interlinked under patriarchy. Such violations of norms around sexuality are, hence, critical and crucial in people's negotiations with their lived genders.

As a final round, the team actually did an exercise of formally conducting interviews on each other. This exercise helped us test every part of the questionnaire, gave us experience in conducting interviews together, tested our technology, and helped us arrive at the final modalities of the interview process. This trial round also warned us about the length of our interviews.

Finally, we decided on the following method for our interviews:

Each interview would be conducted by two members of the research team together. The interview would be recorded on an audio recorder (after ensuring that the respondent was comfortable with this). We would ensure that the respondent knew that it could be a long interview, and accordingly slot time and place. In situations where the interviewers and the respondent did not speak a common language, we would make arrangements for translators, taking into account the comfort and consent of the participant. We would get informed consent letters from each of our respondents.

As part of this consent procedure we would clarify to the individual participants that their audio recordings would not be accessible to anyone other than the two persons who were present at the interview. We would send back the transcripts to the respondents for approval and only after this approval would the transcript be shared with the whole research team. Our consent form also made it clear that participants could withdraw from the study at any point after the interview, up until our writing process began. We were also committed to maintaining complete confidentiality and to not ever publish or share in any form the life stories of people interviewed with anyone other than the research team. (The consent form that we used is attached as Appendix 2)

All set now, we conducted two pilots in Bombay. They went off without any hitches and we were all ready to begin with our interviews.

2.5. Reaching out and selection of respondents

We sent out initial letters to Sappho in Kolkata, Sahayatrika in Kerala, LesBiT and WHAQ in Bangalore, Parma in Vadodara, Sangini in Delhi, and Sampoorna (which identifies as a group for trans persons and has an active e-list with members across the country as well as outside

it). We followed up these letters with phone calls, and in person where feasible. We wanted the groups' help to reach out to individuals who would participate in the study and also have group discussions with each organizations' members.

Besides this, we contacted individuals, especially in Delhi and Chennai, for other contacts through social networks. In Bombay and Pune we relied on our connections as LABIA with other queer spaces. We also got in touch with some individuals from far-flung areas, whom we had met over the years and stayed in touch with, but who were not part of any of the groups.

We got very helpful, supportive, and whole-hearted responses from most of the groups and people we reached out to. And we must emphasize here that without the support and help from these people and organizations we would have never been able to reach out to such a diverse group of people from all over the country. We eventually managed to get a good sample of people fairly well distributed across the four geographical regions of the country.

There were some disappointments, too. The call for participation in the study was put on the Sampoorna e-list, but we did not get any response from there. We must clarify, though, that a few of our respondents are on their list as well, because there are some overlapping memberships between organizations. We did, however, get to do a group interview with Sampoorna, which was very useful and helped us understand, to some extent, the reasons why we had not received any individual responses from the group. As for the others, Parma wrote back and told us in person and by phone that they could not participate in this study as they were also doing a similar study. From Sangini we did not hear back, as they did not respond to our emails and we were unable to talk to them over the phone, though we tried. We feel it is a bit unfortunate that we were not able to have discussions with Parma and Sangini, as both these groups have been around for a while and have varied and diverse experiences.

We tried to get as random a sample as was possible in each location. We wanted other locations of age, class, caste, and religion also to be as mixed and representative as possible. So, our final selection was done through a focused random sampling, although the method of sampling was very diverse in each place, and we had to make many changes along the way to accommodate for people's time and availability.

In Bombay we began with drawing up a list of all the persons we knew. From this list we chose some individuals whom we felt we definitely had to include in the study. The rest we divided roughly into clusters according to age ranges. Then we decided how many people we wanted from each age group and actually picked lots for the persons we would approach. Luckily for us, the first round of random selection gave us a fairly varied sample. Most of the persons that we had as our first choices agreed to the interview, and we were able to go ahead with them, but in some cases we had to pick lots a second time around.

In Delhi, since Sangini had not responded, we relied on other networks, individuals, and social spaces to be able to get a similar list of names. Three members of our research team moved to Delhi in September for professional reasons, and so they took on the interviews in Delhi. It was a little more difficult to follow this procedure in Delhi as compared to Bombay because of us not being as familiar with the city and with people there. So, the list there went through many more changes than the Bombay list.

We were in Kolkata and in Kerala only for limited periods of time and so the choices were more limited, depending on who had time on those days, and in some sense the organizations

there chose the participants for us based on our verbal communications with them. We were in Bangalore for a longer period and also made two visits there. Here, too, we did the picking of lots, but we also kept the peculiarity of a group like LesBiT in mind while doing this random selection. There are many persons in LesBiT who have come from different Southern states and so we tried to get a fair representation of these in the final list of people.

Most persons were interviewed in the cities where they live, but in four cases we made it possible for the respondent to travel to another city and be interviewed there. In three other cases we conducted the interviews in other mutually convenient locations to which the respondents had travelled for their own reasons. The spaces that we used for the interviews were our own houses, respondents' homes, organizational spaces, other people's homes – basically, spaces where everyone was comfortable and we were assured of privacy. No interview was conducted in any public space, as these are not comfortable spaces for interviews that explore intimate parts of people's lives.

Most interviews were conducted in the course of a single day, with small breaks. Only in exceptional situations did we have to discontinue and complete the interview on another day. Seven interviews were done with the help of translators. We did not go back to our interviewees to fill in any gaps, but when we sent back the transcripts many of them added more information and some deleted a few things. We are glad that we sent back the transcripts, since several interviews came back with changes. This was especially true with respect to names or identifying details or incidents to do with other persons.

2.6. The interviews and analysis

The interviews followed the questionnaire broadly, but took many different routes depending on the inclination of the interviewers and of the person being interviewed. Sometimes we were able to go as per the sections of the questionnaire, but most often people first spoke of what they felt were the most important parts of their lives. For some people these were stories about growing up, for some it was about intimate relationships, for yet others it was their specific passion or profession, and for yet others it was school, college friends or actually coming to organizations, meeting other people like them. Often the interviews turned into conversations, and we were able to probe beyond the obvious meaning of what was being said and understand it with its layers and nuances.

We recognize the inter-subjectivity of such an open-ended interview process, in which we as interviewers were as much a part of the meaning making and narrative as the person hirself. We understand the specificity of the stories told to the context in which they were told and the time at which they were narrated. Any generalizations from these texts and narratives has to be carefully done, with due recognition of the subjectivity of those involved and the contexts in which they were made. Life stories are very complex, and we are well aware that what can be obtained in a single interaction is finally just one layer of a complex life.

Having said that, at the end of these 49 interviews, we do feel that the subjective positions from where we entered into these conversations are very crucial to the kind of data that we have been able to collect. The only way in which we as researchers can reciprocate the trust that our respondents showed in us in openly sharing details of their lives, in revisiting difficult parts of their lives and struggles, in facing up to parts of them that they might want hidden, is by implicating as much of our individual and collective selves in analyzing these narratives as

possible, and by placing them in the larger discourse where the lines between the researcher and the researched blur and merge.

We also had focused group discussions with Sappho, Sahayatrika, LesBiT, and Sampoorna. In these conversations we kept our questions fairly open-ended and group specific. They came from our knowledge of the group, and some were also inspired by aspects of interviews that we had conducted with some of their members. They were based on our observations around how each of these organizations has used diverse strategies to deal with the question of gender and also of their interventions in the lives of people marginalized due to sexuality and/or gender.

After completing our interviews and transcripts, we have continued with the collective process of research. We have met regularly and continued with our discussions, aided by different academic readings. We have looked specifically at readings from trans studies and queer studies to inform ourselves of how these debates and discussions have evolved in other contexts. Besides this, we have looked at resources on feminist research methods to help us, especially with analysis while conducting qualitative research.

The process of building a framework within which we place this research has been ongoing. We have had two intensive three-day meetings, one in January 2010 when we had finished almost half the interviews, and another in June after almost all our interviews were done. At these meetings we shared our returned transcripts with each other. We got familiar with the data that was accumulating. We spoke of our impressions of the persons we interviewed and also of our personal emotions and thoughts around the whole process.

No one from amongst us has met all the 49 respondents. These narrations helped us get a picture of these persons beyond what the words of the interview could capture. (One of us even sketched some of the people based on these word pictures.) As we heard of the various people's lives together, themes began to emerge, and these helped us make the code sheet for analysis. The coding heads were created, and we coded our transcripts. Subsequently, four of the team took on the task of taking forward the analysis and actually writing this report. Up until this stage all eleven of us have worked on this study as a team, as a collective truly trying to do an academically sound piece of work without the usual academic or other hierarchy.

3. Profile of our respondents

For this study, we conducted in-depth interviews with 49 persons assigned gender female at birth (PAGFB) but whose daily realities reflect a constant tension with the binary definition of gender as just female or male. Our endeavour was to talk to a wide-cross section of individuals across location, age group, caste, class, and religion. These variations were critical as we wanted to reach those living at the intersections of many marginalized identities. However, the silence and invisibility around individuals who continually transgress gender norms meant that we were able to approach only those individuals who have some contact with queer groups. Our respondents are spread across North, East, West, and South India.

There is a quantitative component in this research – we have collected a fair amount of data that can be and has been quantified. The sample size of 49 is not large enough to be conclusive, but it does allow us to observe certain trends. While we have been able to posit, and comment on, some of these emerging trends in more detail in later chapters, we have outlined here the socio-economic demographic profile of the participants. Cross-referencing and correlations across variables are not part of this chapter; such connections are drawn and explored more thoroughly later.

Individuals currently living in Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi, Kerala, and Pune were contacted through queer groups and networks in these cities. These interviews do not include many individuals living in rural areas. We were able to interview just two such respondents, one from rural Maharashtra and one from rural Jharkhand. However, it is important to remember that 11 of our respondents grew up in rural settings.

As family is a critical institution and site of socialization, we have quantified the caste, class, and religious background of the natal families of the respondents. To better understand the intersection of economic marginalization and gender transgression, we also look at the education and income level of our respondents. This chapter also details the three categories of current gender identification for all the respondents.

To provide a basic understanding of the contexts of the individuals we spoke to, this chapter details their ages and current locations. Several have found that cities lend them a certain degree of anonymity and freedom to gender-transgress in ways that would not have been possible or allowed in the native place. Hence, this chapter also looks at whether respondents have migrated from their native place, and on their current households and living arrangements.

3.1. Location

When we began the study, we had intended to talk to 10 people each from metros in the north, south, east, and west of the country and a total of 10 from semi-urban and rural areas. However, we met 18 individuals in the south and 13 in the west. In the south, this higher number was enabled by the existence of queer groups and networks in Bangalore, Kerala, and Chennai.

In the west, we were able to contact so many individuals because Bombay and Pune are home to us. We also spoke to one respondent from rural Maharashtra. In the east, we spoke to nine individuals, eight of whom were based largely in Kolkata (the exception being one respondent from rural Jharkhand). We spoke to nine people in the north as well.

Zone	Respondents
East	9
North	9
South	18
West	13
Total	**49**

Table 1: Geopolitical zone of respondents

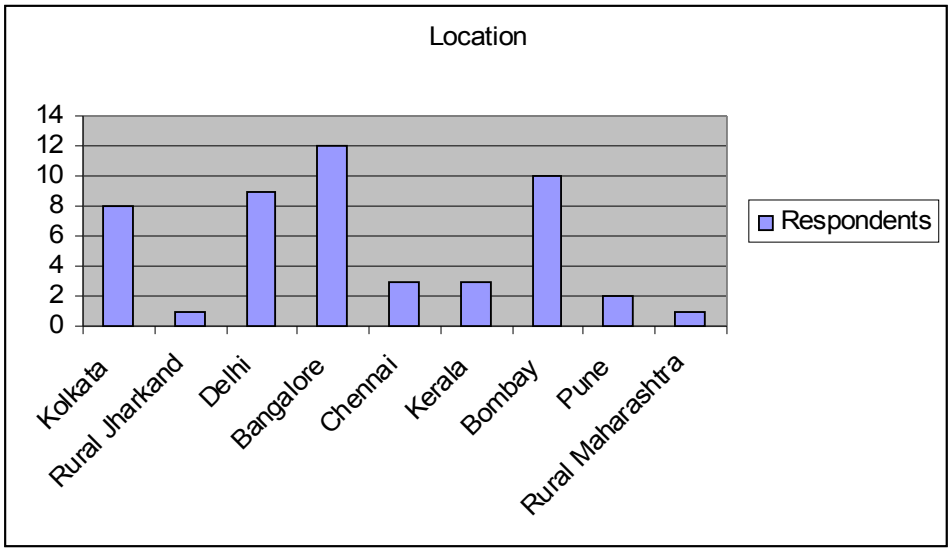


Chart 1: Distribution by place or city of respondents

3.2. Caste

Of the 49 individuals who participated in the study, 30 were from the dominant castes. Ten people identified as Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST)/Special Backward Class (SBC). There were three individuals who were from Other Backward Class (OBC) and six individuals who identified as other. In each location, there was at least one SC/ST/OBC/SBC individual. This data indicates a variation in caste backgrounds.

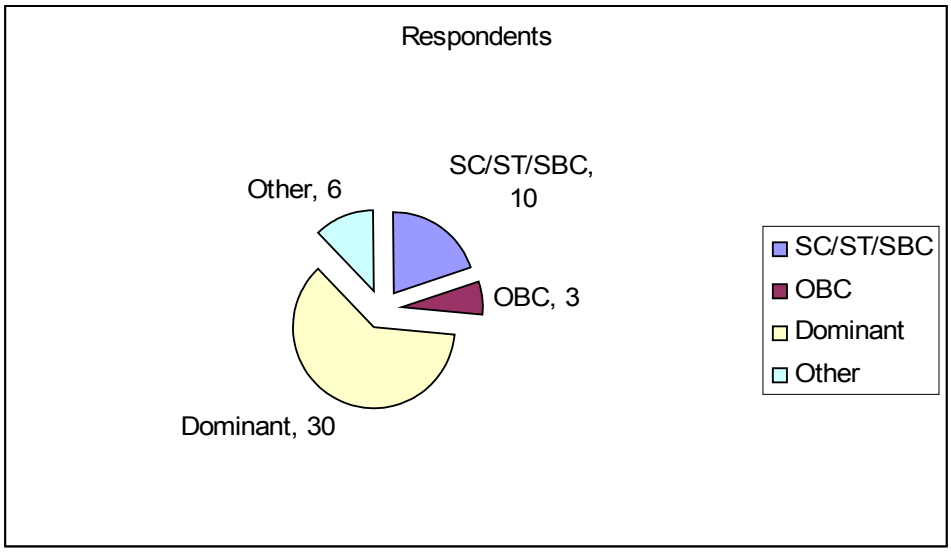


Chart 2: Caste of respondents

3.3. Class

We asked our respondents about the class background of their natal families while they were growing up. The categories were lower class, middle class, and upper class. This question was answered based on individual self-perception of class. Hence, the answers are dependent on relative experience, rural and urban settings, as well as region. Hence, the length and breadth of experiences of individuals who identify as poor range from a story of everyday hunger to that of a family that owned some land. Jai, a respondent from a rural area, says that he used to just get ready and go to school because there was no food to eat at home. Sometimes, he said, "The neighbours would give us stale food in exchange for work like going to get rations from the shop which was five kilometres away." The family professions of many individuals who identified as poor were of daily wage labourers, farmers, or domestic workers.

Like Jai, there were five individuals who had to work during their childhood due to poverty. While it was tough to work and acquire an education as well, one person, Sandhya, was forced to work in the fields when all s/he wanted to do was study. Hir family were all daily wage earners and hir mother did not support hir desire for education. Sandhya remembers, "Sometimes my mother would also say to me do not go to school because there is a lot of work and I would sneak out and go to school." On the other hand, Murali, who identifies as FTM, helped his father work in the fields. For him, this was an affirmative experience as it was man's work. While he was allowed to accompany his father to the fields and on campaign trips for the communist party, Murali was also sent to a private school. From daily hunger to being able to attend a private school, then, is the range of socio-economic experiences that we encountered in our sample of the lower class category. There were 13 individuals who came from lower class backgrounds.

Twenty-five of the respondents identified their natal family backgrounds as middle class. The variation in what constitutes middle class is immense. Individuals who came from middle class backgrounds had families who worked largely as professionals or in service. A few had parents who worked as professors or who managed a family business, Santosh identified as middle class despite his father being a daily wage earner because many of his brothers worked

and brought home wages. Another individual, Rahul, said that his mother supported his family entirely. His father was a vegetable seller but did not bring home any income, while his mother, a staff nurse, put all her efforts into sending Rahul to a private school. Many mothers in this socio-economic category were part of the workforce. However, mothers stayed home in almost all families that were engaged in business.

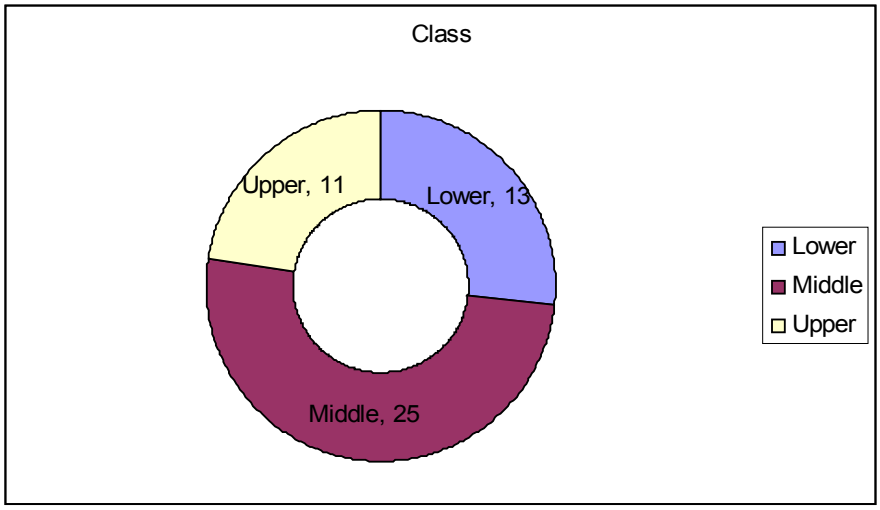
In Bombay and Delhi, most of our respondents came from the middle class and a few from the upper class. As we primarily used social networks to contact respondents in both cities, it is telling that class barriers do not seem to have been broken down in these social spaces. Eleven individuals came from upper class backgrounds. However, an upper class background did not necessarily mean having resources and privileges. 20-year-old Nidhi hails from a business family but, due to family dynamics, she was unable to afford the education she wanted and had to support herself through earning small sums of money by playing cricket. Like Nidhi's, most upper class families had a business or professional background. Another respondent, Bhargavi, identified as upper class because of her perception of class relative to circumstances in her town. Like Nidhi, she was deprived of education. Hence, an upper class background does not automatically translate into class privileges for queer PAGFB, especially if they are challenging gender and/or sexuality.

3.4. Nuclear or joint family

The influence and power of family can be pervasive, especially in one's formative years. Abuse, neglect, rejection of gender expression, prohibitions, and punishment were common; stories of acceptance, love, and support also emerged.

In the case of an individual challenging gender boundaries, whether s/he lives in a joint family or a nuclear family could make a marked difference to hir life trajectory. Thirty respondents grew up in nuclear families and 19 grew up in joint families.

Chart 3: Economic class of respondents



Roma grew up in a joint family from which she faced extensive mental, verbal, and emotional abuse, despite having a supportive parent in her mother. But for some others, extended family influences were positive. Jai got food to eat only when his uncle fed him; when Jai's father threw him and his sister out of their home, it was this uncle who came to their rescue. Aditi was raised jointly by her mother and aunt. Manjula relates a complex story: she grew up in a house full of people, including her parents, but spent most of her childhood learning music with her teacher. Even though she did not have formal extended family, her music teacher became for

Manjula an influential extended family member, whereas she did not receive the same time and space from any adult at home.

We were constantly reminded of how, in the Indian context, the extended family can play a significant role, wielding considerable influence on a person's life even if s/he lives in a nuclear set-up or has moved away. There are times when this role is affirmative, as in the case of Sunny whose family accepts, affirms, and supports his gender identity. For Kamal, tribe and clan played a necessary part in leading him to undertake ceremonial rituals to have his partner be accepted as his wife by the community. For others like Saumya and Falguni, their extended families had a regressive influence in their lives, exerting pressure to get them married. Monu, who identifies as woman, faced pressure from the extended family to change her appearance, look and behave more like a girl. Such pressures take a great toll on many queer PAGFB and are indicative of the oppression of queer PAGFB within their families.

3.5. Religious background

The preponderance of respondents, 41, come from a Hindu background. Despite a heightened awareness towards religious diversity and explicit attempts to talk to individuals from the non-dominant religion, we were unable to do so. In Bombay we did reach out to potential respondents from varied religious backgrounds, but most declined to participate. However, when contacting individuals through groups, we found that the make-up of groups seemed to be largely reflective of the make-up of mainstream society. Three individuals were brought up in the Christian faith and two individuals were brought up as Jain. It is important to note that many individuals we spoke to do not currently practice the religions they were born into. There were instances of people changing their faith, choosing to believe in only God and not in a specific religion, as well as people who do not believe in God.

Religious Background	Respondents
Buddhist	1
Christian	3
Hindu	41
Jain	2
Muslim	1
Sarna	1
Total	49

Table 2: Religious background of respondents

3.6. Age

For this study, we intended to get an even distribution of respondents across the age brackets of 20-25, 26-30, 30-35 and 35+. Approximately half of the respondents were aged 20-30 and 16 persons were between the ages of 30-35. We spoke to eight individuals who 35+. The youngest respondent was 20 years old; the oldest respondent was 46. The sample seems to

lean towards younger persons. This could be due to the largely young membership of groups like Sappho and LesBiT. It is also indicative of many young people reaching out to support groups, possibly reflecting some social change and a fledgling openness in society.

Age Group	Respondents
20-25	13
26-30	12
30-35	16
>35	8
Total	**49**

Table 3: Age group of respondents

3.7. Education

In terms of access to education, 15 persons had studied up to the graduate level, 16 individuals had completed or were in the process of completing their post-graduate studies, 12 respondents had completed between 10 and 12 years of education while six had completed less than 10 years of school education. This variation was prevalent across all locations.

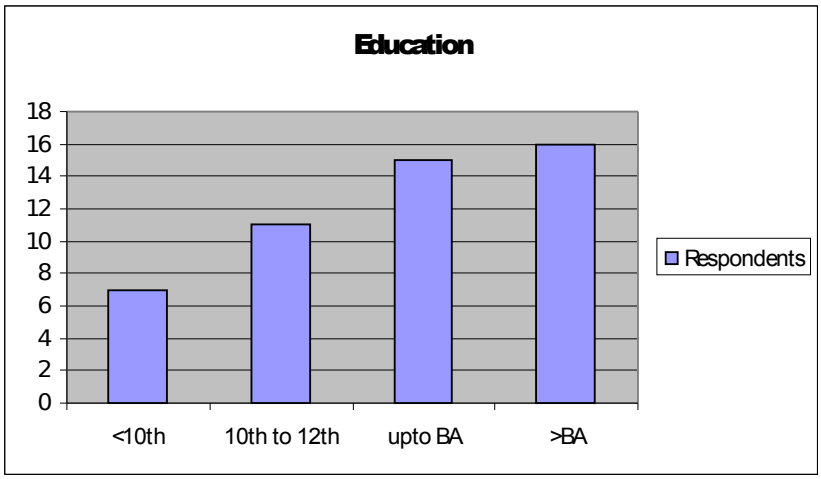


Chart 4: Education of respondents

3.8. Income

It was our aim to talk to people across income-groups, as economic marginalization can affect gender transgression in multiple and complex ways. This data details the current income earned by the people we spoke to. Respondents living in the cities of Bombay and Delhi earned higher average incomes as compared to the rest of the country. This is due to two reasons: the cost of living is highest in these two metros; and we primarily used social

networks to get in touch with individuals, which led us to people who were largely from the middle and upper classes.

At the time of the study, eight persons did not have an income. Three of these were students, while the other five were neither employed nor living with or being supported by their natal families – which meant they were being supported by queer groups, friends, partners, and their personal support networks.

Eight respondents earned less than Rs 5,000 a month, while 11 earned between Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000. Six individuals declared their income to be between Rs 10,000 – Rs 20,000 per month and seven persons had incomes in the Rs 20,000-30,000 bracket. The highest income bracket, Rs 50,000 and above, was what nine of our respondents were earning.

While we cannot comment here on this distribution due to regional differences and varying costs of living, in a later chapter we explore how some gender-transgressive individuals are either marginalized by what we have called the 'circle of deprivation' or enabled by their economic situation.

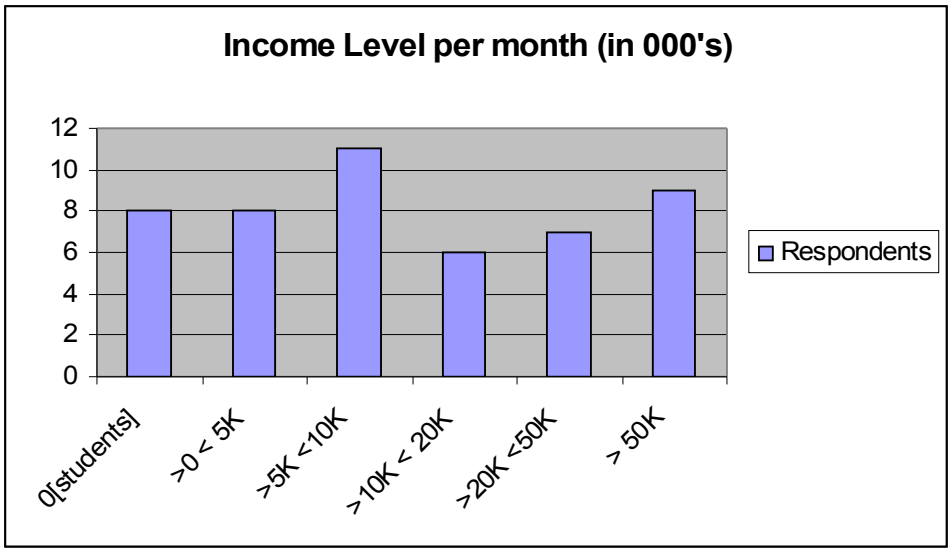


Chart 5: Income level per month of respondents

3.9. Current gender

During the initial stage of our guided interview, we asked respondents to state their current gender identification. To ensure that individuals would feel safe and free to respond to this question frankly, we did not furnish any options. Hence, these are self-identified genders.

The people who have identified as woman are those people who are most comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth. 'Woman' here does not indicate a category of gender expression or presentation, however, as there are also marked differences among those identifying as such.

When we say 'other', the people referred to have rarely identified as other, but they have named their gender is various ways that cannot be classified as man or woman, so we have clubbed these together. Other, then, is a varied category. There is no uniform understanding of what 'others' mean by 'man' or 'woman'; nor is their gender presentation or expression similar or uniform.

Man/woman are not categories our respondents are using in a conventional manner. These nuances of gender – gender identification, gender expression and gender performance – are discussed in the chapter on gender.

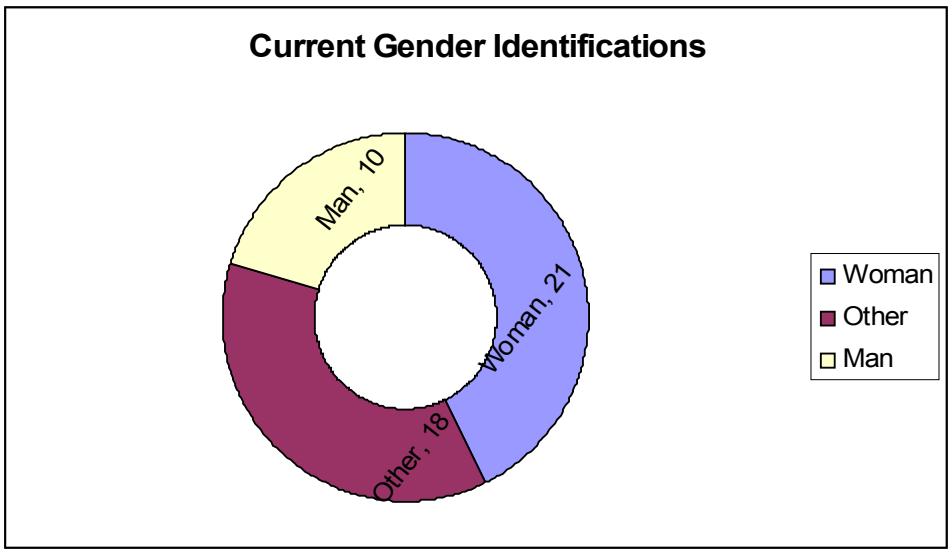


Chart 6: Current gender identification of respondents

3.10. Marriage

As focus on marriage is persistent in India, we asked our respondents about marriage and living arrangements. Currently, the Indian legal system recognizes marriages between cis-women and cis-men only. Of those we spoke to, one person is currently married to a cis-man, one is separated from a cis-man and three persons are divorced. There are five persons who consider themselves married to women. One individual is married to a non cis-man and two individuals were married to women but are now separated from them. Six of our respondents are parents to either adoptive or biological children.

3.11. Living arrangements

It has been the lived reality of gender-transgressive individuals that public spaces and neighbourhoods can be problematic and require constant negotiation and renegotiation. Are public spaces a greater threat when one is with a partner or friend? Was the childhood neighbourhood hostile? These were some of the aspects we probed, while asking respondents who they currently lived with and where.

twelve respondents live with their partners, whereas nine persons live with others such as flatmates and/or friends. There are eight individuals who live alone and 15 who live with their natal families. It is noteworthy that there are five individuals who share a household with their partner as well as natal family member(s). Every individual interviewed in the East lived with their natal families; one lived with her partner, mother and brother.

Living With	**Respondents**
Alone	8
Friend/Flatmate	9
Natal Family	15
Partner & Natal Family	5
Partner	12
Total	**49**

Table 4: Living arrangements of respondents

3.12. Individual migration

Twenty-five respondents of 49 have migrated from their natal place. This migration was largely propelled by tensions around gender and/or sexuality. For gender-challenging individuals, the tensions could be with family, neighbours, or even a whole village. All respondents who had migrated had moved from smaller towns or villages to metros or large cities due to the relative anonymity of the latter. Ranjana, who identifies as woman, lived in an urban area and ran away from home because she was in love with another woman. Her family did not know about her sexuality. She and her partner both ran away from home to join other queer people in another location so that they could live their life freely. Kamal and Murali, who identify as male and are from rural areas, both ran away with their partners once their relationships with women were discovered. Most people run away with a partner when there are tensions around sexuality. Some were compelled to run away from home to escape attempts at gender policing or gender violence, including marriage pressures.

Forced migration often causes economic hardship. Anand was forced to sleep at railway stations; Santosh and his partner lived on the streets for a while. A few others like Vasu, Sam, Laxmi, and Prem found a place to stay in shelters run by queer groups or in queer activists' homes. While moving away from family or natal places may reduce hostilities, tensions or pressures, it may also mean that an individual loses any support system that s/he may have relied upon previously.

In the course of the interviews, we found that a few queer PAGFB had also formally moved to bigger cities or towns to pursue their education. All of them spoke of the greater freedom this enabled, giving them a chance to express their gender and/or sexuality. These were all individuals who identified as woman or other and came from middle class backgrounds.

4. Preliminary analysis, necessary interventions

In the course of this research, we have tried to understand the circumstances, situations, and experiences of persons assigned gender female at birth (PAGFB). This has shed light on how queer PAGFB have navigated structures and societies, and how they continue to search, negotiate, and challenge multiple boundaries. Some important concerns that this research has examined are -- where are the points where the gender binaries rupture; what reinforces normative gender and what helps to open it to varied gender identities; and what are the experiences of PAGFB vis-à-vis families, friends, communities, social structures, the health and the legal systems? Based on these understandings, it is important to identify and articulate affirmations, areas of concern, needs, expectations, and possible interventions.

Several conversations and campaigns around these issues are already going on, and work around these is being done within queer and feminist groups. But much more is needed. This study brings together a whole range of life experiences that provide material evidence to help us highlight concretely the areas of immediate and long term concern. Possible interventions range from structural changes affecting major social institutions such as the family and school, to specific changes like not having public amenities such as toilets divided on the basis of binary gender, doing away with gender-specific school uniforms and dress codes, a different system for identity cards, and greater access to health care mechanisms for all. The queer, feminist, and human rights movements must undertake long-term campaigns as well as acting to address current needs, while continuing the conversations around breaking the binary gender system in society.

4.1. Family

One of the most critical aspects in most PAGFB lives is their relationships with their natal families. This has not been an easy space for most people. Of the 49 persons that we spoke to, not all were out to their families about their sexuality. In most cases where the gender and sexuality choices of our respondents were known, we heard of many instances of violence – physical, mental, and emotional.

This violence cuts across class and other social differences. Various family members – mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, extended or joint family members like aunts and uncles – all have been perpetrators of violence. Suicide attempts, cutting, harming oneself, depression, and persecution seem to be a commonplace occurrence within families. In very few cases has there been complete and unconditional support.

As a result of this kind of violence some of our respondents have had to break off completely from their families and run away, others have continued to stay on as they do not see any alternative, some stay back and negotiate either through hiding parts of their lives or by becoming a source of support for the family in economic and other ways, and yet others manage after a long time to achieve a balanced relationship which allows them to live within familial spaces.

There are many people who do not meet another queer person until there is a crisis situation, and then there are the countless people whose stories may never be told. Several PAGFB who

spoke to us told stories of being compelled to run away from home without knowing of groups or having any community support. Male-identified Sam was beaten and denied food for not behaving like a 'good girl' should, and had little option but to run away.

In the cases of multiple others, their gender non-conformance was not a problem until their sexuality entered the picture. Due to pressures of forced marriage and controls on communication, mobility, and meeting people, couples have been forced to flee. A few respondents have had to run away on the spur of the moment to avoid lifelong persecution from their families. One respondent recounts the story of a suicide pact with hir partner, when they felt they would not be able to survive without shelter and jobs.

Several respondents had faced sexual abuse from within their families and/or inside their homes. It was also evident that many individuals were neglected or lonely in their childhood homes. Priya, speaking of her childhood, said "Over the years my brother had been violent towards me. I guess he was learning from my father. I became a loner and that's how I still am." Much of this abuse and neglect began very early, and often had nothing to do with non-normative gender expression or sexuality. Meghana recalls, "Both mum and dad beat us. Dad was particularly violent when he would beat us e.g. with a belt. Sometimes when he would hit us, it felt as if I had lost my hearing in one ear or had broken some teeth. It never really happened but it felt like that." Taken together, all such experiences are indicators of the violence, repression and trauma that routinely takes place within the private and supposedly safe space of family.

Figuring out support structures for PAGFB whether they decide to stay with their families or away is very crucial and needs to be taken up by both the queer and women's groups. It is imperative that the queer movement foreground the issue of violence in private spaces like the family. The issue of violence in public spaces by police and by society has been taken up by the various queer groups. Our study shows that, to address specific concerns of PAGFB, we also need to urgently find mechanisms and ways to deal with violence in private spaces.

Apart from raising awareness in queer groups and larger society, efforts must be made to work with other agencies and groups who can reach out to the family constituency. Women's groups need to address the issues of natal family violence with the same urgency as is now seen in cases of marital violence. Bringing up all PAGFB from childhood in ways that makes them independent and able to be on their own is crucial. A significant area in this respect is that of training and education. Many of our respondents who had to leave home find themselves at a loss as they have not been able to complete their basic education and training.

4.2. School

In their growing up years, school also played a very influential part in most of our respondents' lives. For some like male-identified Anand it was a haven from an unhappy home, whereas for someone like Sunny who identifies as other, it always was a place that was suspect. For some others like woman-identified Nidhi, although it was a safe haven from home and much liked, it also became the most violent space as soon her sexuality became known and she was openly attacked. Another respondent, Kanika, remembers, "One of my friends was very abusive – she did not know what was my gender and my sexuality but she used to suspect me as a lesbian and used to make fun of me , heckle me in front of others raising this issue, She used to send me texts saying 'get well soon'."

Violations of norms around sexuality play an important role in negotiations with lived genders. Neha, who identifies as a woman, remembers school as a very cruel experience, "As I walked down the corridor, people would say there goes the slut. The entire school came to know about this. It became really difficult for me to be in that school then."

Examples of such incidents are seen starkly in schools, where PAGFB seem able, often, to negotiate gender non-conformance. However, when sexuality is added to the mix, all transgressions come under the scanner. Nidhi loved school, was a tomboy and was much loved by her peers and teachers, till,

> In the 8th Std, we had our batch ceremony in the hall. They called me up on stage. I was expecting to be announced captain again. However, my head mistress insulted me in front of all by saying "How can she be captain as she smooches girls." She openly told everyone. I was very hurt. I loved school more than I loved home. School was important to me. I just didn't know what to do.

PAGFB shared experiences of facing censure from school authorities and peers, as a result of which several people were unable to complete their education. Hence, we think that it is very crucial for schools to be more open and affirming when it comes to questions of gender and sexuality.

There is an urgent need felt for sexuality education for teachers, administrators, and schoolchildren. Considering that more than half of our respondents were aware of their sexual desires and feelings at very early ages, we feel that sexuality education is highly necessary at this stage, as school is one of the sites where many young people tend to explore their sexuality. Bhargavi, who identifies as other, says, "Children in school should get education on sex, sexuality and gender. This should be included in the syllabus." Such active engagements over time should help make school an affirmative location for a young person's gender or sexuality rather than a place where s/he has to control hir explorations and expressions and face constant monitoring.

Apart from widening the horizon on sexuality, there needs also to be a de-emphasis on gender within the school structure. This does not mean that gender is negated, for there is still a need for gender-segregated schools as there are many parents who would deny education to a female child if co-educational institutions were the only possibility. The impetus should be, rather, on deregulating gender. For example, uniform regulations make gender boundaries rigid and compel gender definition. Such a gender marker could be erased if there is a common uniform for all children, irrespective of their gender identification.

Textbooks, too, need to be inclusive of different lived realities of people rather than reflective of a sanitized, homogenized, and heteronormative account of culture, social realities, histories, and families. Queer groups, child rights groups, and educationists need to work together to ensure some modicum of openness in teaching and text books. This would probably need an analysis of gender and sexuality and family in school textbooks, much in the way that there is ongoing work on gender and communalism. Collaborative efforts between educators, activists, and researchers are much needed.

4.3. Sports

Sports, especially in school, impact people's lives in many complex ways. For a large number of our respondents sports were an important part of growing up and many recounted incidents in which the sports arena, within or outside schools, was a positive space. It is noteworthy that several PAGFB got into sports, especially competitive sports, around the same time as puberty set in. Puberty was, for most of the respondents, a time when rules around their behaviour started getting stricter – with greater monitoring of what they could wear or not wear, who they could play with, how long they could be out of the house, etc. For several, it was also a time of becoming aware of their attraction towards other PAGFB, and dealing with the changes happening within their bodies – all in all, a difficult time. For those that identified as man or other, the bodily changes were crucial challengers to their existing understanding of their genders.

Sports offered a space of physical activity where respondents could establish a positive relationship with their bodies and its abilities at a time when more and more restrictions were being imposed on them. Sports also provided a place for people to explore talents and abilities that otherwise find no space within the school curricula. Many respondents also expressed their sense of the loss of this space once they stopped studying; very few were able to pursue their sporting interests outside of schools and colleges. We hence think that sports have to be as integrated into school programmes as much as possible, and there need to be avenues for playing that continue for all PAGFB outside of and after school.

Several affirmative experiences from the sports arena were shared by respondents – a different kind of learning, attention from other girls, support from sports teachers in general, and in some cases even support for gender expression or sexuality, much more space to do things which in the ordinary course of things 'girls' would not be allowed to do. Simran, who played sports through most of her school days, says, "Sports actually teaches you to block out and deal with various kinds of pressures. Even in education. I remember it helped me a lot."

PAGFB who faced criticism for their gender non-conformance in other quarters, often found in sports either a safe space for gender expression, or a bargaining chip to negotiate their gender expression, especially if they did well in the sport. For example, Sumit managed to get permission to wear trousers to school and college because of the fact that s/he was winning competitions for hir team, "From class 9 girls had to wear a sari. One teacher tried to force me to wear a sari but I did not. I got some leeway and facility because I was a player. I was not good at studies but had got a lot of trophies for my school and so got away with some of these things."

Almost all respondents who played a sport reported that they met other queer people (or as the most used phrase puts it best, "people like us") within the sports arena. This went a long way towards allaying feelings of alienation and loneliness. As Aditi, a cricket player, says, "Sports can be one way of getting in touch with friends and coming together. I met new people at the last event and I was very happy."

Sports also seem to have been an outlet where many individuals could access a safe space for sexual exploration. Non-normative sexuality was possible and even encouraged, sometimes by sports coaches.

However, while some gender rules are more relaxed within the sports arena, the space itself remains inherently gendered. There is also a differential treatment for boys and girls playing

sports, or an attitude that certain sports are 'boys'' sports. These gender boundaries are explicit as well as implicit and mimic the boundaries set in other parts of life. One respondent spoke of choosing to pursue a particular sport as all the other sports required girls' uniforms. To devalue the importance given to gender and to make the spaces safer spaces for gender challengers, some sports need to be common and played by all. The choice of playing a certain game must be left open. All PAGFB, or for that matter all genders, should be allowed to play any games that they want.

4.4. Isolation and intimacies

While some people met others through sports or in other walks of life, not all of our respondents were lucky enough to find other queer persons or have supportive adults around them. In some cases, before they managed to reach a support group and access safer spaces for conversations about their lives, often the only other person they knew was either a sexual partner (who may or may not have identified in a similar manner either in terms of sexuality or gender) or a friend or co-worker in as closeted a space as themselves. This sort of isolation, violence, or constant threat of violence do much harm to a person's sense of self and ability to negotiate situations with confidence. Many respondents speak of depression, loneliness, and alienation as intrinsic aspects of their growing up and of later experiences. Eighteen of the 50 respondents in this research – a shockingly high number – had attempted suicide at least once. Several of these attempts were made when they were in their late teens or early 20s, often while living with the natal families. Some of these attempts were also linked to severe pressure to marry, which was something most of our respondents had faced.

It is therefore extremely important to reach out not just to individual queer people who may be isolated wherever they are (isolation can be as much in urban as in rural locations as we have found), but to actually have enough voices in the mainstream that mitigate against our default sense of being isolated oddities. In some sense, a sort of general social acceptance of such relationships and an easing of social, cultural, and familial pressures to marry are linked and must be taken up as important long-term goals by all movements.

Chhaya, who identifies as male and grew up in a rural area, was forced to marry, even though s/he was already in a relationship with a woman:

> After I met M, I had to get married. My father pressurised me. He said I could continue to come and meet my friend. I told him no, I don't want to get married but he forced me. I tried to tell him that I wanted to live my life on my own and that I hated marriage and I feel scared of men. They told me that everyone has to get married and in the beginning everyone is scared.

S/he kept on moving back and forth between hir husband's house and hir father's till s/he finally moved back.

Not only is the pressure to marry more severe for PAGFB than for PAGMB, the space of normative conjugality that PAGFB necessarily occupy as 'wives' after marriage gives them much less room to manoeuvre, and very little power to access spaces to explore their gender and sexuality. Often in such situations 'wives', even if they are earning, do not have financial autonomy from their 'husbands'. Most of our respondents who had been (or were still) married to cis-men had had to leave their husbands (and in one case the children too) to be

able to have queer relationships; also, they often encountered very high degrees of violence in their marital homes. A sustained campaign against compulsory marriage would go a long way in easing some of the pressures that PAGFB face from families and communities.

Besides the isolation that individuals feel, queer intimate relationships are also often lived in situations of extreme silence and with a sense of being the only ones 'like that'. Many of our respondents speak of the fate of intimate relationships lived under such complete invisibility or constant censure and usually zero support. This apparent vacuum and isolation, combined with the constant fear of discovery and the threat (and reality) of severe violence, burdens these relationships with an intensity of togetherness – you only have each other to talk to – which makes for a peculiar fragility. The intimate relationship is often the only space where the partners' gender and sexuality are affirmed, and at the same time, such a closed and mutually dependent space can lead to a lot of destruction and violence within. Not having other spaces in which to share these relational conflicts often makes the situation much worse, and some suicide attempts are also because of such conflicts.

Gender and sexuality sometimes get conflated in intimate spaces, or at the very least, operate in complex ways. To understand the conflicts within relationships, we need not just to understand the stressful circumstances within which relationships operate and work towards easing such pressures, but also understand how the nuances of gender are played out within relationships. As we have articulated at length, gender identities and masculinities and femininities are lived in complex manners and often require a much more nuanced reading than is available from most critical readings of how gendered power operates in a bi-gendered world. These equations get further challenged when genders criss-cross with the other hierarchies of power operating in relationships. So, we do not feel that easy generalizations can be made about gendered power in relationships.

If at all, the one lesson that can be drawn fairly confidently from our respondents' lives is the fact that when other axes of power do not directly operate, the more 'male' identified person in the relationship does not automatically have more power than the other person. PAGFB who are more 'masculine' in terms of their identity, expression, and roles in public, do not automatically acquire gendered power in their intimate relationships. Each of the partners is vulnerable in their own ways, and so is the relationship. We need a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes gendered violence to be able to deal with these realities. And finally, we need more spaces where these relationships and intimacies can be spoken of with ease and comfort and where conflicts and joys can be shared among communities rather than remain confined to the narrow space between two persons.

4.5. Health

Given the high degrees of isolation, violence, and continuous social and familial control that queer PAGFB face, it is absolutely essential that mental health services and good counselling be widely available. However, it is extremely challenging for PAGFB even to access mental health services. Individuals with class privileges were able to see a counsellor, or in a few rare cases, local health services had counsellors. A few people sought counselling at various points in their lives, and some were taken to counsellors by their parents. While some were lucky to find supportive counsellors, several encountered homophobic counsellors. One respondent, Kavi, sought counselling while in college to deal with her depression. The doctor instead tried to treat her sexuality and added to the stress in her life by telling her mother that this was a

phase Kavi was going through that she would leave once she was married. Another respondent, Jai, went to a counsellor in his village when he first fell in love with a woman so that he could understand what was happening to him, and the counsellor asked him to bring her along so that he could cure them both. These responses are, unfortunately, quite common and add to the burdens that queer PAGFB are already dealing with.

It would be fair to say that accessing counselling would be safe and comfortable only if it is with an explicitly queer friendly counsellor with an understanding of queer issues, be they around gender or sexuality. Trained counsellors are needed not just for queer PAGFB but also for their parents and families, and not just for adults but also in educational institutes, since much of the conflict around issues of sexuality and gender starts emerging fairly early in people's lives.

The same holds true for medical health care. When, where, and how to access such services are burning questions for PAGFB. Many respondents said they did not visit doctors even for minor ailments. This is especially true for gender non-conforming persons. As Arun says, "Going to a doctor is another irritable thing. They look you up and down and ask questions. I am ill and have come for help and it is your duty to look at that problem and not talk about morality or talk about my clothes etc." Not just doctors, but technicians, nurses, and other staff also ask questions and make comments, so that accessing health care of any kind becomes extremely fraught. Hospitalization brings up an even more difficult set of issues, where in female wards – the only choice available to PAGFB at this point – they also have to deal with questions and insults from other patients and their relatives.

Neither trans nor intersex issues are understood at all. One intersex respondent, who went to a hospital to get a certificate saying his gender was male so that he could apply for jobs as a man, underwent severe trauma at the hands of the medical team and students there who examined him for fifteen days and then almost refused him the certificate.

The situation is worse for persons who want medical interventions for their body. There is meagre knowledge on interventions and their effects, and no accurate or readily available information. Add to this the routine pathologization of persons and their bodies and feelings, which further marginalizes those who do not conform.

Many respondents also shared their discomfort, in terms of both gender and sexuality, with visiting a gynaecologist. The assumed heterosexuality, and questions to do with marital status, are difficult to address, especially when one senses that the immediate response could be homophobic. As Jamuna says,

> The only thing is that they never ask you if you are sexually active. They only ask if you are married and then they assume that you don't have sex. So now I have started telling them that I am not married but I am sexually active. The next level is whether to tell that I am not having only heterosexual sex but also different kinds of sex which should change the way you should look at my body. It is a constant hassle. Especially, if one is changing cities. One is never sure whether or not to say it. It is not easy to walk into a hospital and say that I am having homo sex. And half the time I don't end up taking care of possible infections because I don't want to go through this hassle and possible homophobia.

In the short term, a data bank of queer-friendly medical and mental health professionals should be compiled in as many places as possible. This sharing of resources is being done at

small local levels, but needs to be done much more effectively within communities. Queer groups along with groups who work in the health arena should run sensitization campaigns for medical and mental health practitioners. The overarching intervention would be to change the medical and mental health syllabi so as to include issues of gender, the body and sexuality. While HIV/AIDS and MSM health issues have come under the states' scanner and services may be available at public hospitals, the health issues of queer PAGFB are quite invisible to the state.

4.6 Public versus private space

Access to public spaces is rather limited for most PAGFB, especially while growing up, and so their connection and comfort with them later varies, dependent on factors like class, access, and mobility. Many respondents felt most comfortable meeting friends in homes and other private spaces, though some liked the relatively non-interfering atmosphere of places like coffee shops. Also, the strict gender segregation in our society allows for intimate friendships between people of the same gender, and these do not by themselves come under much scrutiny in public, unless gender transgression visibilizes them in unsafe ways. Transgressions of sexuality norms come in for much more censure in private and familial domains. The attacks in these private spaces do spill over sometimes into the somewhat public spaces of school and work. Unlike PAGMB, who access sexual relationships in the public realm and hence are subject to a lot more violence, especially from the police, PAGFB face police violence mainly when their families seek direct intervention from the state.

In the public sphere, vulnerability is more acute when there is transgression of gender norms. In rural and semi-urban areas, the norms around dress and assigned roles are so rigid that it is extremely difficult for anyone to transgress them without severe repercussions. Chhaya, 41, speaks of how she can never break some codes where she lives:

> In the village we only wear sarees. Ideally, I would like to wear pant and shirt. But I can't wear that in the village. I would like to wear men's clothes but not possible in the village. Having lived in the village all my life and worn sarees, it is hard to imagine what I would look like if not in a saree. And I would have short hair if I had a choice. I would have smoked and drunk more freely. Once S and me tried to smoke inside the house but people from outside wondered about the smell. So we stopped and haven't done it again. Sometimes I feel like leaving the village and coming to the city with S.

In such places, then, visible transgressions in public spaces lead to more attack and censure. However, in large urban centres, the norms, especially around dress codes, are somewhat more relaxed for PAGFB than for PAGMB. Thus, the nearest big city becomes a desirable refuge for many PAGFB.

Gender-segregated public spaces, however, remain the most contested and difficult to negotiate, even in urban centres, most notably public toilets, reserved seats in buses, train compartments, security checks in malls, airports, or anywhere else. Respondents shared their experiences of using public toilets as well as their thoughts on an ideal public toilet system. Some individuals do not use public toilets at all. As Prem testifies, s/he is scared of using a public toilet as two PAGFB friends were publicly beaten in the course of using a women's public toilet. Some PAGFB feel comfortable using the women's toilet when they are

accompanied by an individual who can pass as woman. However, woman-identified PAGFB in the study have also spoken of being challenged while using women's toilets. Priya says, "I might be mistaken for a boy sometimes, but I just turn around, look at the person, and they figure that I am a girl." Other individuals use smiles, clothes, or their voice to enable them to use women's toilets with more ease.

Using men's toilets is also a viable option for a few respondents. However, if the toilet has only urinals, it is problematic. Kartik says, "I always go to the gents' toilet, if there is only urinal, I will not go. I will control myself." For those who have the privilege of being able to access restaurants and other such spaces, there are often unisex toilets where no questions are asked and a degree of cleanliness is maintained. For others, it is a constant decision to be made. Sunny says, "I sometimes hesitate wondering which loo I will feel like going to today, I see how people react and make my choice accordingly."

Since public toilets can be problematic for individuals across a range of gender identities, some respondents believe that it would be best to include toilets for transpersons along with toilets for men and women. However, there are concerns of being outed or being singled out as a transperson. Safety concerns for women, and considerations of hygiene, were paramount for individuals wondering whether having common toilets would work. A few respondents suggested having unisex toilets with the proviso that they contain only private cubicles with doors.

The issue of public toilets is a tough one to tackle. At one level, as one respondent said, the issue is about something without categories but the solution is being sought in terms of categories. As s/he points out, such categorization serves only to emphasize gender while possibly marginalizing individuals who are already on the boundaries of gender.

4.7. Queer groups

Some stories can be shared today only because some individuals found queer support groups through sheer serendipitous chance. The most astounding parts of several narratives were about the ways in which people got in touch with others like themselves, particularly groups and organizations. Learning about a group through a magazine that they accidentally came across, finding an article in an old newspaper lining a cupboard shelf at a time of utmost depression, meeting that one odd person from amongst acquaintances and family who can open up a new world for you, having a teacher who nudges you in the most needed direction – all this followed by those anxious phone calls made to strangers, sometimes speaking in unknown languages, yet making one feel at home despite these inherent difficulties.

There is one uncanny story of a runaway couple travelling up and down on a long distance train for days on end, and being given a phone number by a member of a LBT group who was also on the same train and recognized the situation, even though the couple in question denied it. Another respondent who identified as male spoke of wandering the streets of a city with no specific plan after being forced to run away from home. He says that he saw someone who looked like him and started running in the opposite direction, but was followed by this person and brought to the space that has been a haven since. Yet others spoke of the help that they got because groups made the effort to reach out to them when they were outed by the media, and came just in time to help in really difficult situations vis-à-vis the police and families.

All this points to two very pressing needs – one, for more queer groups and/or queer-friendly groups, and for a greater effort at outreach initiatives. The need for outreach is possibly greater for smaller cities and towns, for rural areas, and people who do not have access to mainstream/English language media. As Aditi explains, "I have seen that there are many lesbians even in the rural area. But they have problems of meeting each other … Main problem for girls when they come out is shelter – where will they stay." Secondly, there is a critical need for a shelter for people in crisis. One respondent from a non-urban background recounts how he and his partner were forced to live on the streets for a while, forcing him to stay awake nights to ensure their safety.

There is a lack of spaces where queer PAGFB can drop in to organize, meet community, make friends, and find and use support. Such infrastructure is essential, but there is a need for many more initiatives. Some of the other needs articulated by PAGFB are education, livelihood opportunities, vocational training, and support groups for bisexuals as well as individuals who are single.

The experiences of PAGFB, irrespective of their gender identification, point to the fact that support at various levels is necessary. Conversations and discussions with group members indicate their awareness of these needs. The anguish is about not being able to do enough and the extremely difficulty of providing for the all-round support that so many persons need, especially when they do not have any support from their families.

4.8. Legal campaigns

The state machinery has helped sometimes, because the story they encounter is of adult persons wanting to run away from home and live either by themselves or with another person of the same assigned gender, a perfectly legal proposition. But most often the individuals acting on behalf of the state have the same opinions as the families of the PAGFB, and they are willing to help the family assert control. Now with the Delhi High Court reading down Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code in 2009, the state has been forced to take a basic step towards legal justice for queer individuals.[33] Yet, as our respondents and others from the LBT groups said, this is just not enough. Even for accessing basic citizenship rights, legal safeguards such as anti-discrimination laws need to be put in place.

And there is much more that needs to be done. On being asked about their expectations from the legal system, respondents spoke about a wide swathe of issues. Apart from basic citizenship rights, many people spoke out in favour of legalized partnerships versus same-sex marriages. Aditi, identifying as woman, states, "I don't want marriage because marriage means bondage. Each one should live the way they want and with whomever they wish to." For many people, a civil partnership is important because it allows access to the same rights that heterosexual couples enjoy, such as property rights, the right to a joint bank account, the right to make medical decisions for your partner, and the right to write a partner into a will.

Then there were specific demands around individuals' gender identities as well. Male-identified Anand asserts, "Documents should have the mental gender, not the physical. Then life would be so easy." Another respondent says, "In the gender category there should be an extra category called 'others' so that those who do not identify as male/female have this

[33] Section 377 of the Indian penal code contained a criminalization of sodomy.

facility." To have legitimate identity papers in the gender of your choice is imperative for achieving full citizenship rights.

Divakar, who is intersex, wants "Equal rights with no discrimination like for everyone else. Separate platform for intersex people for their political, social and religious rights. Want separate reservation of 1% for intersex people." The list of legal demands also included a complete overhaul of the constitution, changes in labour laws, rights for commercial sex workers, and rights for single parents. Chandni sums it up, "Expectations from legal system – protection of my rights. All kinds of rights. The right not to be discriminated against, right to privacy, right to fairness in the system. The entire gamut of things – justice."

5. Gender: Breaking the binary

Our interviews have helped us to see the multiple ways in which PAGFB name their genders, and give us a sense of how this naming is arrived at. Looking at life narratives has also helped us identify the ways in which lived gender is made to match with the gender one ascribes to oneself, or how lived realities are altered to achieve a balance between the genders one names, expresses, and lives.

Here we are borrowing from the terms for the social construction of gender and its components followed by Suzanne Kessler and Wendy Mckenna (1978). We have not included *gender assignment* (one of the terms used by them) because our respondents comprised only PAGFB, and we have added a new term, *gender journey*. The other terms have been specifically interpreted as given below.

- **Gender identity** is what people use for their own gender. Though this is influenced by the world around, they are trying to construct their own identities within the existing structures. The term refers to people's own individual negotiation with naming themselves while negotiating the prescriptions and ascriptions of society.

- **Gender expression** means the things a person does, in terms of appearance, behaviour, and other means available, to express their gender or, as happens in some instances, to hide it. This aspect is most crucial in the public domain, although its base is laid and largely resides in the very personal as well. It is also considerably mediated by the prevailing scripts and norms of society.

- **Gender attribution** is how others perceive a person and assign a gender to them which influences the way people deal with each other. Here, there is an interplay between the gender society assigns, or reads through its norms, and its intolerance of the breaking of these norms. The more prescriptive the society about its gender assignations, the more violent and rejecting can be its attribution.

- **Gender roles** are collections of factors which answer the question, "How do I need to function so that society perceives me as belonging or not belonging to a specific gender?" In other words, positions and actions specific to a given gender as defined by a culture. These expand the notion of gender into the very personal space as well, so that interactions within the family and in intimate relationships may be as gendered as they are in the public sphere.

- **Gender journeys** are where we talk about the modifications and changes in people's gender identities, expressions and/or understanding through the course of their lives. These exemplify the fact that gender need not be a static construct in an individual's life; it often shifts, facilitated and/or impacted by various factors.

5.1. Gender identity

In the first part of our questionnaire, we had a question on the current gender identification of our respondents. Their answers were very varied, and we have discussed these in brief in chapter 3.9 (see Chart 6). As we said there, we clubbed together all those who clearly said that they identified as 'man' or 'male' under 'man', those that said they were 'woman' or 'female' under 'woman', and put all others with variations on these under the category 'other'. Of our 49 respondents, then, 10 identified as 'man', 21 as 'woman' and 18 as 'other'. Even for 'woman', people often had individual descriptors. The table below shows the various answers given.

Man	**Other**
Man	Confused
Boy	Shifting from female to male
Male	Confused and variable
Male (but use FTM for others to understand)	Gender queer
	Androgynous female
	FTM
	Do not articulate
Woman	Between transgender and lesbian
Woman	Other
Bisexual woman	Androgynous
Woman with a difference	50% male 50% female
Girl	Man but have come to terms with socially being seen as a woman
Female	Transgender
	Think as woman but am not sure
	Woman from outside but not fully a woman
	Fluid woman

Table 5: Gender identity of respondents

Several had long narrative answers to the question. As Monu says, "To talk about my current identification I will have to tell my story from the beginning. I would like to begin from the time when I was very young." Such narrations made us aware of the routes that individuals had traversed in arriving at their current gender identification. These showed the shifting nature of gender in individual lives, and also how lived realities allowed for a lot of porosity and movement around gender.

As the interviews progressed, it also became clear that, even when people used the same terms to describe themselves, the meanings these had and the ways in which people actually lived these were considerably varied. Even 'man' or 'woman', which are the available gender categories, often meant very different things. This points to the number of ways in which gender is constructed by individuals, sometimes rewriting societal norms, at other times just tweaking them a bit, and at others following them in a prescriptive sort of way.

For some people their personal sense of gender makes fitting into stereotypical gender norms either very easy or very difficult. For others, however, this innate sense is itself nuanced in ways that makes the struggle between the assigned and the lived gender fairly complex.

This sense of gender and its expression is often very individual and nuanced, while usually the only language available for articulation is the normative one. So, it is important that we pay minute attention to what respondents have said and understand it in their specific contexts. It is important not to read heteronormativity into these articulations, which need to be read with an awareness of their inherent dissonance.

5.2. Gender expression

The outward articulation of gender can be seen in both the public and private spheres. For this study, we had a set of questions on physical appearance, for example, around clothes, hair and body. Respondents expressed their gender through clothes, hair, interactions with partners, at work or through their hobbies or interests. Some questions that were exciting to explore were: When and how do people find the space to wear the clothes they want to wear, or the haircut they want to sport? Do people ever shift from these notions? If yes, how and why does that shift happen?

Many of our respondents had to fight to wear pants or shorts and shirts because such acts transgress a gender boundary. Respondents across gender identities have gone through such experiences. This struggle to wear the preferred clothes has been fought right from childhood for many. Others were allowed to wear clothes of their choice until they experienced puberty. The codes around hair tend to be as rigidly defined. It is a cultural compulsion for girls to have long hair. The atmosphere in schools is often claustrophobic, as there are rules around hair length, footwear, and clothes.

Hence, for most individuals who have managed to circumvent the norms, there are enabling factors that give them the license to wear the clothes they please, keep the hair length they prefer, or occupy the space that they want to occupy.

For many people, the only way to wear clothes of their choice or have haircuts that they liked was to achieve autonomy. For some this meant running away from home, while for others it was actual economic independence. 23-year-old Sam**,** who identifies as man, was suspended from school because his affair with another girl in the school was made public through a complaint by the girl's father. After this, his mother made sure that he behaved exactly like the 'good girl' she wanted him to be.

When he rejoined school, the restrictions were too many. Besides, there was the humiliation of facing old friends who teased him and did not want to be friends with him any more. And so he left home. The only way that Sam could wear pants and shirts was to leave home and live on the streets.

It is not only persons identifying as men who faced opposition to their wearing clothes of their choice. One of our respondents, Laxmi, a 25-year-old from a semi-urban area who identifies as woman, could only wear the clothes her mother purchased, which meant wearing a dress, skirt or sari. Eventually, both Laxmi and her partner ended up in a city. This move to an urban area was an enabling factor. "I have the freedom to dress in jeans. First I had to wear what my mother bought but now I can wear anything."

Some people's freedom to express their gender identities lies in becoming economically independent. Take the story recounted by 33-year-old Saumya. She comes from a devout Jain

family and grew up in a city. In her childhood she had access to her brother's clothes and wore them instead of her frocks. This preference continued as she grew older. But in college she wore salwar-kameez. She did not like such clothes but was compelled to dress like that. Saumya started wearing the pants and jeans she preferred only after leaving college and starting to work. The economic separation from her family allowed her to stand up and claim her preference.

The idea of needing to look a certain way in a public space is a compelling norm for many. Professional clothing codes have been problematic for some, empowering for others**.** Jharna, 44, has over the years acquired her own style of dressing, which is a good mix of what she likes and feels comfortable in for the kind of work that she does. Jharna has faced many comments for such breaking of norms. A colleague who saw her dressed in a kurta at a poetry reading said, "'You wear neither men's clothes nor women's.' I told her I wear what I feel like, how does it matter to you?" Not only did she ignore the way that she was expected to dress, as a woman, she has a strong critique of the sari which, she says, is an attire that makes women dependent. "Can't jump or run – and you know how they show in films – what a dress, that someone can pull off!"

Roma could not wear the clothes she preferred due to a different situation. She is 29 and woman-identified but not very comfortable in very feminine clothes.

> As a kid I was wearing trousers, shorts, and pants almost all the time and shirts and T-shirts. Back then I was thinner and my parents were the ones to buy these clothes for me. Until, in late adolescence, I became fat, and PCOS was diagnosed … Till a year ago I wasn't allowed to wear jeans because my mother and aunt felt I was too fat. They said that I look like a hippo and my bulges show.

She later lost weight and started wearing pants again.

Kamal's gender expression was enabled in an ironic fashion. Now 25, and disabled from the age of 6, he says he was marginalized in five ways – "born a girl child, belonging to a Scheduled Tribe, disabled, alienated from family/community, and FTM in terms of gender." The problem behaviour had to do with his saying that he wanted to wear pants and shirt like boys, while his parents wanted him to wear dresses and "behave like a girl". When his mother made him wear bangles, he would break them. Eventually he got his way only because boys' clothes were more convenient, given his disability. Even then, it was a constant battle.

Quite a few of our respondents have stories to tell around restrictions with regard to hair. Anand, 25, who grew up in a semi-urban area, recounts, "I had hair till my lower back – my dad wouldn't let me cut it, he used to say (even when I was 5 or 6) that he liked long hair, I'd say then you grow yours, why do you want me to? After that nobody asked, but then the day I left … khach khach khach khach!" In fact the very first thing many persons did after leaving home was to cut their hair short. Even in times of acute crisis, in the midst of running away, individuals have gone and had their hair cut!

5.2.1. In sexual play

Bhargavi, 29, got support from unexpected quarters. S/he identifies as shifting from female to male, and was comfortable with hirself until puberty. Bhargavi did not like the changes in hir body. S/he was also made to wear conventional girls' clothes. At a young age, when hir relationship with a woman was discovered, s/he was forced to get married to a man. S/he did not feel comfortable with him and did not want to be touched by him, but then s/he discovered a bond. "I liked cross dressing and so did he and we came close to each other. I started liking him."

Playing with gender expression is difficult, and the privileges of location and class may be crucial enablers for it to happen. However, it is often very important for some to create a space for play. Whether it is in bed or on the streets, this playfulness is vital for Meghna, 30, who identifies as androgynous:

> Some days I feel that I have to change my clothes seven times. Some days nothing feels right, you just feel your gender is off. You cannot understand your own gender … hair is too long, too short, and those days are miserable and I am complaining to my friends that my gender does not feel right today. … I feel if I have more opportunities to fancy dress I would feel even happier. That if we could play out weird kind of genders in the mainstream and look crazy then I would feel as if I have given vent. … I have a lot of personal identification somehow with the phallus. It is not that I want a real penis but in my fantasy I definitely can easily completely align myself with a bio-man.

Meghna's example indicates the many arenas in which people push boundaries through visibilizing gender transgressions. A majority of the people we spoke to, irrespective of their gender identification – other, woman, or man – recounted stories of their gender expression in which, more often than not, societal mores and norms did get challenged.

5.3. Gender attribution

Gender expression that enables a person to be hirself is one part of the story. The other part lies in making others perceive and read your gender in the way you want it to be read. Every society has its scripts for the ways in which people of a certain assigned gender, age, body appearance etc., are allowed to express themselves. Also built into societal norms is the amount of transgression that is allowed, and to whom and in what situations. Gender attribution is hence very varied, and works differently for different people. As a result, gender expression always needs to be seen in conjunction with its perception and attribution by others, especially in public places.

The class you belong to automatically controls the spaces that you can access and the ways in which you are allowed to behave in them. PAGFB with greater societal privileges – of class, caste, or religion – are often more easily able to wear clothes and sport appearances which may not be very 'woman-like'.[34] In fact, some amount of breaking of norms is, within limits, approved and even encouraged.

[34] For those assigned the male gender at birth, however, the space for transgression in terms of dress and hair is more challenged. The reasons for this are many, and will be discussed elsewhere in this report.

5.3.1 Being ‘men’

For those respondents in our study who identified as man, there was a certain enhanced notion of expressing maleness through dress and other factors to do with external appearance. Most were happy when strangers or others around them recognised them as boys or men, or whenever they were able to pass with their ‘male’ behaviour and appearance. Rahul, who is 22, recalls, “There was also this party – I was dancing away. These gay men started dancing with me. I told them I am not a gay man, I am an FTM trans person, but they wouldn't believe me! It makes me feel good!”

People go to great lengths to be perceived as they want to be. And many times they do pass. So, the question people ask them is not about why they are behaving like men; the situation is that of being seen as a man and then being questioned about why you are not behaving like one. Karthik’s story shows this clearly.

Karthik, 25, has worked in construction all his life, starting with breaking stones in a quarry alongside his mother at the age of nine. Today, he is a site supervisor and earns money as a truck cleaner when construction work is slack. “At work I am aware that all around they think I am a man. I try to make my voice deep and strong.” But people do notice that some of his habits are unusual – “All boys change clothes before starting work, and bathe and change clothes after work. The women who are working say, ‘Why are you not changing your clothes, even when you are sweating you do not change your clothes? Are you a real man?’

When the passing is so complete that the officially assigned gender itself gets changed, then the story becomes more complex. On the one hand, there is a satisfaction in getting a document with the male gender mentioned on it because of the perception of the people issuing it to you; on the other, there is the constant fear of discovery.

Sunny, 27, who has always worn pants and had short hair, says that he got all his documents made in the male gender:

> All the papers had been ticked male just by looking at my face. So far all my documents have been ticked as male, PAN card male, passport male, voting ID. I was even pulled up for having a male passport for 10 years. … There was a time when I was happy that they would tick ‘male’ in my forms, but my mother has been so harassed and so much money was being spent on changing it again and again, that I have stopped feeling happy; now I just make sure they tick ‘female’.

However, Sumit (shortened from Sumita) used this mistake of the bureaucracy to hir advantage. S/he recounts hir tryst with officials.

> The voter card is another story. I first got my card as a male because they looked at my photo and decided I was male. This was causing trouble to me in the bank and elsewhere so I asked for a correction in the card. They were not doing that, so I just reported that card as missing and got a new one made. So now I have a card with each gender.

Murali**,** who identifies as FTM, and hir girlfriend have rented a house together. Everyone around sees them as a heterosexual couple. But situations do not always allow people to bluff or fight their way through. The constant questioning when they access spaces that are segregated along gender lines, as in airports, or entrances to malls where gender-segregated

checking of individuals happens, or public toilets and other spaces reserved for women, makes them quite frustrated with the constant humiliation and violence.

As Ujwala, 45, says,

> Just looking different is such a difficult thing that you have to live with. When you know that you are not going to pass. When you know that you are not going to be woman enough because you are not curvy enough or not pass as a man because you are not hairy enough. So it is a very difficult terrain when you are caught in between and you have to answer questions on practically everything.

People traverse this terrain using various strategies for avoiding any awkward or humiliating experiences. Sandy, who is 34 and prefers the category 'other' to that of 'woman' for hirself, says,

> I hate malls because you have to go through the body check at the entrance and that is always a tense moment. At the airport, I have a uniform and wear a tight T-shirt where the boob outline cannot be missed. … This last flight back, the lady cop at the airport poked my breast with the body scanner and asked, 'Are you sure you are a woman?'

The assumptions that people make also extend to voice and manner of speaking. Many participants spoke of how they dealt with the apparent mismatch between their voice and their perceived genders. Some did not speak in public if they wanted to pass as male, others used their 'feminine' voices to pass with ease in women-only spaces like public loos, and yet others had to deal with the annoyance of being mistaken for a man when people thought they heard a 'male' voice on the phone.

In extremely gender-segregated places, even those who are perceived as either man or woman have very many different kinds of negotiations to do. Things get a bit aggravated in women-only spaces where people live together because, at one level, the separation of the genders is based on the perceived similarity of certain bodies and on their differences with other bodies. Thus, a body that is not keeping with the norm may seem threatening and out of the ordinary, even when the person's gender does not seem transgressive.

Sandhya, 24, who has an intersex condition, says that s/he thinks hir gender is woman but is not sure because of hir body and its difference. S/he speaks of the fear s/he had that other people might notice these differences when s/he lived in a women's hostel:

> When I was in the first year there were 40 of us sharing one single bathroom. So I would get up at 4 am or so and finish my bath with cold water before anyone else got up and saw me. I would be scared, what if someone sees, notices my different body, then I will lose my seat in the college and education.

The fear is not unfounded. In fact, women-only spaces have also been fairly violent towards many people who are perceived to transgress gender boundaries. Several people responded to our questions with stories of violence and expressions of fear around travelling in women's compartments and accessing women's toilets.

40-year-old Alex, who says that hir gender is between lesbian and transgender, talks about hir experience of using public toilets.

> I never had any difficulty to use the men's loo, For the last four-five years because of the changes that have started coming in my body, I began to feel the need to go to the women's loos. But it's very difficult, I get stared at by everyone, … I have had women screaming at me, 'This is a women's toilet!' and I have to yell back, 'Can't you see that I am not a guy?'

Juhi, 32, speaks of gender-segregated spaces and hir discomfort with them, with particular reference to beauty parlours.

> So, when you have all these women who are doing waxing and bleaching around you, you are thinking that these women don't know who I am. I'm not supposed to be looking at them, why the hell are they like this and why the hell am I here. I can't be here! That I remember was a distinctly uncomfortable thing while growing up.

Transgressing the norms of both gender and sexuality makes the territory more difficult to traverse and often more violent. Nidhi, 20, identifies as neither man nor woman. Although s/he is often mistaken for a man by strangers (an assumption s/he always challenges), there are also times when people realize s/he is biologically female and "yet they say I am a boy, to trouble me." S/he is more troubled by strangers when s/he is with hir partner, "From public in general we have to bear a lot. They say dirty things – 'Ladke ka kami ho gaya kya ki ladki saath saath hai?' [Is there such a dearth of boys that two girls are together?] or 'Come and sleep with me.'"

5.3.2. Dealing with it

It is such experiences, and the need to negotiate public spaces without constant discomfort, that makes some people alter their gender expression in a more permanent or semi-transparent sort of way, be it growing hair or wearing something that is ambivalent in its gender presentation.

Aditi, 25, has been working as a police officer for five years. In the beginning she liked it a lot; she especially liked the fact that she could wear pants and shirts – the uniform was a major attraction. But over time, it has become a problem. "People call you names, 'she is not interested in marriage so she must be a lesbian.' … hence they torture you to marry. My feelings are the same but I am trying to change myself at least superficially so that I look a little 'normal' in public." Aditi now wears kurtas and has grown her hair a bit. She is waiting to be able to leave the police force and start her own gym. She hopes in this way to escape the constant comments and questions about marriage and be able to wear her clothes and hair as she pleases.

So for Aditi it is very clear that the transformation is for a short period and then she will get back to her chosen attire and hairstyle. But things are not as simple for everyone. Slowly the counter culture also begins, subtly or overtly, to evolve its own trends and impose its own norms. In a space where there are many people who call themselves 'men' or 'FTM' or 'butch' or some such, there also starts emerging a dress code to enable such identification.

Prem, 27, says s/he is confused about hir gender, although when people ask if s/he's a man or woman s/he says s/he is FTM. After trying to conform to the generic FTM look sported by others in the support group s/he is part of, s/he has recently let hir hair grow a little, and would like to wear more conventionally feminine clothing sometimes, but is shy to experiment because s/he feels that may be going against the FTM norm and causing comment.

5.4. Gender roles

In a segregated, patriarchal, heteronormative society, gender roles are well-defined and strict adherence to them is the base on which the whole edifice is maintained. So, the complex interplay of gender expression and gender attribution gets more complicated in intimate relationships, where prescribed gender roles get rewritten, recast, and/or reconstructed. Personal battles extend from the outside (such as what kind of work you can do and how you will be treated in that sphere) to the very intimate and personal space of an intimate sexual relationship.

These roles, expectedly, also partially depend upon the class to which the respondents belong or the circumstances within which they live. Several persons are forced to do certain domestic chores while growing up, or later, though they may not want to; others from more middle class or upper class circumstances have the resources to employ people to do the same work. Often, urban families might employ house help and so some children escape housework, while some others in rural areas might be able to escape housework as they might have sisters who do the work. Similarly, an only child or the eldest child often has to take on responsibilities within their families that others may not have to. Stories of having or not having to do housework cut across the gender identities of our respondents.

Kavi, 32, identifies as woman and grew up with two older brothers. "There was no work in the house for me. …. I preferred to work outside the house, with the water tank, clean the outside. I hated cooking. …. Even nowadays, my mother does the cooking. If my partner and I live together, who will cook? Neither of us likes cooking. But we share tasks."

Very often we came across narratives where the natal family, extended family, and sometimes even persons in the neighbourhood, had been tolerant, if not downright supportive, of gender transgression. These narratives were as true of urban areas as of rural, especially in the early years of our respondents' lives.

Coming from a daily wage-earning family, Murali is now 32 and settled in the city to which s/he migrated because hir gender and sexuality were not accepted in hir village. Murali identifies as FTM. Being the youngest sibling, s/he was not expected to do any housework. Hir elder sisters did it all. S/he spent time with hir father and felt comfortable doing male work.

Narratives of acceptance of gender transgression are often coupled with the family's dependence on the transgressive individual. In a socio-cultural environment where the roles of the sons and daughters of the family are very clearly defined, gender transgressive 'daughters' are often treated like sons, to some degree. But this does not necessarily translate into support for the life choices this very 'son' might make, especially around sexuality and relationships. A disavowal of heterosexual marriage might not be troublesome, but a relationship with a woman is often quite unacceptable.

Monu grew up thinking of hirself as a boy. All of hir friends were boys and s/he never took part in games like playing house, which were only for girls. Hir father, who was very affirmative of Monu's gender identity, taking hir on market excursions or seeking hir opinions on important matters, even though he had another, biological son. After hir father died, Monu took responsibility for the family, got hir sisters married, and took care of the paperwork and taxes. S/he began to hand over hir entire salary to hir mother and economically supported the family. Hir father had been so attached to hir that family members asked Monu to perform the *shraddh*, a traditionally male task, at hir father's death, despite hir having a younger brother.

The other positive affirmation in Monu's life came from hir partner. She and her family are very supportive of Monu. If anyone is offensive towards Monu in the public sphere, she challenges them. In terms of the family pressures that Monu faces, hir girlfriend has stood by hir. These vital supports in hir life have led Monu to challenge family pressure as well. S/he now tells hir brother to help out with the work outside the home. Monu also questions hir mother, who does not acknowledge hir relationship except tangentially and darkly, "When I get angry with my mother I tell her that I have done enough, now I will not do anything. I am a girl so why should I do all this. You very conveniently make me a girl when it suits you and then a boy. Why should I do all this if you want me to be a girl?"

For other respondents, family acceptance for their gender identity has come, but with a struggle. In some cases it has taken periods of estrangement or drastic steps before this could happen. But when it has, families have even included their 'sons' in rituals or customs ordinarily reserved for the men of the family. As with Monu's performing the *shraddh*, rituals do seem to be another marker of familial acceptance of gender.

Sunny, who is from an upper class urban family, sees hirself as transgender and as "50% male 50% female". Hir family has accepted hir as the man of the house, and in hir mind, too that is the role s/he plays. For Diwali s/he does the *puja* which, in their family, only the male members are supposed to do.

Kamal grew up in a middle class farming family. He and his partner had to elope since there was immense pressure on the partner to marry. Interestingly, when Kamal recently reconciled with his family, they had the couple married according to tradition, with Kamal performing the rituals prescribed for husbands, and his partner doing the rituals for wives.

5.4.1. Scripting intimate relationships

Gender roles in intimate relationships weave themselves into people's lives in complex ways that are often difficult to classify. Sometimes this is restricting and sometimes it is these very gendered equations that are desired. But it is not very fruitful to see these as normative; our very lives and realities imbue them with dissonance, even while they might seem pat.

One of Anand's relationships was especially affirmative of his gender, as he fondly recalls – "around the house, minor plumbing jobs would come to me and cooking was her thing, making the bed was her thing – I used to help of course. All these things were unsaid. Buying stuff from the market was my thing." He was happy to help around the house, except for cooking, as he has a strong aversion to this gendered task.

In terms of a future relationship and living arrangements, Anand says, "My dream is to get married the right way – *ghodi, phera, saali joote churaati hai,* I want all of it." He says that he wants to be the stereotypical male, "the nice husband, the perfect father." For example, he wouldn't have a problem if his wife wanted to work, adding, "If she's the home-home type I'll never get attracted to her." Anand says that if they chose to adopt a kid, he would not be the one to take a break from his career. Would he expect her to, then? "I won't take the break – we'll not have the baby then. If she really wants to work I won't stop her but then we won't have the baby." He imagines a partner who would be free to refuse him anything. So, for Anand, an open-minded, non-interfering, caring husband fits the mould of 'stereotypical'!

While Anand may be redefining the 'stereotypical man' in his feminist fashion, not all enjoy such an equal equation.

Priya, 27, never had to do any housework. She was always a tomboy and never a girlie girl. She was living independently and earning very well, when she started living with her second girlfriend, and that was when she really encountered overt gender conflict. Although they had a cook and a maid, and Priya was working long hours at her job, she was expected to play a wifely role:

> My ex-girlfriend considers herself butch, I was the girl/wife in the relationship. As I didn't do much work around the house, she was sorely disappointed. … She would call my family names, monitor where and with whom I was going out, stopped me from talking to a male friend. She at various points was physically abusive, and it kept on increasing. She wasn't very different from my father. Once she threatened to rape me. That day I pushed her hard. It was extremely abusive emotionally.

Narrative after narrative reminds us that societal roles and norms are very clearly defined. Yet, within these parameters, each person is doing hir own negotiations and rewriting these scripts almost continuously.

Vimala, 31, identifies as woman, and is married to her PAGFB partner who self-identifies as man and does not call himself transgender. Vimala articulates her feminism, her relationship with her partner, and their mutual affirmations in a much nuanced manner. Her negotiations are not untroubled and her affirmation of her partner's gender is delicate:

> We did go through marriage. Because apart from considering himself a man, my partner used to be someone who abides by conventional societal man-woman relations, the customs and conventions associated with it, the powers related to it that society gives to men. Similarly he believed in marriage and wanted to marry his partner, and see ourselves as husband and wife. And sees himself as a husband. My politics has changed since then, and so I am now prepared to call him a partner, not a husband. But that is my matter, and not of the person I am with. He does not use the word partner, but wife, husband. He is still within that system…. I cannot see it as a marriage to a woman. That is the problem. But it is as though I am keeping things to myself, in a way cheating myself and telling the world that I married a man. I would still say that he is my husband and a male.

Even though this is clearly seen as a traditional marriage by Vimala's partner, he is the one who does all the housework. Their family and marriage also seem to follow many other democratic norms. As Vimala says,

> Decision making we do on a monthly basis. … But prior to taking a decision we do sit and share it out. And in these discussions, all my family, even my most youngest sibling participates. Everything, even our loves, is discussed in our place. We keep a meeting for everyone to come and share and discuss (laughter). That sort of a family we are, always discussing.

Vimala personally does not see the need for marriage. She clarifies that this is not because of the person she is married to, but just that she does not feel the need to be married even if her partner were a 'biological man'. "It is not to hurt the gender of the person. I accept him as he is and love him as he is." But understanding the complex nature of her partner's gender, Vimala sees her marriage to him:

> as a vehicle for filling it with love for him. For me wearing of the *thali (mangalsutra)* was to see happiness on my partner's face. Not to show the world. Using those symbols was to make him happy…. There are many things he may not get, as he is biologically not a man, so this is a space for me to attain for him those things he desires. If he had another lover, who fulfilled all these aspects for him, then maybe I would have stayed away from this. But since I am the only one with whom he has a relationship, I have to compromise a bit. Although I don't see it as a compromise. I am only very happy to do it for him.

Manjula faced a different kind of conflict in hir relationship. At 36, s/he says that s/he is confused about hir gender, though has never felt discomfort with being a 'woman'; in both gender expression and voice, s/he sees hirself in multiple ways. S/he speaks about the pain and confusion in her long-term relationship with a gender queer person, and the conflicts around gender within the relationship which get aggravated since both of them are fiercely political in their lives and work:

> With him I felt comfortable playing the roles of wife, mother, all the roles which I otherwise detested…. It is the way in which we played out roles in our life. I get up early and so always get his coffee to him like all wives do and he never does that for me. Again cooking also mostly I do. The moment we go home he would sit and order me and tell me to do this and that and it felt like he was being the husband. It was and even now it is comfortable but for a person who claims 'no gender, I do not like marriage', this did not seem like he was not playing the role. He argues, 'Why do you have to see this role as the wife's role?' Very simple answer to all this. My sense of comfort is that I really like doing it for him but I do see it as a wife's role. This automatically puts him in husband role, which he is not accepting.
>
> He assumes he is not being man or woman. I say, 'You can clearly see it.' He says, 'But you are making this association, if you do not make this association then you will not see it as male or female.' … I did not expect this. … A simple argument like 'do not make this association' does not work because there is a history to it.

Sandy also spoke of the negotiations around gender roles in hir relationships. In one relationship s/he felt much supported and there was the space to calm down; hir gender was naturally accepted and s/he did not feel challenged. But another relationship was very intensely gendered in many ways:

> In this other relationship I was very much the man and she was the woman. … To begin with, I liked it and I also did not challenge it. I was overtly male and she was

> overtly female. She would wear a sari and I would wear a proper suit and our courtship was very gendered too. … It was very fun and playful and great and then it became set, and when it became set it was fucked. The thing is that if you get into gender roles without problematizing them and thinking through the problems then you are setting yourself up for a lot of trouble.
>
> I used to go and work outside and once I came home I was also expected to do other things in the house, because she did not want to feel that she had to do the housework because I was being the man and going to work. She nagged me continuously about household chores. This was gender as convenience. … The problem is that at some point the feminist activist within you gets up and says bahut ho gaya. By then, though, some things have set in the relationship. … And then she gets up and says that she is a feminist and why should she take care of the house. … But now all the traditional arguments against men were being said against me.

Tuli talks about how, in each of her close friendships and relationships, she was almost forced to enact the role of a husband or boyfriend, and she took on those roles even when she did not herself want them. While she may have been a somewhat reluctant 'husband', she also seems to have liked many aspects of the role. Tuli herself fell into several patterns, and everyone around seemed to fall in easily with treating them accordingly. "I started giving half my earnings to my girlfriend and half to my mother. Even after my girlfriend started working, I was the one who always had to pay, in shops or among friends. She'd give me the money before we went out."

Tuli also has a relationship with a transgender woman who sees Tuli as her husband, while Tuli herself does not think of their attachment as a romantic/sexual relationship. But when the woman adopted a child, she asked Tuli to be the co-parent and Tuli officially adopted the boy. At that point, her parents, too, stepped in and "my mother came and did the rituals according to our customs just as usually it's done according to the father's family's customs. Even her mom was hesitant to let her do the woman's part of the rituals as she's a hijra, but my mother insisted." So Tuli spends part of her time with this family of hers – a 'wife', and a child for whom she is a father figure.

5.5. Gender journeys

> *Throughout my younger life, I have been coaxing out what I call 'inherent' gender, looking in the mirror and making changes till one is happy finally with what one sees, one is seeing an image that is pleasing to oneself. The tension is between creating the image that the world demands and the image that one wants. In that sense I view myself as having had to reconstruct the original. I am not sure what the age was when I got entirely comfortable. ... 20 is a good age as a reference point when the reconstructed image was complete, the process of removing the conditioning, the rules etc and finding what one likes. And even when one finds what one likes, it is a journey to allow oneself to like what one sees in that image. You are pleased by it but you are oppressed by the idea of it being wrong. And to then make that transition towards celebrating, and for me that celebration begins when you are happy with what you see, glad that the world is seeing it.* (Sandy, 34)

Some people keep fine-tuning their gender expression till they achieve what feels like consonance rather than dissonance with their gender identity; others may not have the enabling factors of class, or of other supportive circumstances, or affirmative relationships, and may feel the gap between self-image and reality more keenly. Some may be comfortable enough (or be allowed) to express their inner gender only in certain spaces and not in others. None of which is to suggest that gender identity itself is a static, given quality – the conversations with our 49 respondents show how it is both innate and constructed, and may be fairly fluid for one individual and relatively fixed for another.

Gender is often a process of discovery, even a work-in-progress, inflected and influenced by class and caste and education, negotiated through interactions with strangers and within intimate relationships, working its way around obstacles and redefining boundaries. It is both a point of departure and sometimes of arrival, which is why it makes sense to speak of it as a journey.

Some of these journeys resonate with each other; some are studies in contrast. Together, these resonances and differences have much to tell us about the individual, social, relational, sometimes provisional meanings of words like man, woman, daughter, son, lover, family, body, sex and, of course, gender.

5.6. Towards a porosity of gender boundaries

The largest sensitization campaign should call for an overarching change in structures, institutions, and interactions to reduce the impact of binary gender in our lives. Queer PAGFB question the binary in many different forms and fashions and their thoughts on gender are articulated from multiple positions. There is no uniformity to these articulations and these identities. For example, there are numerous ways in which people name their genders and take their identity. Even when people use the same term to refer to themselves, the meanings of these terms and their lived realities differ greatly. As we saw in the earlier, the very definition of masculinity and femininity is very richly and heavily nuanced in the articulations and lived realities of the respondents. Boundaries between categories are also being pushed, pulled, and squeezed, feeding off the energies of diverse genders. This means that there are already multiple movements from one gender category to another. Making it easier for people to move across, to straddle, or to claim varied gender identities, will reinforce the de-emphasis on gender, as well as ease a few concerns of gender-challenging individuals.

While the respondents spoke of these rich variations, their lives and narratives are also stunning records of almost continuous violence they faced in their homes, schools, colleges, public spaces, work places, from their communities, friends and strangers, at every transgression of the norm of gender and sexuality. This violently enforced gender norm must give way to a more egalitarian and voluntary system of gender. It needs to transform from a hierarchical discrete binary system to a porous, multiple gender system. Whether the world is more or less gendered, gender categories should be less rigid, strict prescriptions for a gender category should be relaxed. When the boundaries between categories themselves are blurred, the decrease in controls and rules will allow gender boundaries to become porous. This will allow individuals greater choice of moving across genders and also redefining the categories themselves.

This change will have to be wrought in both the short-term and the long-term in social structures, institutions and in private and public spaces. In the short-term, one practical example would be modifying the way gender-segregated spaces function. When people access spaces like malls or airports, where gender-segregated security checks are carried out, the gender boundaries are binary and very strict. Perhaps, allowing one the choice of choosing which line to be part of irrespective of gender presentation would be one way of reducing the importance given to gender.

In the long-term, it will require extensive awareness and sensitization campaigns. This change has a long term transformatory impact on the whole social structure itself. Whereas one may not be able eliminate categories, it is possible to reduce the need to explicitly define gender categories by removing hierarchies between genders. Hetero-patriarchal structures bestow privilege on cis-genders as well as establish pecking orders where gender is concerned. If there is to be ease of movement between categories, marginalization of genders must not be tolerated. The absence of privilege, and thus marginalization, could be instrumental in creating space for a better public-toilet system or free gender expression, whether it is at home, at school, from peers and colleagues.

6. Conclusion

Law, education, health, society, families. Airports, malls, toilets. Where are interventions *not* needed? It is hardly surprising that every area of life and every social structure needs to be looked at afresh when we speak up for the inclusion of any marginalized group and for its rights. Allies, then, become more crucial than ever. Vimala, one of our respondents who has worked for years with LBT support groups, puts it succintly:

> there should be a strategy to prevent this migration of LBT people. … As there is really no community here, as people are all living in secret all over the place. Also there should be public activities and campaigns to make this a right. Also means of a livelihood for people to survive, opportunities for work … And since we cannot do all of this ourselves, we should make the government, other agencies or other groups, other movements, do it for us.

It is in the very spaces and institutions that regulate our lives that we are most invisible or oppressed, most vulnerable and abused. We need to recognize every person's right to hir gender expression, child, adolescent or adult; we need a nation-wide campaign against forced marriage; we need a health system that has learnt to understand rather than pathologize. We need parents and siblings who went to schools and grew up in societies where they were taught to recognize and celebrate diversity – we need to go to such schools and move and breathe in such a world ourselves.

We need to push the state to act, and we need allies who will push hard with us, especially women's groups and movements. As we have seen, not every non-normative PAGFB makes it to a support group. Such groups are few to begin with, and their outreach and resources are limited. We in the queer movement need to have more conversations, then, with all those who work with PAGFB on issues ranging from health and livelihood to domestic violence, so that these activists are trained to recognize and to affirm individuals who challenge gender norms. We need our allies in the women's movements to help support non-normative individuals in fighting the policing and violence they routinely encounter simply because they are trying to be themselves and just because they are breaking an increasingly dysfunctional binary.

We need other queer groups to recognise the realities of PAGFB, their distinctness and particularities. We need to build a movement that takes into account the needs and issues of the marginalized among us and also build alliances with all who are marginalized. Our understanding of sexuality and gender has to come from recognizing the possibilities of transgression and performance. This understanding, however, shall be without an edge if it is not rooted as much in challenging power and patriarchy as engaging with the politics of the public and the private.

Appendix 1: Sections in the questionnaire

1. Personal History
2. Information About Family you Were Born in
3. Growing Up
4. Work
5. Migration
6. Public Space
7. Living Arrangements and Circles of Intimacy
8. Marriage
9. Religion and Beliefs
10. Gender Trajectory
11. Mental Health Issues etc.
12. Body
13. Medical System
14. Sex
15. Intimate Relationships
16. NGOs/Support Groups
17. The future
18. Contact Information

Appendix 2: Participant consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Breaking The Binary: Understanding concerns and realities of female assigned/born persons across a spectrum of lived gender identities

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lesbians And Bisexuals In Action (LABIA), a Bombay-based queer feminist collective. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

- **Purpose of the Study**

Our study seeks to understand the lives and experiences of those who have been assigned the female gender at birth but whose life trajectories reflect a constant tension with the binary definition of gender as just female or male. The aim of this study is to understand the lives of persons in gender locations marginalized by society as well as to articulate areas of concerns and interventions. We wish to embark on this study with the dual aim of visibility and of advocacy for those who occupy this vexed, largely ignored and much-misunderstood terrain.

- **Procedures**

The study will be conducted by members of LABIA. We will be talking to both groups and individuals in the course of this study. Participation will be completely voluntary and we will provide information in the language desired by you. This study will be conducted all over the country and we will approach as many groups as well as persons who may not be part of a group. Continuous informed consent, comfort and confidentiality would be integral to our doing this research.

The study will entail an interview which is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The interview will be conducted by two LABIA members. If need be, we will have translators for this interview with your consent. The interview may last up to 7 hours. The interview will be recorded on paper as well as using an audio recorder for accuracy.

After this interview, we may contact you once again for a follow-up interview. This would be qualitative in nature and would follow the same procedures as the earlier interview. All interviews will be conducted in a space that is confidential and safe as deemed by you.

- **Potential Risks and Discomforts**

All or parts of the interview may bring up thoughts, memories or feelings that may cause you discomfort.

- **Payment for Participation**

This study is by voluntary participation and participants will not receive any compensation. However, if you have to travel to reach the interview location, that amount will be reimbursed, in cash, by LABIA to you.

- **Confidentiality**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning alpha-numeric codes to the interviews, removing information that specifies names, places, people, institutions and organizations.

All data from this research study, including audio recordings will be kept with LABIA in a safe location where only LABIA members will have access to it. The study will be shared with the participants, both organisations and individuals, once the analysis is done and then finalized. Once final it will be shared freely electronically under creative commons agreements.

- **Participation and Withdrawal**

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact LABIA on 00-91-9833278171 and on email stree.sangam@gmail.com

I understand the procedures described above. I have read the introductory note to this study and have a copy. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

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Chapter 6

To support activism: Building communication among lesbian community in Surabaya

Prepared by:
Siti Mazdafiah
Gender and Health Study Club (GHSC)
University of Surabaya

Biography

Our research team includes:

1. **Siti Mazdafiah**, is myself, here as coordinator of the research. I have a background in literature and women's studies. Single parent with two children. Lesbian issues were not previously my focus of study, though the issue is not considered new for me since I took a women's studies program for my graduate degree. My previous interest is in motherhood and literature.

2. **Dian Lestariningsih (DL)**, is as the field organizer for this research. She was previously working for Ausaid Jogja as program officer. She has a lot of experience in community organizing. I asked her to help GHSC in this program and share her knowledge about community organizing. Dian Lestariningsih is a journalist and freelance photographer as well.

3. **Wulan Widaningrum,** is currently completing her professional degree in Psychology at Surabaya University. She is the youngest among GHSC members. Wulan has always been available as a friend for community members to share their stories with and to provide a shoulder to cry on. She is now becoming a counselor to the newly formed group Dipayoni dedicated to activism.

4. **NK Endah Triwijati,** is a psychologist, lecturer, activist, and researcher. She has been working in the issues of sexuality for years, knowing a lot about the history and activism of lesbianism in Indonesia. But, unfortunately she could not participate in all activities we held due to taking a ph.D. program in Jogja, about 7-hours driving from Surabaya.

5. **Ayuni**, is a labour activist, psychologist, and lecturer at Surabaya University. She has considerable experience working in labour issues and activism and engaging with non-government-organizations on issues of labour.

6. **Dian Yulia Arianti (DY),** has an undergraduate degree in chemical engineering from the prominent state university Sephuluh Nopember Institute of Technology in Surabaya. During our collaboration with the community in arranging events, she has been the most committed and active person in the community, motivated and having strong leadership and a vision of better conditions for the lesbian community in the future

7. All community members informally involved in this research as active participants to share their knowledge and analytical account of the lesbian community in Surabaya.

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Gender and Health Study Club (GHSC)

Gender Health Study Club (GHSC) is a university based organization that puts young people as our primary beneficiaries. Our concern is to build gender based equality in every sphere of human life in order to develop society's awareness on health matters and to establish a study center that is working on gender issues within the university.

Although it is the first time GHSC has had the opportunity to conduct a study on lesbian community, GHSC is not totally new to the issues concerning lesbians. Individually, members of GHSC had good relationships with some lesbians and, as an organization; we are part of the LGBT NGO network. Within the university we deliver information about LGBT issues, not only through occasional events, but also as a topic in classes when we were giving examples of cases to students. We are also encouraging students to take sexuality as their topic for their final undergraduate reports

Our activities include dissemination of gender equality in sexuality training, seminars, talk shows, and research. Our beneficiaries are women – mothers, working women, young women, and students in general.

1. Introduction

1.1. Lesbian activism in Indonesia

Surabaya is an important city to the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intesex (LGBTI) activism in Indonesia. According to Agustine, a prominent Indonesia lesbian Activist (Journal Perempuan, 2008), in her article *Rahasia Sunyi: Gerakan Lesbian Indonesia (Secret Silence: Indonesian Lesbian Activism)*, Lambda Indonesia, an organization of lesbian and gay Indonesia and Asia, was established in Pasuruan in 1982, moved to Surabaya. Several organizations from Jakarta and Surabaya were joined to this organization. However, due to the limited human and financial resources, lesbians withdrew their participation. In 1987, GAYa Nusantara (GN) was established in Surabaya, continuing the works of Lamda Indonesia. Officially, GN is intended to organize female and male homosexuals. In their activities, GN had been trying to reach the lesbian community in an attempt to organize, but they found several difficulties, including getting access to and going deeper inside this community. According to Khanis Suvianita, a former GN director for research and education, "lesbian community is between there and not there." Like other lesbians in other parts of the world, Indonesian lesbians bear a double burden, with stigma that prevents them from coming out and saw GN as a male homosexual organization than a fe/male homosexual organization. Dian Yulia, the coordinator of Dipayoni, said that people still see homosexuality as wrong, but they are more *tolerant* if it is a man who commits to doing wrong than if it is a woman.

Cited from the Gesang Foundation official website, Saskia E. Wieringa, (1999) in her book *Female Desires: Transgender Practices across Culture,* mentions that Indonesian lesbian struggle was first organized by Persatuan Lesbian Indonesia/Indonesian Lesbian Union, (PERLESIN) in the 1980s. In 1998, the Indonesian Women's Coalition raised the issue of lesbianism as part of the struggle and organization with the affirmation of LBT groups during its first congress in Jogjakarta.

In 2003, Swara Srikandi**,** a Jakarta based lesbian organization spread their activism to Surabaya and built their representation in the city. Swara Srikandi reached their success of having International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) representatives for South East Asia in 2003. After this success, no more Swara Srikandi Suarabaya activities were heard of. However, one of our respondents said that she continued to receive three editions of the Swara Srikandi bulletin in 2003, and some said they still have regular meetings in mall up to the present. Nursyahbani Katjasungkana, an advocate and lesbian activist, mentioned that, in 2004, lesbian activism was focused on campaigning to be included in the Indonesian Women's Colaition (KPI). In 2006, it had been proposed to have lesbian representatives in KPI named *Sector 15* to accommodate lesbian activism as part of the Indonesian women's struggle.

Ardhanary, a Jakarta based lesbian organization, was established later on in 2007. There are several other LGBT organizations that were established across the country since then, such as

Arus Pelangi (Jakarta), Clietz (Jakarta and several other cities), Our Voice (Jakarta), Institut Pelangi Perempuan (Jakarta), Harley (Makasar), Kipas (Makasar), Pertopan (Pontianak), and Qmunity (Jakarta).

Indonesian lesbian activism has now been connected with international LGBT activism. In 2008, Indonesian lesbians were assigned as female board representatives for ILGA-Asia.

Besides the above organizations, lesbian community is interconnected through several Internet chat rooms such as *mirc dalnet mesra***,** *klit*, *lesbi,* as well as on social network such as Facebook and friendster. Informal groups of lesbians are many, found in various public venues. However, the groups do not have a strong basis and structure for lesbians to receive support and organize the struggle for their rights as humans.

Though groups of lesbians are increasing in numbers, very few of them are putting lesbian activism in their agenda. Meanwhile, Islamic fundamentalism is getting stronger. Recent news reported a fundamentalist attack on the Q-film Festival in Jakarta and Jogjakarta (October 2010) after their attack at the ILGA Asia Conference in Surabaya (March 2010). Recently, fundamentalists have not only attacked LGBT groups, but also Ahmadiyah, an Islamic minority group, and other gatherings perceived as non-Islamic symbols in public spaces. Islamic fundamentalists recently asked for taking down the Buddha statue in Tanjung Balai District of North Sumatra and Bima statue in District of Purwakarta, Central Java, from public view in the name of purifying Islamic values. They state that such statues open to be viewed in public is *threatening to the Islamic faith, as well as destroying the Islamic image of the local majority as Moslems.* Meanwhile, the Indonesian government has been neglecting to address the fact that Islamic fundamentalist acts are against the principles of human rights and have given almost no protection to the victims.

Some legal cases involving lesbians are related to the social refusal of same-sex relationships. In Semarang (Central Java), a lesbian was accused of taking an underage girl away from her family so they could live together. Another popular case considered to be related to female same sex relationships is Alterina Hofan who was married to Jane Hadipoespita. Alter is a person with Kinefelter syndrome who received his status as a biological male after removing his breasts in Canada. He married Jane in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA, and was accused by Jane's family of not telling the truth that he changed his status from female to male.

Lesbians in Indonesia, as lesbian elsewhere, share a common problem – that of the social refusal of homosexual practices in the name of religion. Individuals who practice homosexuality are perceived as committing a sin and are thus charged with being social deviants. During the ILGA conference in Surabaya 2010, even the belief that *the existence of homosexuality is a sign of the end of the world sent by God* was legitimized by an anti homosexual cleric's opinion that was widely spread in the media.

The assumption that heterosexuality is the only normal and religiously correct sexual practice sexuality has serious impacts on people with different sexual orientations. Seeing people with different sexual orientation as abnormal has led them to have severe psychological problems

such as self denial, depression, even leading to suicide. Furthermore, negligence, discriminative and abusive behaviours from the society has worsened the life of people with different sexual orientations, and specifically, lesbians. These behaviours generate difficulties for the lesbian community. including difficulties in obtaining and engaging in paid work and gaining access to social-psychological health services as well as legal support. Greater social pressures had prevented them from coming out with their sexual orientation and force them to live in seclusion.

The problems for the Indonesian lesbian community are even getting worse in terms of economic conditions. Financial difficulties have prevented many from having the ability to have a greater commitment and dedication toward engaging in activism. The urgency of earning money for a living has also affected the life of the organization and the time available to dedicate to activism. Many studies on lesbians have been done, but they are limited in being able to bring immediate improvement to the lives of lesbians in return.

1.2. Surabaya lesbian community

Dr. Dede Oetomo of GN, in an interview with journalists few days before the 2010 ILGA Asia conference, mentioned that, as the second largest city in Indonesia, Surabaya has been very friendly to LGBT activities. Culturally, Surabaya has *ludruk*, a traditional drama which features all male actors, including in playing female roles. In everyday life, some of these actors are transgender. This traditional plays are very popular and during the era of Indonesia's struggle for independence, ludruk became a tool of pro-Indonesian propaganda. This proves that the city was both familiar and friendly toward non-mainstream gender.

Figure 1: Map of Indonesia

GHSC's experience working with GN in carrying out activities as part of promoting understanding towards sexual diversity, locally, nationally as well as regionally, has been relatively free from negative responses and criticism. The author wrote two articles in the newspaper with no negative consequences. Within this friendly and peaceful environment for lesbians, this research was begun.

There are many lesbian groups that are not focusing themselves on lesbian issues and are not identifying as lesbian groups. The majority of the groups base their activities on shared hobbies and interests, such as: motorcycling, biking, art and design, photography, drama, and music. Many of lesbian groups have clear orientations of the directions their organizations are headed, but many others do not know where to go and merely host 'fun' activities such as parties here and there, chitchatting, and getting drunk.

These are some opinions about the lesbian community in Surabaya according to members of the community itself:

I have visited some groups in Plaza Crown [to share information about the fasting break event], they are in various ages. The first group I met was several ... probably two or three butches in their age of 25. They looked mature and tend to be careful to accept new person who came to them. I join them only for a few minutes and decided to move to the other groups. It was lesbian in the 15s or 20s. They looked more expressive and accept me friendly. They are more expressive in their sexual behaviours such as they would not be reluctant to play with their partner's breast in front of other people. They are quiet large in numbers and seemed noticeable to other people [that they were lesbians]. *No wonder if the security often wanted them to leave even not in a good manner because they were assumed to disturb other people's comfort.* (Diana, 20)

In the public park I know some place where some butches are gathered and even to live because the do not have any place to after they decided to go out of their home when they have conflicts with their family. They are quite small in number and having drunk as their habit. There is information that they experience physical abuse from their family, but I am not clear yet and maybe somewhat forget that she was telling that. The group is there up to now and Satpol PP and the park authorities do not have idea about their existence because they are relatively good person to their environments.

If gay has their papi [father] *as a key to their togetherness and the groups productivity, ... any conflict will be resolved if papi takes a part to finish the conflict ... lesbian group has their mami* [mother]; *but ... the problem is mami does not have clear roles and seems very busy with their own personal problems. That is why lesbian groups are not cohesive and being connected to each other in the area of activism.* (Widya, 25)

Our study has identified that there are at least 14 lesbian groups (with both exclusively and non-exclusively lesbian membership) with 185 members who gather in Surabaya malls and public places regularly. Among those groups, only a few of them name their groups and organizations.

The backgrounds and activities of these groups are varied. We define them into five categories:

Group of activists: These groups are usually composed of exclusively lesbian or LGBTIQ members. They consist of individuals who are more or less familiar with the concept of lesbianism. They have been exposed to knowledge about human rights (and their sexual rights in particular), and build affiliation and networking with other lesbian activist groups located in other cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta, Jogjakarta and Bali. They have a relatively good connection with other LGBT groups and actively participate in LGBTIQ events, such as the Q-festival, the International Day against Homophobia (IDAHO) celebration, and various public dialogues around LGBT issues. Most of the lesbians in this group are open about their sexual orientation, especially to their friends or families, though not all of them are open to

their families. Many of them define their identification system as *tahu sama tahu* (people know that they are lesbians without being asked or telling them).

Members of these groups are high- school-educated and some of them are going to college or university. Many of them are working in informal sectors such as telecommunication cafés, self employed, and giving private lessons to school age children. Their family of origin is usually secured in terms of their economic condition and have a good social status. Among these activist groups are: Dipayoni, Us Community, Mbambetters, and Clietz. Having limited access to labour, difficulties in coming out to their family and the wider social environment, and obsessive and/or abusive romantic relationships become major problems that must be dealt with in their lives.

Groups of middle-class lesbians: The membership of these groups is not usually exclusively lesbians. However, it is usually acknowledged that there are lesbians among them and they gain relatively good acceptance from the other members. They work actively with a variety of social issues in an effort to establish early business networks both nationally and regionally. Within these groups, the members learn how to be young entrepreneurs. Most of them are going to college or university. They are privileged within the labour force because they come from well educated backgrounds and have a positive social status due to the economic condition of their family of origin.

Member of these groups are reluctant to build relationships with other groups of lesbians. The are aware of the danger of being financially exploited by other lesbian groups, such as becoming the ones responsible for expenses and an obligation to share material resources with others without a guarantee of return. This is becoming the foundation of their resistance to becoming deeply involved in and networking with lower class lesbian groups.

Novice lesbians groups: Theses groups consist of young school age lesbians. Most of their activities are gathering with as many as lesbian friends for fun. They come from lower-class and lower social status families. Many members are not even familiar with the word 'lesbian'. They prefer and more comfortable to be addressed as *belog*, or bent. This term is also used by most lesbians in Surabaya. They usually gather in the food courts of several malls in Surabaya. They are in search of their own identity and still unsure about their lesbian characters. They think being a lesbian is cool as identifying as belog is part of a trend. Most of them decide to be heterosexuals later on in their lives. One of our respondents uses the term *'lesbian coba-coba',* or lesbian in trial, to identify these groups. Other groups are somewhat reluctant to involve themselves with these groups because they tend to be demanding and dependent on elder lesbians they are acquainted with.

Non-group lesbians: These exclusive groups consist of individuals that have almost no contact with any other lesbian groups. They avoid creating larger conflicts by limiting their interaction with a wider social network. Their focus is on personal planning, such as finishing their education and getting a good job in their future. They are very serious toward their effort of enhancing their capacity in life and to become professionals in their majors. In term of social status, most of them come from wealthy families. Their group is very restricted in

establishing new members and are small in number, averaging four individuals of their own class.

Senior lesbian groups: These groups consist of lesbians aged 30 and older. They have usually had relatively more secure economic and relational conditions compared to those of the younger generation. They have limited contact with younger lesbians in Surabaya, possibly because they are no longer active in organizing and reduce their club activities in public space. They employ rigid gender segregation between butch (masculine lesbian) that they call 'hunter' and femme (feminine lesbian), similar to the segregation of feminine and masculine roles in heterosexual relationships.

Of course there is always a failure to rigidly separate groups as some individuals occupy spaces which intersect between groups and go in and out of one group to another. We found, for example, a lesbian who belongs to two different groups although there is no relationship between the groups she belongs to.

During our research, we identify conditions common to Surabayan lesbian groups related to lesbian activism. They are:

- Most of them get together for fun activities and only a few of them are focused on lesbian activism. However, fun activities are less stimulating in creating a strong responsibility and do not provide a benefit to the group in terms of having a commitment to achieve certain goals for the sake of lesbian activism.

- Motivation to join the organization is personal, often to find a romantic or sexual partner. Personal motivation as a reason to join the group is somewhat inevitable. Any time a partnership has personal problems, it affects the group at large.

- There is no specific or long term agenda; instead, activities are arranged based on an impulsive idea. The absence of an agenda has caused difficulties in maintaining the cohesiveness and engagement of the group.

- There is no established space for groups to meet, although each group usually has a meeting point in a public space, such as malls or cafes.

- Members of the group have less time to remain active in group activities due to the need to secure a means to earn money for survival.

- The most persistent groups are also the most exclusive, while the rest remain the least active.

All of these conditions will endanger the existence of the group which itself has the power to support lesbian activism in the future. However, current conditions show that the motivation to engage in activism is still there, despite inactivity. Several members of the community are ready to start working, though some are still sceptical of being engaged in activism. This condition is a potential for creating a more solid group among the community. In the mean

time, a first step that must be taken is to rebuild or refresh the spirit of the group by creating a medium of communication among the community, to stimulate and maintain the sense of togetherness and regain trust from each other.

Academic studies about lesbian activism are very limited. If any, they prefer to focus study on lesbian group identity and conflicts, rather than their struggle and activism. In this research we intend to combine both activism and academic research within a program aimed at empowering and supporting lesbian activism, documenting the process for academic purposes.

1.3. Objectives of the study

- To build communication among the groups and link up with existing groups and/or alliances through creating funedutainment activities such as informal discussions, outbound, tarot readings, /movie watching, and sports games
- To provide knowledge to both individuals and groups on their sexual rights and opportunities for/potential of activism
- To introduce both individuals and groups to basic peer counselling
- To document the process of empowering and activism

1.4. Goals of the study

This research is aimed at building communication among members and groups of the lesbian community in Surabaya to support activism.

2. Community based research as a theory and methodology

Parker and Aggleton (2007) notes that there has been a significant increase in research on the social and cultural dimensions of sexuality in the past three decades. He divided the increase of the research into three phases: the first phase is 1970 to 1980; the second phase is 1980-1990 and the third phase is 1990-present. In the first phase, the study of sexuality works on establishing tools for thinking about sexuality, using basic concepts such as culture and society. Theories employed in this phase are in line with Michel Foucault's notion of the organization of sexuality by religion and science, and the discursive practices of power. The studies of sexualities at this phase challenge the naturalist's notion of sexuality.

In the second phase, the study of sexuality focuses on sexual cultures, identities, and communities which shape not only our sexual experience, but also the ways in which we interpret and understand that experience (Parker & Aggleton 2007). Sexuality, as an interaction, is necessarily social and involves a process of complex negotiation between individuals.

In the third phase, the structure and agency in sexuality are addressed. It presents the complex interactions of historical and political-economic analysis of structural factors such as gender power differential and sexual discrimination and oppression—and, importantly, according to Parker and Aggleton, on the synergetic effects of these factors with other forms of social inequality such as poverty and exploitation, racism and ethnic discrimination, and, more generally, social exclusion.

We create our framework of the study parallel with this third phase of the study of sexuality.

Lean Chan Heng, Professor at University of Sains Malaysia, presented at a community based research (CBR) workshop at the University of Surabaya in January 2010. She stated that academic research has been criticized for contributing the least toward the improvement for the living of the research subject. The research is creating betterment for the research itself, yet failing to see and understand the community beyond information that the academic researcher wants to know. Furthermore, academic research serves the interests of the researcher and the donor of the research more than serving the needs and the interests of the targeted community.

Answering this challenge, we decided to apply the conceptual framework and principles of community based research in which the self-understanding of the community receives more attention than academic theories. As CBR researchers we view the community theorization of their own life as equally as important as academic theories that we learn in the university.

The researcher involves his or herself and merges with the community not as an expert who defines what the community has to do. It is what we called collaboration. It is the community

who defines what is researched and it is the responsibility of the researcher to write the report to provide information to the university and the donor.

The research should come out with and_strengthen the sustainability of the community. Through the arranged activities, it will create a conversation and build togetherness among the members of the community, building trust amongst each other and to enable them to work together in the future.

Our preliminary research shows that there are many lesbian groups, but they are not cohesive in their characteristics. The activities arranged are aimed to create cohesiveness among the fragmented lesbian community and empower them in terms of building communication among them in order to empower and to strengthen the community as a whole. CBR is a dynamic process in nature. We realized that the plan of activities might become subject to revision and adjusted to meet the dynamics of the community itself and to accommodate the actual condition of the community.

2.1. Plan of activities

a) Preliminary study and building trust with the following objectives:

- To get to know each other and to create a good relationship among persons involved in the research
- To introduce and orient the program with the community
- To assess community needs through gathering preliminary data
- To provide opportunity for groups to work together in joint activities

b) Funedutainment - four activities such as watching movies, informal discussions, outbound and sport games with the following objectives:

- To build strategic communication among lesbian communities
- To create links between lesbian communities
- To build a sense of togetherness among lesbian communities
- To develop trust for a good, regulated working atmosphere necessary among all members of community during the projects

c) Strengthen local institution to prepare a strong foundation among the groups, who will continue the works, so all the investment will be maximally utilized and prevent conflicts among the groups. The objectives of these activities are:

- To provide lesbian communities with knowledge about sexual rights
- To address issues concerning lesbianism and religion
- To address lesbianism and activism
- To provide training in basic peer counseling

d) Monitoring and evaluation through the use of focus group discussions that will use a process of self reflection among the researchers following events with the following objective:

- To ensure the aim of project; monitoring system will be developed and utilized during the project to detect and respond to all the problems and conflicts early on that happen during the study

e) Building a temporary meeting point (these activities will be done only if the project can assist the various lesbian communities in building a strong alliance) with the following objectives:

- To provide a place to meet and for activities to take place to be able to accommodate small groups for discussions to carry out several meetings and discussions.
- To carry out fun activities to gather members of targeted groups

We leave the activities loose in format, but continue to emphasize that Events will be focused not only on fun, but also on providing information to members of the communities. As a result, arranged activities must undergo some changes and revisions to coincide with the dynamics of lesbian communities. The plan of the advocacy program remains in line with the aim of empowering the communities and facilitating research through activities.

3. Entering a world of difference

For me and the majority of GHSC members, lesbian issues are not our focus of interest. Tiwi and Ayuni had some information and connections with lesbian groups due to their long experience in women's activism. I was the one who had the least experience with issues concerning lesbians. Wulan has become the advisory board for US Community, while Dian Lestari, at the beginning of the research, said that this was the first time she was close to lesbian issues, but later we found she knows a lot about lesbianism than we all thought.

Though I had great doubts in my ability to work well in this research, my colleagues and I realized that, working together with lesbians is not only a good opportunity to enrich our capacity as a group to know more about the issue, but also a good opportunity to implement a CBR method in academic research that is in accordance with the university spirit of community empowerment.

At the beginning, we wanted to identify which group or groups of lesbians that we were going to work with. We expected to have more information from GAYa Nusantara, but found they were also having difficulties working together with the lesbian community. Therefore, some individuals were recommended to us, but others just said they knew nothing about lesbian activism.

Hence, we decided to include some young lesbians who usually come to GHSC to meet Wulan and try to gather some information from them as our initial data. After some discussion, we decided to put young lesbians as our beneficiaries with some considerations:

- We were somewhat familiar with their situation since they often shared their problems with us (especially to Wulan).
- We found some students who were homosexuals and thought that it would create a link between young lesbians inside and outside the university to work together toward lesbian activism.
- University members (we as lecturers and the students in particular) were able to learn more about lesbians' life experience.

At the beginning of the research we had difficulties in defining the groups that would participate and be our partners in this research. We decided to approach Clietz and US Community with the considerations that both groups focused their concern on lesbian activism.

As soon as we gained access to the young lesbian community, we learned that both Us Community and Clietz experienced unfortunate leadership problems. Members of those groups who participated in our program decided to participate individually rather than as

members of particular groups since leaders of both groups were not in agreement about the group participation in this program.

Some challenges were faced in the beginning of the research and still remain throughout the research progress. They are:

3.1. Negative images of research and psychology

- Many participants had experiences that suggested to them that academic research will only benefit the researchers.

  We have to be careful with them. Who knows they are just using us as a part of their "project"[35] (Prima, 24)

During the research process, one of our research participants said that this kind of feeling was still there. One participant shared her thoughts about this research:

> *In that meeting, she talked about how you* [GHSC's members] *have been paid from this research. Bagi-bagi duit* [sharing money among GHSC's members] *She said that this [the research] is a project to enrich GHSC's members. There unequal payment among the researchers.* [I asked who said that, and she answered that it was one of our researchers]. (Vivi, 27)

The negative feelings towards researchers were even greater among senior lesbians. They had more experiences of being cheated and exploited by people outside the groups, both academic researchers and local politicians to gain supports for the election. They are extra careful with outsiders who try to go inside their community. Dian Yulia did not allow me to meet the groups early on in the research process, waiting until she knew them well. She was very afraid that there would be resistance toward non-lesbian people and close down the relationship.

When inviting the group to meet Nursyahbani and Wieringa, a senior lesbian reflected this phenomenon to Davi:

> *I don't mind to see your leaders. But we have to know first what they want to do with us. Is it going to be like any others? They come to us when they need us and then disappeared after they had what they need. I remember when the time of Walikota* [Major] *Surabaya election, they came to us and promised us to give some job opportunities, but ... hence, they just gone ...* (Nini, as told to Davi, 24)

The fact that GHSC is part of Faculty of Psychology creates an impression that we will consider lesbians as abnormal beings. One of our participants shared the response of her group leader when she informed her about our program.

[35] The word "project" here refers to something that will give benefit in terms of financial/money.

> *She* [our group leader] *said you do not know who they are. They are psychologists, and you know what the psychologist do to us? They just think that we are abnormal and want us to be normal again* [be straight people]. (Prima, 24)

GHSC's offers to work together with the groups in creating events had often been suspected as an effort to distort the group's objectives.

> *She was a bit angry with me because I had announced our biking plan in that event. She said I should keep it for us. She raised an issue about the possibility that you might steal the idea from us.* (Prima, 24)

One group leader thinks that GHSC had been cutting past group bureaucracy by not telling her first about the possibility to organize collaborative activities. Meanwhile, we think that it is only an informal approach and will be followed up with formal procedures if they show their interest in joining the activities. We attempted to contact her and explain our approach and address her concern but failed.

3.2. Differences of personal backgrounds

Unavoidably, members of the research team come from a variety of backgrounds that are both supportive and unsupportive to the research and, hence, to the empowerment of the community. Wulan and I have been provided with basic counselling skills that give us the advantage to be close with the communities and to whom individuals can share their problems. The fact that none of us are lesbians (only Tiwi who identified herself as non label) at least at that time had created a gap with the feeling of many members of the communities that we would never understand them exactly as lesbians do.

Dian Yulia mentioned that indeed, different sexual orientations created a gap.

> *Most of you* [GHSC members] *are heterosexual. We have a kind of uncomfortable with that. We feel that we are different from you. We think that you are not going to understand us exactly as what we feel.* (DY, 27)

Her opinion was inline with Kaka's.

> *Those heterosexuals, no matter so close they are with us, they still create a gap. They are talking good about lesbian only in front of us, but not in our back. They are still afraid of us. As if, we are going turn them into lesbians.* (Kaka, 20)

3.3. Difference of naming

While we are using the term lesbian to address the general community, not all members understood the meaning. (Later I wrote about the origin of lesbian term in Surabaya Post, a

local newspaper. During the routine discussion, I knew later that they read it in turn form GHSC's files in the computer). Lesbians in Surabaya feel more comfortable to call themselves *belog*. One of our research participants gives their opinion about this:

> *Besides lesbi, there are some more terminology to address lesbian such as belog, lines, l atau lesbian. I, myself, feel more comfortable to address myself as belog or L than lesbian or lesbi. She feels that the word lesbian and lesbi bring enough pressure to her because it contains social stigma. Lesbian and lesbi sound like a representation of social stereotype and discrimination towards the sex minority. I feel of being pushed into the corner [marginalized]. I have been trying to find comfort in my life and one of them is to avoid the word lesbian and lesbi. Using the word belog is more comfortable because not many people know about the meaning. Lesbian, in my opinion, can be divided into three categories. First is pure lesbian, it is those who like women since they are small. Second, Lesbian dibelokkan* [being bent lesbian], *it means that she becomes lesbian (being a straight person at first) because of having relationship with lesbian. Last, it is lesbian in trial* [lesbian yang coba-coba belok], *lesbian who is previously straight, having relationship with lesbian, but hence break up, but she feels that it is much enjoyable of being lesbian and trying to find another woman to replace the lost relationship* (Riska, 24).

For the research team, the term *belog* has a somewhat negative sense to it because it means bent or not straight. However, we realize that the best name to address any individual is with that which they are most comfortable with.

4. Working together, learning together

In this study we work together with Us Community Surabaya to arrange activities and to reach out to the greater lesbian community, learning which activities are most effective and have the most impact to gather lesbians. This study was intended to include lesbians across organizations, as well as individuals not affiliated with groups.

After gathering some information together with a member of the lesbian community who had previously agreed to be an active participant in the program, we arranged an event to bring as many lesbians in Surabaya as possible together. The researchers established a rule for arranging events: that events planned should be "not too serious," "not too difficult," and "not too long" so that the community would be interested in participating in the event.

A party format was established as a means to bring together large numbers of lesbians and bring the various communities together. The interest in this type of event involves many factors, including:

- It is an opportunity to get to know other people, other lesbian groups, and their ongoing activities.
- It is an opportunity for individuals to share stories experiences so that they will not have to bare their sadness alone.
- It is an opportunity to build networking, share ideas, thoughts, and job opportunities with their lesbian friends.
- It is an opportunity for those who do not belong to any group in particular, but to participate in the activities, support and become involved in activism.
- It is more comfortable to build interpersonal relationships
- It is an opportunity to meet the members of the Surabaya lesbian community, establishing a comfortable feeling to know that they have many friends.
- It is an opportunity to learn the way other people are coming out.
- It is an opportunity for activists to ask the communities to work together in activism.
- To get together with different groups will provide the opportunity for some individuals to meet with they have had conflicts with before and address past trauma.

Although there is common understanding that gathering all together for an event has a positive impacts for community support, to be open in public is still frightening for some people. It will attract people\s interests and the possibility to be identified as lesbians will be

greater, especially to their family. One participant said that she will lose family support if they know that she is a lesbian.

> *Oo no no no... I do not want the event can be seen clearly from the street over there. People will think what kind of crowd is that? And, they will be able identify ourselves from our appearance, especially the butches like this* [looking at her suits] ... *you know ... If my friend or family saw me among them woooo ... I cannot imagine what going to happen. I might be expelled and cannot go to university anymore* [will not receive financial support for her education from her parents]. (Riri, 18)

There were 16 activities intended to address both the interests of research and advocacy (see Figure 2). These activities were arranged based on the immediate need of the community. Some others were arranged based on preliminary studies, ongoing research, and literary studies. Routine gatherings among the community need to be made to build and maintain the spirit of togetherness and for the potential of activism among the greater lesbian community (see Appendices for notes of activities).

No	Activities	Objectives	Scope	Facilitator
	Movie watching ***No Bra*** **May 2009**	• To watch movie together and learn something from it • To introduce of the program to the community • To build trust GHSC-community • To build communication among the fragmented groups within the lesbian community	Lesbian Community in Surabaya	Erna
2	**Teamwork Technical Meeting 16 July 2009**	• To build a joined teamwork (of KSGK and Community members) • Asking for serious participation of those who wants to be part of the team • Who contributes what • Building commitment among teamwork	KSGK-committed individuals of the community	KSGK-Community
3	**Gathering "Freedom of Youth" (FOY) 15-Agustus-2009**	• To experience organizing event as teamwork • To engage the community with the activities • To raise a consciousness of the importance of working together • To raise self confident among teamwork	Teamwork	Wulan
4	**Monev FOY (Belajar dari FOY) 22 August 2009**	• To evaluate FOY event • To practice being honest about everything we feel • To practice assertive capacity • To practice self evaluation • To learn from the experience	Team work	All community and KSGK
5	**Fasting Break (Buka puasa bareng) 15 September 2009**	• To have alternative interpretations of Quran regarding the issue of lesbianism • To increase community self-esteem	Teamwork-and member of community who is interested in participating	Dian Yulia Zainul Hamdi
6	**Course on Photo Narrative "My life" (classes) (September-November 2010)**	• To portray lesbians' life • To describe lesbian's life in a story • To see ourselves • To gather community	Community and KSGK	Dian Lestariningsih (KSGK)
7	**Photo Narrative exhibition and talk show (9-14 November 2009)**	• To give opportunity to the photo narrative class to exhibit their works in a national events • To show to the public that lesbians are among us	National Event "STOP" (Scientific Time of	Siti, Toni, SPsy, Psych

		• To show to the society that lesbians can be appreciated by what they do (and not to be judged by what their sexual orientation) • To evaluate Photo narrative event in the perspective of photo analysis and self	Psychology)	
8	**Monev Photo Narrative November 11, 2009**	• To evaluate photo narrative class and exhibition • To learn from our experience of participation and organizing event		
9	**Outbound and Training "Understanding Ourselves and teamwork" February 19-21, 2010**	• To know about one's self • To accept ourselves • To learn about teamwork	Mandatory for teamwork (max 20 pax)	Dian Yulia Adam Agus
10	**Monev Outbound and Training "Understanding Ourself and teamwork" February 28, 2010**	• To evaluate Outbound and Training "Understanding about ourselves and Teamwork" • To learn from the activities	Teamwork and those who are interested in	KSGK and the community
11	**Writing Class (Weekly) Since March 2010--present**	• To learn about writing technique and its process • To write anything about lesbian lives • To share and discuss writing •	Surabaya Lesbian Community	Siti
12	**Support Group (Weekly) Since March 2010--present**	• To communicate each other • To discuss actual issues • To share problems • To support each other in terms of one's psychological wellbeing	Surabaya Lesbian Community	Dian Yulia, Wulan Widaningrum
13	**Discussion "Cancer cervix" (March 20, 2010)**	• To understand about Cervical Cancer • To follow up discussion in Coming Outbound • To get in touch with women NGOs	Surabaya Lesbian Community and women NGOs	Dr. Umi Rinasari, MARS
14	**Discussion "Cancer cervix" (March 20, 2010)**	• To understand about Cervical Cancer • To follow up discussion in Coming Outbound • To get in touch with women NGOs	Surabaya Lesbian Community and women NGOs	Dr. Umi Rinasari, MARS
15	**Discussion "Lesbianism and Religion" (May 29, 2010)**	• To understand better about lesbianism in the perspective of religion • To follow up community	Surabaya Lesbian Community	Zainul Hamdi

		needs		
16	**Network Building for Dipayoni August 12, 2010**	• To launch Dipayoni • To build network with other organizations in Surabaya	Surabaya NGOs and lesbian Community	Dian Yulia

Figure 2. Lists of Activities

Some challenges during this phase include:

- Continued hierarchy between the university and the community during the research.
- The university team's concern that the methods proposed are too focused on fun and provide little capacity enhancement for the participants.
- Lower trust to believe that they will do the activities better.
- The tendency to be too directive and definitive of how the activities should be done.

An attempt to overcome these problems was made by applying some strategies:

- Visiting and spending more time with lesbian groups to overcome the gap felt by the participants.
- Providing input and proposing considerations for the activities to be negotiated.
- Increasing trust that they know the best for themselves.
- Learning to be more humble.

Interpersonal conflicts happen frequently. It often became difficult to know when it was appropriate to intervene beyond just providing input, but also providing support and mediating in personal problems. Participants were always asked about whether they wanted someone to intervene in a situation of conflict, and if told that participants stated that they could handle the problem themselves, they were trusted and the situation monitored.

5. Lesbians as groups

Although few lesbian groups are focused on the issue of activism, many show that they are a cohesive group. Members of one group are usually provided support for one another. The fact that they are groups of individuals with non-mainstream sexual orientations and experience refusal and discrimination by society raised the feeling of *senasib sepenanggungan*, one fate one struggle.

Most individuals like to engage in a group as a means of establishing a support system, giving and getting the support needed. Few of them realize the importance of being in a group and the potential of group participation in activism to fight for lesbian rights. However, there were some participants who felt reluctant to join a group for a variety of reasons, including:

They are afraid that their involvement in the group will disclose their identity as lesbian:

> *If I join in a group, hence people in a group will want to know me more, and hence want to come by into my house, therefore my family will ask 'who is she? Who is she?' ... and then they will discover who I am.* (Riri, 22)

Joining a group means the possibility of interpersonal conflict is greater:

> *It does not mean that we do not want to support activism, but you know, sometimes to be in a group means more conflicts.* (Lily, 21)

Joining a group occasionally means they must be ready to lose their girlfriend:

> *If I had a girlfriend, I will not bring her in groups meeting. I will not bring her in front of you.* [Why Prima? I asked] *They are going to take it away from me. They are beast* [Ind: ganas-ganas]. (Prima, 24)

Most lesbian groups are temporary, usually not lasting longer than a few years. Since most groups are founded on shared interests, membership constantly fluctuates, waxing and waning as the interests of individual members changes. Groups of activists usually last longer. However, involvement in activism remains part of some of the organization's agenda. Besides external factors, internal factors also contribute to the nature of activities. They are:

- Personal problems, such as fearing that their identity will be exposed in the media, disclosing information about themselves that can have detrimental effects on their relationship with their family, on whom they depend on for their livelihood.

- Financial matters; most lesbians in Surabaya do not work in the formal sector, having instead steady work in the informal sector as a means of making a living. This can lead to further problems, such as making it more difficult to focus on activism or desiring earning money through activist activities.

- Interpersonal problems, including romantic relationships and friendships, can lead to the individual withdrawal from actively participating in activism. Romantic relationship breakdown can also lead to the disclosure of one's sexual identity in cases where one's partner uses the threat of revealing their sexuality to their family in order to maintain control. Many lesbians have difficulties breaking free of abusive relationships due to this kind of intimidation.

5.1. Leadership

In addition to the above factors, lesbian groups face problems in leadership. Leaders of lesbian groups are an integral factor in the motivation and movement of the group in the direction of their shared objectives.

In one case, while working with one group on delivering a statement of protest against a radio host statement, we made the following observations.

- The leader of the group did not have the capacity to mobilize or build the confidence among the rest of the membership that for the group to be assertive is a must. She was worried about the safety of herself and the group, and several times cited the case of Prita Mulyasari who was sent to jail for her protest against maltreatment by OMNI Hospital, Tangerang. It indeed demotivated the group.

- The leader's support fluctuated. She was often missing and difficult to find when the rest of the group needed her participation in the preparation for the action.

- The members of the group feel that their leader failed to accommodate their interests and took too much time to make decisions regarding immediate actions.

- The leader said that it was difficult for her to fully commit to activism because of difficulties with time management, balancing time needed for her many activities that she could not possibly leave, such as studying and helping her parents earn money.

- However, it was equally as difficult for her to resign because she was worried that the organization that she herself established would stay away from its original aspirations.

- According to her, she was the only founder that was left in the organization. (This statement was challenged by other members of the group who said that she was not the only founder left.)

- In another group, there was a leader who insisted on isolating themselves from others, not allowing the members to have any contact with other groups. External affairs such as these were left to the responsibility of the leader, leaving other members unable to do anything about it.

- Meanwhile, there was also a leader who did not like their members participating in activities outside the group.

Good leadership was needed among lesbian groups, an issue which we addressed while carrying out teamwork training in the Coming Outbound event (see Appendix 8).

A further difficulty facing the groups were inter-personal problems creating group conflict. Thus, our group meetings always emphasized (especially to new members joining) that no matter what happened, no one's sexual identity would be disclosed against their wishes and without their consent.

5.2. Inter-group relationships

It was known from the beginning that lesbian groups had poor relationships with each other. Historically, relationships between individuals as well as between the groups themselves have become significant factors affecting the quality of inter-group relationships.

One participant noted:

> *To be honest, we feel reluctant to work with them. We had been working with them before for organizing some l/g/b/t events. And, you know ... they do not have such a good manner .... or let say capacity to do their parts. And anytime we do an activity together, we become the one who pay for our personal expenses such as drink, cigarettes, and sometimes ... they borrow our belonging, like cell phone and cars. They use it but do not want to pay the expenses for those things. And, even it happened in the past that they also took a cell phone from one of us. As long as they still like that, we do not want to work together with them.* (Vivi, 20)

In nearly every event held throughout the project, we found that groups tended to remain exclusive from one another with members rarely straying outside their group.

With bringing forward a sense of togetherness in all the events, there was the opinion that *to bring the lesbian community together for an event is fine, but to bring them together for every event and share the same vision is impossible.*

> *If we should to be together in a big event occasionally, say hi here and there, is still possible Mam. But it is only what you see (in the surface) that they are friends to each other. But, behind that reality they will talk each other bad, complaining people they just met about. It is because they already had conflict between them before. If [we] should be together in an event, it will be impossible.* (Diana, 20)

However, we can confidently say that building inter-group contacts and relationships is possible. Through events focused on gathering members of the lesbian community, a spirit of activism and the focusing on topics of shared interest can create the feeling and raise awareness of the importance of a shared struggle and build lesbian activism.

6. Lesbians as individuals: Their challenges

Along with pressures from the community, we identified several major problems which arise from acts of discrimination faced by lesbians in Surabaya. Though Indonesia has ratified CEDAW Articles, there is still no legislation which addresses the need to protect and ensure the lives of lesbians. Lesbianism continues to be viewed as abnormal, against social, family, and religious norms and behaviours. Outside of mainstream women's activism, many lesbian women must find ways to survive in their own ways.

6.1. Self identity

Lesbians experience social and religious discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation, affecting the way they see themselves as individuals. Many face issues such as:

6.1.1. Low self esteem

Many lesbians perceived themselves as wrong doers and think that being lesbian is only a temporary state that will end and that they will become heterosexual, or normal, later in their lives.

> *Today I am still like this (to be a lesbian). I know this is wrong. Someday I am going to marry a man like a woman should be. Having children …* (Prima, 25)

> *You know, this is wrong. I am a sinner. This is not the bible says. I believe I will be safeguarded and will have a relationship with a man at last.* (Zee, 45)

> *I cannot be friend easily. I always be ashamed. I never had a friend that does not belong to new community that I did not know before. I do not have enough confidence to start a relationship with others.* (Zee, 45)

6.1.2. Self destruction

As many members of the lesbian community face problems related to their sexual orientation and relationships, they often find themselves isolated and without anyone to talk to since their sexual identity remains hidden, even from close friends. In some cases, the problem can get worse, leaving one uncertain on what to do. Some turn to hurting themselves physically as a means to ease the pain:

Look ... [Alan shows her wrist and hand, I can see a lot of scratching marks on it]. *I often do this anytime I feel desperate, do not have any future and feel empty in my life. Being a lesbian is not easy ... I hate this* [life]... [What do you feel when you are doing that? I asked.] [It feels] *good. It seemed like I move my painful feeling into physical pain. It is a relief.* (Alan, 31)

6.1.3. Self disappearance

As individuals face difficulties that continue to worsen, often with regards to personal romantic relationships, many feel there is no need to continue living.

Once I had a relationship with my religious advisor. She is a priest in my church. Anytime I wanted to see her but I could not make it, I got mad, angry a lot to everybody around me and feel that I wanted to die. I slashed my wrist at that time, and my mother allowed me to live together with her. (Zee, 45)

She told me lie many times. Deceiving me. Having relationship with somebody else when we were in relationship. I was so tired. I was once thinking that killing myself was the best way to end this problem. (Luna, 21)

6.2. Relationships

Believing that being a lesbian is only a temporary state affects how many lesbians approach and build relationships. Many of the participants were not involved in serious or long-tern relationships.

Why should I being involved with girl [affectionately] *in an in depth relationship. This* [lesbian] *relationship will do not have a future like you* [heterosexuals] *have. We are not able to engage in a marriage ... having a family ... come on!* (Prima, 24 when her girlfriend told me that she was cheating on her)

I have told her that it is impossible for me to be like this [having relationship] *with her forever. Someday I am going to marry a man just like many other women ...* (Niken, 23)

Some participants were engaged in short term relationships and change partners often. Cheating and having more than one partner without their partner's consent often led to conflicts within lesbian groups and lead toward the potential collapse of the group. However, some participants noted that legalizing homosexual relationships could have a drastic affect on having the aspiration to become involved in and build long-term relationships:

O yes I want to change [the condition]. *I want this relationship not to be a temporary relationship. I want to be like the other* [heterosexuals] *who legalize their marriages. I want this relationship to be forever.* (Widya, 28)

6.3. Marriage obligation

Most of the participants and lesbians met during research experienced being somewhat pushed into marriage by their parents around the age of 25. In interviews with participants, some indicated that even if their families were aware of their sexual orientation, there remained the expectatyion that their daughters will love, marry, and build a family with one man.

It happened again. When I went home for Eid, my father was trying to arrange a marriage for me. I think he knows that I am a lesbian because once I told my mother that I do not have any desire to man. It was the ... [fourth] *times he did it to me, and that one was the one that seemed made him angry most because I keep refusing to marry. I think they [her parents] know that I am a lesbian but they are still expecting that I will be able to change.* (Endah, 24)

That is why I decided to leave my home, because my parents always try to marry me with a guy. I have told them that I am a lesbian. (Riska, 24)

I had told my mother that I was not interested in man. And my mother seemed that she understands about that. But now - after we had a family problem which is my brother goes to jail because of the crime that he committed to his employer, my mom asked me, when I will plan to marry [a man]. (Dian Yulia, 27)

Clearly, families maintain an insistence that their daughters change. One aspect of this issue that can be addressed is disseminating further knowledge about what lesbianism is; this should become a top priority.

6.4. The problem of identity disclosure

Although many of the groups involved in the research were excited to have several events focused on gathering friends, the anxiety of being noticed or acknowledged by others as lesbians for attending such events remained a primary issue.

I really want to come to the tonight event ... If the worst happens ... there would be somebody who is contacting my parents and they suddenly would come and find me among lesbians, how do you think about that? (Fem, 22 via sms)

It is even worse after the attack at the ILGA conference in March, having spread terror that meant having to postpone many of our activities with fewer members of the community

willing to attend. This made the process of moving forward dint he research and the activities more difficult to move forward.

> *I am a bit worried if we met in open* [public] *area. What if the FUI (Front Umat Islam)*[36] *come and attack us. Who is going to give us protection? It is better to have the meeting here. In the university… far from people who are against us. Away from other people's houses. I do not know whether I will come to the next meeting if you held it in that* [open/public] *place.* (Zee, 45)

> *We are not going to find any lesbian in Crown Plasa right now. They are disappeared. They have just gone. Rumour said they had been expelled by the Crown's authority. The security send them out of their food court. It happens to those who gathers in the Bubu Park. Satpol PP often dismiss their meetings lately* (Widya, 25)

[36] Moslem Defender Front

7. Lesbians and the media

The media has become an unofficial public authority, possessing tremendous power in creating a particular discourse on lesbianism, responsible for enhancing mainstream ideology and contributing to the public and stigmatized perspective of lesbians, including accounts proposed by psychologists and psychiatrists. One the one hand, lesbians are portrayed as 'sexy', while on the other, there is no proportional account of the voices of lesbians.

Until recently, lesbians received all negative media coverage that has been more or less a disadvantage to their lives and their struggle to be treated equally as all other members of society. The discrimination against lesbians in terms of media coverage during our research is documented in the following cases.

A statement was made by the host of a Surabaya radio station on June 5th 2009:

> *So... The personnel of the V***** is not lesbian. It is good to know that they are still sane.*

The statement indicated that not being lesbian is sane, which also means that being lesbian is insane, despite the fact that the American Psychological Association (APA) had agreed that lesbianism is not a kind of abnormality, the diagnosis having been abolished from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) list in 1973. Statements such as these ought to be constituted as providing false information to the public and an act of discrimination.

Another negative article about lesbian appeared in Jawa Pos, a major Indonesian newspaper, on June 8, 2009, in the article "*Upaya Komunitas Penyuka Sesama Jenis di Solo Tunjukkan Eksistensi"* ("The Effort of Same-Sex Lovers in Solo to Show Their Existance").

As part of our project, we sought to address the misinformation provided in both the radio statement and newspaper article by, first, writing letters of objection to the management of the radio station and the editor of Jawa Pos. However, there has been no response from Jawa Pos regarding this matter. The letters included correct information about lesbianism so that such misinformation may not be given to the public again in the future. Second, we provided assistance in developing the writing skills of the participants so letters can continue to be written in the future.

8. Violence against lesbians

Physical violence against lesbians continues to be a problem many members of the lesbian community are familiar with.

8.1. Family beating

For many lesbians, the disclosure of their sexual identity to their family can result in physical violence. Within Indonesian culture, violence is an aspect of disciplining children. Therefore, if the children have done something that has been deemed by the parents as wrong, it is seen as acceptable for the parents to beat him or her. Some participants shared their own experiences with violence: something that according to them wrong, it is fine for the parents to beat her/him.

> *I had relationship with a woman that was very abusive. She forbid me to do this and that and did not allow me to have close relationship with my friends. One day, I had gut to break our relationship. Knowing that I did not change my decision, hence she was calling me many times desperately. It is such a terror. Finally she was calling my parents and telling them that I am a lesbian. I woke up in the morning when my father yelled at me and punch me on my cheek ...* (Diana, 20)

> *I know it happens to Riri. She was beaten by her family many times. Once her parents know, she was expelled from home. Hence she lives with her aunt with an over protection.* (Endah, 24)

> *Eka is now staying with me. She was beaten by her family. I do not think that her family knows that she is a lesbian, but more because she is dressing and behaving like a boy.* (Endah, 24)

8.2. Partner beating Other cases of violence against lesbians are caused by their partners. Several cases of this were found during the research process. In most cases, the butches were the abusers and the femme the victims. Since butches dress like men, it often becomes difficult for them to find employment; meanwhile, it is less difficult for femmes to find work. One of the consequences of this is that, in partnerships, butches tend to become financially dependent on femmes, leading to a feeling of having no control in the relationship. As a result, abusive relationships may develop as one partner seeks to regain control.

> *She* [one of our lesbian friend] *was just beaten by her partner.* [Why?] *For a typical reason ... jealousy. She had a good job and her partner didn't.* (Endah, 24)

> *One of my friends asked me to join Swara Srikandi. When we sat together in a café a hunter[37] came, yelled to a femme that was sitting together with us. I knew then that the femme was her girlfriend. Suddenly she slapped her on her face. Then I thought that it was not a good idea to join their group.* (Hany, 28)

It seemed that lesbian relationships adopt the social and cultural patterns of gender hierarchy (masculine over feminine), that disadvantage one in the partnership (Article 5 of CEDAW).

However, in some cases, the femme may be the abuser:

> *Widya texting me at that time. She asked me to see Riri and find out whether she was ok. Widya said that Riri's partner has just beaten her and does not want her to leave her house. I [called Riri and] asked her where her partner was, and she said that her partner was not there. So, I said, 'well, why don't you just leave?' I think she was a fool to stay.* (Dian Yulia, 27)

> *I know many many lesbians involved in unhealthy relationship with their partners. You remember couple who sang in one of our event? ... They have a very abusive relationship. It is not the butch who abuse the partner, but the femme. Can you imagine that? And, the butch cannot do anything about that.... I my self had one in the past, but I left her anyway.* [What kind of abusive behaviour did you receive?]... *First, she was yelling at me anytime I did not do what she wanted me to do. Later, she beat me anytime I refuse to have sex with her, though I have told her that I was to tired to do that.* (Dian Yulia, 27)

> *You know Riri? She is very masculine isn't she? But some friends said that her femme was beating her, bumped her head on the wall, and many other kinds of abusive behaviours. And she just cannot do anything. I cannot believe how she can be like that.* (Davi, 29)

We tried to address this issue in all of our activities throughout the research project (see Appendix).

[37] Hunter is a term for butch in their earlier generation. They are now 50 years-old of age.

9. Conclusion: Community based research, a full-time commitment

While this should be a conclusion, it is difficult and too early to provide one after only one year of community based research. We, as researchers, think that it was just the beginning, and as a result, almost impossible to derive a conclusion from the process; the problems were too complex and had not been fully addressed.

The positive changes that were expected from this research were too small to identify and too difficult to notice. One year of research was not enough to bring a community into its potential. However, we appreciate what we, as researchers and all members of the community have been able to build a system of and link up existing groups and/or alliance through activities we arranged such as movie watching, social gathering, and small discussions. We have, at least, provided them with information on their sexual rights and acknowledged the need for and build their spirit toward activism. We ought to think how this activism can be kept alive as a means toward the betterment of the lesbian community at large.

We have provided the participants with writing skills, encouraging them to write about themselves as lesbians as a tool to fight against media discrimination and misinformation. We strengthened their bonds with each other through fun activities. We tried to address the problems shared among members of the group and build peer mentoring skills so members of the community can help each other on issues related to being lesbian in Indonesia – not only concerned with sexual orientation, but in other dimensions of life including studies and sharing job opportunities.

We have also been able to create a support group to minimize the need for individuals to carry their psychological burden alone. This research has also helped to establish a new lesbian organization that focuses their activities on lesbian activism.

Personally, I have been greatly changed since the beginning of the research process, especially as one who has never been deeply involved in the lives of lesbians, to one who lives with a lesbian couple, Dyan Yulia and her partner. I have seen first hand on the effects of discrimination as Dyan and her partner were expelled by their landlord after suspecting they were a couple. I have also seen how important sexual diversity is, as my children are able to have conversations about lesbianism, spend time with individuals who have a different sexual orientation, and have caretakers in my absence. I would say that my son is partly learning masculinity from them.

I realize that my other activities as a single mother with two children and a lecturer have factored into my limited contribution and commitment to this research and involvement in the daily activities of the community. I was unable to participate in many of the activities that the lesbian community arranged outside of this project, limiting my ability to fully understand the

lives and problems of the community. However, Dian Lestari and Wulan Widaningrum, who worked hard in the field day and night, tried to be immersed in the community as much as possible, recording their activities, helping to solve their problems. But, in terms of being a researcher, I feel that it was not enough to get information without being a part of the community. I feel that I can be best as a researcher if I become part of the community itself and directly *be there* with them.

Therefore, I would say that community based research within the lesbian community would be best done by a member of lesbian community itself, not a *visitor* like me or Wulan. Lesbian living is complex, and part-timers like myself and Wulan cannot give the best commitment. However, a partnership between the lesbian community and academia is also needed, where input can be given on how to strategize and solve problems and the discussion of alternative solutions can provide the potential for the facilitation of new knowledge into the community. Only through a full time commitment can community based research be at its best.

Appendix 1: Movie watching: "No Bra"

Date: 30 May 2009

Place: a café owned by one of community member

Number of participants: more than 30

Facilitators: Erna Susanti and Dian Lestariningsih

Preparation began at 4pm while the event began at 6pm. The committee came one by one. Many people came (the ILGA representative, Pudjiati Tan, was among them), including those who knew each other from before and those who did not. Number of total participants registered on attendance list was 30, but more decided to stay on the first floor and did not write their names on the list. Everybody seemed to enjoy the movie, but during the discussion they say it was a little difficult to get the message. We tried to explain and include the information about sexual and reproductive rights that was conveyed in the movie.

Therefore, we asked some questions related to human rights, relationships, violence, among others. We provided door prizes to the audience. When people seemed uninterested in serious questions, Dian Lestariningsih got a brilliant idea to switch the discussion to easier topics and loosen the tone with her jokes.

Overall, the participants from Us Community seemed more familiar with the issues of sexuality, equality, and discrimination than the rest of the participants. We were trying to explain and answer all of their questions as well, as they were trying to answer Dian's questions about the movie. The participants were very enthusiastic.

The important result for this event is that all participants got to know each other, to have conversation, and fun. At the end of the event we agreed to see each other again. The event closed at about 11:20om.

Appendix 2: MONEV "No Bra"

Date 5 July 2009

Place: Lumbung Restaurant

Number of participants: 8

Some feedback regarding the movie watching event were underlined:

- The film is somewhat 'too high' for those less exposed to sexuality issues.
- The place was too noisy and too warm. The event took place at the second floor. There were some people who decided to stay at the first floor.

We gave our appreciation for our hard work. Some positive responses were expressed by the participants. The film "At Stake" was suggested for the future. Some questions rose about the movie. The fact that there were some audience members who still found it difficult to understand the message that the film try to deliver made us think that we should find an easier film for next time. However, we received many positive responses to this event.

Several points that we could learn from the event:

- The way to communicate with several lesbian groups from the process of publication of the event, up to the event day.
- The way to organize event.
- The way to work with the team (building effective interpersonal communication between the members of the team).
- The new information brought by the film.

This meeting is intended to socialize the objective of the research, to build rapport and commitment with the lesbian community in Surabaya, as well as to preliminarily think about the appropriate advocacy program that meet the community's needs as a short term or long term agenda.

The meeting started with asking why participants chose to join in the program. Motivation for joining the program is varied:

- There is an aspiration among them that lesbians will have social lives and exist as heterosexuals without having to hide their sexual orientation or need to pretend to be someone they are not, to be able to express themselves, and have a positive image in society.

- They are glad to have someone who can bridge the gap. There is an aspiration that the existing groups can have a link to the larger lesbian groups, as wll as links to carry out activities.

In this meeting we put emphasis on our positions as equal in terms of participation, but there should be a coordinator to manage the research. We differentiated between the activities of empowering lesbians and recording and analyzing the process as academic research. We agreed that there should be no exploitation of one over another.

Some problems that we took note of in the preliminary research were discussed at this occasion. They were:

- Limited intra/inter-group communication

- The availability of a common room that could become a place to carry out community meeting.

- Limited financial support for individual lives and group activities; therefore, building capacity in generating income for individuals as well as groups are needed. (Later, we identified that individuals have enough capability to support themselves in terms of education and skills—as well as survival, but limited financial support to start small business).

Participants in this discussion decided to participate as individuals rather than as members of their groups because:

- They feel that they have more freedom as individuals than as group members.

- They yearn for building their community.

- Some people think that their group leader is too slow to respond and to decide whether they need to participate in any activities outside their groups.

On this occasion, we also discussed was kinds of activities the community will be interested in. Camping and bicycle riding were some of them. One of the participants gave us an idea to carry out training on self knowledge (or self deconstruction), or "who am I", because she thought that many friends are still confused with their self identity and sexual orientation. She thought that it was the issue that we should address first. After we deconstruct the self, we can move to the wider scope of interpersonal and groups/inter groups relations.

Appendix 3: Gathering: Freedom of Youth (FOY)

Date: 15 August 2009

Place: a café owned by one of community member

Number of participants: more than 70

Facilitator: Erna Susanti

One 16 June, 2009, we carried out a preliminary informal meeting to discuss this event in a café owned by a community member. The meeting started at 6pm and as the previous meetings, we did not use a presence list due to maintaining their feelings of security. However, we noted that there were 17 people who attended this meeting.

The second meeting was carried out on 17 July, 2009. In this meeting we discussed the objectives of carrying out the event. That is, to gather the lesbian community in Surabaya and build communication among different groups.

Possible issues to be raised in the event include group exclusivity, and lesbians being here, happy, and independent.

In this meeting we had decided when and where the event would be held.

The next preliminary meeting was carried out on 20 July, 2009. The result of this meeting is solidifying the rundown activities:

Sessions of Gathering Freedom of Youth:

14.00 - : The committee should be in the venue already
15.00 – 15.30 : Briefing
15.30 – 17.00 : Instrument check
17.00 – 18.00 : The committees are ready in their positions
18.00 – 19.00 : Guest coming and Band Performance
19.00 – 19.15 : Opening by MC and commander
19.15 – 20.15 : Introduction (show your self) for participants and the committee
20.15 – 20.45 : Games I
20.45 – 21.00 : Talk show: Dating Violence
21.00 – 21.30 : Play Performance
21.30 – 22.00 : Games II
22.00 – 22.30 : Games III
22.30 – 22.45 : Band performance
22.45 – 23.00 : Games Brawn
23.00 – 00.00 : DJ performance

Figure 3. Rundown of activities for Gathering FOY

Considering that there will be many lesbian community members attending the event we decided to print t-shirts as an advocacy tool for the socialization of the principle of equality and to build understanding towards sexual diversity.

There were at least 70 participants attending the event. It was less than the invitations that we had sold. There were no unexpected situations during the event. Participants mixed during the event. Some of them left early, but the situation was getting more fun to the end.

We also discussed dating violence at this event. However, participants seemed uninterested in the topic. We think that it is because the concept of discussing something serious in a gathering party is something new for them. Participants looked so impatient to jump on to the next session on play performance and games. Participants were getting more enthusiastic to join the next session: play performance. The party got more exciting.

Though our intention to share knowledge about dating violence seemed far from the expected, our objectives to gather lesbian community in Surabaya and build communication among them were met. Participants were talking to each other regardless of their groups of origin.

Those from different groups were mixed in the event. After the party ended people asked when we were going to create another party.

> *When are you going to have a party again? Please do not invite the same people every time.*

From that statement we knew that they were longing for having many more friends.

Something that we noted from the event was that the committee got drunk till morning. It is against our principle as an organization that has a concern about health.

Appendix 4: MONEV Gathering FOY

Date: 21 August 2009

Place: Café Corner

Number of participants: about 13 people

Some points that we noted from the gathering FOY event that need to improve are:

- There is no equal sharing of workload. Some committees were complaining about working too hard compared to their peers. They had asked to add other personnel to help them with their tasks, but the coordinator did not agree with that. As a reflection, we asked them whether they also did not mind to share their workload with others.

- MC (announcer/host) did not have good performance because they failed to bring the audience into focus, especially in the session about dating violence. Before the event, the committee had told them to walk into the audience, but they decided to sit together with the resource persons on stage. And, they seemed to understand well about that.

- One of the committee members was complaining about her roles as player in drama performance and committee at once. It was very difficult to handle her roles at the same time. She thought that they needed more time to rehearse.

- Room setting became another thing to evaluate. Too many chairs set up inside the room, sounds system did not work well. The fact that we used two level rooms makes the coordination of the audiences difficult.

- The committee did not anticipate that the event that was arranged for LBT women would also be attended by gay men. According to them, lesbians should be put on priority before we sell the ticket to men. Many lesbians wanted to attend the party, but the tickets were sold out already.

- One of the committee members had informed to the individuals who bought a ticket that they will receive a free t-shirt as door prizes; meanwhile, there were changes made by the committee that t-shirts would be sold to collect money for charity.

- One person has an idea to show hospitality to the audience by, for example, conversing, so they would feel appreciated.

- It is difficult to identify the committee because the name tags were difficult to recognize.

- Band did not perform at the event, while they had rehearsed for several times.

- There was no detail of the activities so that some members of the committee, especially the host, could not understand well the detail of what they needed to do.

- The head of the committee felt that she had difficulty focusing on the event because, besides having to manage the event, she had to manage he café as well. Many audience members ordered meals and beverages different from the meals and drinks that were offered by the committee.

- Liquor is something that they cannot be separated with. To change their drinking habit GHSC tried to put it in priority that any event we arrange should be alcohol free.

In that meeting we agreed to call for group participation in arranging an event and to maximize every individual function in the committee. We agreed to carry out another event; we put fasting break together and personality training Next in line to do.

Appendix 5: Breaking the fast

Date: 5 September 2009

Place: Ruang Serbaguna (Auditorium) of the Faculty of Psychology, Surabaya University

Number of participants: more than 80 people

It was Ramadhan (the holy month in the Islamic Calendar) and we thought that it was a great opportunity for us to stay in touch with each other. We were also thinking to insert the information on the topic of *lesbianism in the perspective of Islam.*

The preparation was a bit slow, realising that the coordinator of the event was not part of any group who was working in the previous events. Interpersonal relationship history between her and the members of previous groups influenced the amount of support she received from the rest of the community.

Dian Lestariningsih had an initiative to call for help through a Facebook message that included as many individuals from the lesbian communities as the recipients of her message. Collaboration began. The coordinator was then proactively visiting members of the community to work together and to gather data on lesbian groups in Surabaya. Here now we have a kind of lesbian community map in Surabaya that completed the previous map we drew.

The coordinator of the event comes from middle upper class status that involved only rarely having interaction with people outside the group. Interaction between groups is rare, but at least at LBT events such Q-Fest or IDAHO, they joined together to participate and support. *The limited coordination in the beginning of the fasting break event happened due to the perception that the coordinator is an outsider (of groups that formed the committee in the previous events). They rarely see each other due to their different hang out places.*

Zainul Hamdi, an Islamic scholar who is also the coordinator of research at GAYa Nusantara, lead the discussion. He is a graduate in Islamic Studies and a lecturer in Surabaya Islamic University Sunan Ampel.

The event began an hour late at 4pm. The spokesperson came earlier than the participants. We apologized for that and he told us that carrying out an event with and working with LGBTQ groups (and also for any group in Indonesia, we think), coming late is something common.

After participants came, Hamdi started the discussion with fresh jokes that brought comfort to the forum. Heavy topics on religion and lesbianism turned into an easy one. Hamdi put an emphasis on the fact that understanding religion is a matter of interpretation. And, any kind of interpretation process cannot be free from the bias of people who interpret. We rarely looked back to the text and thought it was the only truth we had. Others topics of discussion came up spontaneously from the participants.

Some topics discussed at this occasion were:

- Discriminative interpretation of certain verses in The Quran that are against lesbian practices.

- Alternative concept that challenges mainstream interpretation of marriage according to Islam.

- Practical things, such as: how to define our position during *jamaah* (together) prayer and what to wear.

This fasting break event is considered successful. Participants of this event came from different social, economic, educational, and religious backgrounds.

Some people came slightly after the *adzan*, or call to prayer. The discussion ended and Hamdi asked to leave the venue. The next session was a music performance. *Some lesbians have their own band and to give them opportunity to show their ability as often as possible in public is good for their confidence.*

Generally we are successful in gathering the community with their various backgrounds at an event. But, an unaccepted consequence is always found, that is through the event someone could identify the sexual orientation of anyone else.

> *In that occasion I see the daughter of someone who is working in my place. She started thinking that I am also a lesbian. She had been calling me for several times (up to now). But, if she opens my identity to my family I will open her identity to her family back.* (Lily, 22, several days after the Fasting Break event)

The disclosure of their sexual orientation is still something that lesbians fear most. It is more frightening for those who come from middle class society, whose family has wider social and business networks than those of lesbian from different groups of origin.

Appendix 6: Photo narrative classes

Start Date: 9 September 2009

End Date: 3 November 2009

Frequency: once every two weeks

Place: Varied

Facilitator: Dian Lestariningsih

Realizing that media is not friendly to lesbians, this activity was offered by Dian Lestariningsih, our community organizer, to the lesbian community in Surabaya. Dian is a professional writer and photographer. She has many experiences in community organizing.

The objectives of this activity are

- To sharpen writing talent among the lesbian community to express their own feelings and thought in the language of narrative and add them with the language of pictures.
- To stimulate the production of lesbian writing in order to challenge the persisting media coverage that is very discriminative to lesbians. The moments of getting together in a group will create closer interpersonal relationship between lesbians across the groups, even though in this class not all groups participate in the activity.

The writings that are produced in this class will be exhibited at the Scientific Time of Psychology (STOP) gathering on 9-14 November, 2009. STOP is a national meeting for students of the faculty of psychology all over Indonesia in which they can share their research and activities.

WRITING CLASS SCHEDULE

MEETING 1: 9 September 2009 at 16:00 – 19:00

- Explaining the syllabus, discussing about reading material and learning contract.
- Participants: 6 people (all admitted that they love writing, at least for own enjoyment)
  "I write since I was small. Once I became a winner of writing competition in Nganjuk" Said B.
- Some question raised:
  How to write a good writing?
  How to maintain emotion in our writing?

MEETING 2 : 17 September 2009 at 15:00 – 19:00

- Participants: 5 people
- Maintaining credibility in writing
- Using our human senses to put details in our writing.
- The imporatance of writing outline.
- Discussion of writing homework
- Every participant is given opportunity to read and present her/his homework and to receive feedback from other participants.
-

MEETING 3: 8 October 2009 at 16:30-20:30

- Participants: 6 people
- Learning about effective language.
- Maintaining paragrph's consistency
- Reading participant's homeworks
- Participants gave comments to their peer's writing.
-

MEETING 4: 16 October 2009 at 10:00 – 12:30

- Participants: 4 people
- learning about point of view and the way to build character and conflict in a story
- Reading participant's homework:
-

MEETING 5: 18 October 2009 at 18:00 – 21:00 in CCCL

- Participants: 6 people
- Attending Q festival closing ceremony.
- Film discussion and Practicing Photography (composition).
-

MEETING 7: 3 November 2009 di KSGK pk: 16.00-18.00

- Editing participants' writing for Photonarrative exhibition.

Figure 4. Writing class schedule

Appendix 7: Scientific Time of Psychology (STOP) Ubaya

Date: 9-14 November 2009

Place: Surabaya University

Participants: participant of Narrative Class and the community at large

The objectives of this activity are to give opportunity to the photo narrative class to exhibit their works in a national event and to show to the public that lesbians are here with and among us. Our participation in this event is intended to raise the writers' self esteem, an appreciation to the self. The activity includes:

a) Photo narrative exhibition

There are nine photo narratives of lesbian experiences and the work of the researchers displayed in this occasion (please see the attached files of the example of photo narrative works)

Visitor's responses to the lesbian writing were outstanding. According to them:

- The works that were shown in the exhibition are very good.
- They described that they considered it very brave to show photos of lesbian living in public.
- They said that to show their works is a bravery to be honest, to public about the existence of lesbians in society.
- To write and exhibit photos about the life of lesbians gives good information to the public that lesbians are among us. Something that we cannot deny.
- The visitors expect there will be more exhibitions on the same topic or issues.
- Visitors are interested in knowing GHSC's activities deeper and will create the same activities in their university.
- Some of the visitors are interested in joining GHSC's activities.

b) Photo narrative discussion

The objective of this activity is to discuss the lesbian photo narrative works in the perspective of photo analysis and social psychology. It is intended to give some feedback to our next training on self-understanding, self-acceptance, and teamwork.

In this exhibition there were five photo narratives from the narratives class coached by Dian Lestariningsih. Those are:

1. *Rusa Betina* (Female Deer)
2. *Penjara Keluarga* (Family Jail)
3. *Bron Cher*
4. *Sepasang Sepatu Mungil: Empat Buah Tanda Cinta* (A Pair of Tiny Shoes: Four Love Symbols)
5. *Antara Ocha Karo Lina* (a poem) (between Ocha and Lina)

On this occasion, four pieces of writing by GHSC members were also to be displayed. Dian Lestariningsih allowed some of her pictures taken during the research to be displayed as well. Those pictures and writing were displayed for six days.

On 13 November, 2009 we were guests on a talk show to discuss the writing and pictures. Tony Mustika S.Psi. MSi., Psi., was a spokesperson in the discussion. He is a textual and picture semiotics analyst.

Toni said that the theme for all writings and pictures is common, that women with various backgrounds (both ethnicity and sexuality) have a common issue, that is, how desire has been controlled by society with various kinds of rules and norms.

1. *Rusa Betina* and *Penjara Keluarga* depict the reality that there are familial and religious limitations towards individual desire. There is a conflict between our desire and a choice of what the family wants, when the family is trying to impose anything that they believe as right. It is also a conflict between what is accepted by society and what is naturally given. If it is a tree then it is a *bonsai* (shaped tree originated from Japan). Its beauty is to be adjusted with what society wants, to be distorted from its natural development. Desire is natural. The two characters in the story are to be forced to marry someone that is not her choice. Meanwhile, the human body is to be born to herself or himself.

The writer describes it as family jail. The picture illustrates people who appear in formal suits and *kopyah,* an oval head covering that people usually put on for religious occasions. It implies a harmonious familial relationship from which we can draw a family spirit. But, for the main character of the novel, it is a jail. At the end of the story, we still do not know whether the main character will follow what her family wants or will follow her desire. If she chooses to follow her desire, she gives up on her family. But, if she chooses the family, then she will sacrifice herself.

Meanwhile, for *Rusa Betina,* there is a contradiction between her veil and her sexual orientation and desire. But, she was trying to negotiate that contradiction and say that religion and homosexuality is not something to be contradictory with one another. Religion and

homosexuality are like two bars of iron that parallel each other so that they will never meet each other but can walk together. This is a choice, to bring together religion and sexual orientation.

2. In *Bron Cher* we have a story about a chair, a cat, and a laptop. But, the writer is able to personify a chair to be a human, as we depict human as thing. If we project something as our spouse, hence something to be close with us, to be part of ourselves and all the enjoyment that we have. Desires in the form of affection and romanticism are away from society's values will be something that is very beautiful and owned.

3. *Antara Ocha karo Lina* depicts an equal relationship. Though they have different religions, we can see that her love is everything to her. In the poem, desire is perceived as something sacred and clean that has no bad or disgusting label. Love can be viewed as something romantic, equal, simple, natural, and not constructed as a distortion in society.

4. In the story *Kisah Sepatu Mungil, Empat Buah Tanda Cinta*, desires are manifested in the form of hobby and works. It is love work.

Some questions raised at that occasion were responded to by Tony Spsy, spokesperson:

> Q: In life, we do compromise. To what extent are we compromising our own interest with the interest of the society? How does compromise help?

A: Basically, Indonesia has a different position than western countries when positioning people of different sexual orientations. Indonesia has a silent agreement that homosexuality could exist, but they cannot show up in public. The process of compromise happens, but we cannot stop at this point. Compromise for LGBT persons is not to make them feeling guilty by reinterpreting religious text by them. Even when the Indonesian Moslem Clerics Board (MUI) have their rules based on what they believe is right and wrong, LGBT individuals have their own compromise about their own life and religions in their personal life.

> Q: Does desire have right or wrong values?

A: Desire does not have values, but people place the value on it. For example, when a baby needs his or her mother's breast milk, it is real desire. It is the society that puts a particular value on it. It could be considered as pornographic. Desires are originated from God.

> Q: Why is it that homosexual desire can only be acknowledged when individual reach their adolescence?

A: Because we were born in a heterosexual world, people will assume that every baby is heterosexual. Another example is transgender people. It is not only about our sexual interaction but also our body consciousness. To be a transgender person will be realized at a young age, but to be homosexual is realized when one reaches adolescence. Desire exists before parents teach their children.

Q: Can sexual orientation be changed?

A: People who are afraid of coming into contact with something that they afraid of (homosexuality) are those who have repressed their desire to be like the one that they are afraid of (homosexual). Sexual orientation is not contagious.

Q: Why, in lesbian relationships, do partners still adopt heterosexual gender roles?

A: It is a matter of butch or femme. We live in a parallel world in which there is a close relationship between private and public, so we imitate norms easily. Thus, it is easy to imagine lesbians' imitate heterosexual relationships as mirroring masculinity and femininity. But, both can be a kind of gender expression. Male homosexuality has *top and bottom*. Meanwhile, lesbians have *butch and femme*. However, they can switch the roles as they want.

c) Drama and music performance

This performance is intended to show some lesbian activities to the public, to gain public appreciation of their capacities instead of stigmatizing based on their sexual orientation.

Considering the response received from both lesbian communities as participants in the photo narrative class and the public as viewer and reader of their works, these activities (4 and 5) are strongly recommended to continue. Writing would become one of the tools for lesbians to struggle for their existence in the world by *writing/expressing their experiences in their own language.*

Appendix 8: Outbound

Date: 19-21 February 2010

Participants: 19 persons

Place: Kaliandra Outbound and Training Center, Prigen, the Distict of Pasuruan, East Java.

Outbound is the activity that the community wanted most during our preliminary research. We try to make it as effective as possible to disseminate the spirit of activism and sexual rights among the participants. Reconsidering that the cost for this activity is much more expensive than those activities we had carried before, we promoted the activity to people that we knew were interested and had been involved in lesbian activism before.

We were visiting community members in the places they usually hang out together and and explained the background, objective, and benefit that they would receive if they joined the event. On this occasion, we circulated registration forms to them and told them that if the number of interested participants exceeded the quota, then there would be a participant selection process.

Though the community seemed very interested in this kind of activity at first, when the time came we had some difficulty recruiting participants. Each individual who gave the idea and agreed to go were contacted, but they had reasons why they could not join us at the time the event was held.

Some reasons that they raised were:

- It was difficult to have permission from the authority (their parents or employer)
- There was anxiety that this activity would lead to the disclosure of their identity by the publication of the activity to media or meeting someone that they did not know before (who they cannot trust to keep their identity as lesbian secret).
- There was a consideration that the activity was less important than another activity. For example, one person said that she had to chose whether she would a take day off from her office for outbound or for holy day with her partner. When we convinced her that her partner could also join the activity, she kept her decision of not going.

Dian Yulia, the person in charge for this activity, said that *it is become the characteristic of the community to have a certain idea, but when we tried to make it happen, they would withdraw their participation for many reasons.*

However we tried to evaluate the situation:

1. *There was not enough trust with GHSC* as the organizer, since potential participants knew that this activity was also part of GHSC research. Some questions like:

    - Can we receive a certificate for the activity? But what are you going to put on that certificate? Are you going to say that this is training for lesbian?
    - Will the journalists be there?
    - Are you going to put this event on media?
    - Tell me the other participants first.

Just before this event there was Q Festival, an event which, through publication of one lesbian café had put the café, gained public attention. First many people came and observed the people who came to the café, and then the previous customers felt uncomfortable with many "strangers" and new people who came to the café that they thought for sure were not lesbians. Finally, no one would come to the café and the café closed down.

2. Who was becoming the trainers for this workshop may take a part in that bad situation (something that we never anticipated before). Some questions were addressed in that matter were:

    - Who are the trainers?
    - Are they lesbians as well?
    - Do they know about us (lesbians)?

We had been trying to give them the explanation that the trainer was working in the issue of LGBT issues as well and was not a stranger of the lesbian community in Jogja, but this did not seem to work well). The fact that the trainers were both men made it even worse.

3. *Indeed, there was anxiety among the lesbian community around joining a kind of "formal activity" in which they should give their personal data and engage in a long commitment to be active in a group or organization.* We explained that the participants will be together to think about ways to improve the lesbian community in the future, arrange activities to maintain communication among lesbians, and to promote sexual rights of their counterparts prior to the event.

Almost everybody who previously wanted to join the event could not confirm their participation in the activity until a week prior to the program; meanwhile, the venue had been booked and transportation had been arranged. Hence, we were trying to approach them via telephone and convince them that everything would be confidential and there would not be any negative impact to their life in participating in the event. As a result, we received confirmation from some people as participants.

Another problem came up. We were arguing whether the topic of sexuality should be a topic that the trainer should covered during the event. GHSC thought that trainers should not deliver the topic of lesbianism for some reasons (based on our observations):

- The community was not ready to receive material on lesbianism because only few of them could accept themselves as lesbians.

- Many of them were still thinking that lesbianism is wrong and a kind of curable disease. They still believe and have a willingness that they will be a 'normal' individual someday.

- GHSC thought that the trainers did not have enough experience and knowledge in the issue of lesbianism; therefore, we were afraid of them seeing lesbianism with the wrong perspective.

- The fact that the trainers were men made us disbelieve them.

Hence, we invited the trainers to come and do some observation in the community to give input for the materials needed to discuss in the training.

After some discussion, we received the revised Term of Reference (TOR) for the material of the training. We were somewhat disappointed with the TOR, because there was no changes made on the material to be delivered. There was a dispute about this among the GHSC members, whether we were going to agree with their TOR or asked them to do some more revision with the TOR. Triwijati had an idea to ask for more explanation why they were insisting on delivering the material on lesbianism.

Finally, I decided to go with the trainer's agenda with four considerations:

- According to their explanation, the issue of lesbianism should be covered because, based on their observations; the community was absolutely ready for that and longing for starting and activism.

- Based on the discussion with Dian Yulia of her account of delivering the material to the community, it indicated that it was fine to discuss lesbianism with the community.

- Long arguments with the trainers will reduce trainer's confidence about what they believe is right and will have an impact on their performance of delivering the material.

- There was little time left to the date. It is not only time consuming but also psychologically affecting committees who were working on the structural preparation.

On the day we were going to Kaliandra, Surabaya was heavy raining. Floods everywhere, thunder storm was striking the city. We were worrying if participants would come while we

had arranged everything. The time of departure that was arranged at 6pm was delayed until 8pm. Participants gathered in GHSC in their wet clothes.

We arrived at Kaliandra at 10pm. The first session of introduction was cancelled that night. We were too exhausted to start the session and went directly to sleep. Here is the complete schedule of the training.

Time	Topic	Activities
Saturday, 19 February 2010		
08.00-10.00	Introduction	Game to introduce oneself while having a certain original position with pillow
10.00-1200	Wishing Tree	Every participant identified their wishes and potential threats that prevent us in achieving the wishes; write them down on a piece of paper and then discuss them together
12.00-13.00	Lunch break	
13.00-1500	Sex, gender, and sexuality	Talking about construction of gender and sexuality in society.
15.00-1700	Sexual and reproductive Health and Rights	Lecturing and watching movie “At Stake”
19.30-21.00	Reflection	Sharing lesbian experiences. Discussion about our feelings and impressions of today’s activity and being a lesbian.
Sunday, 20 February 2010		
08.00-09.00	Review	This session is to review yesterday’s session
09.00-11.00	Teamwork	Game and lecturing on the principles of working as a group and groups
11.00-12.30	Outbond	Outdoor activity
12.30-13.00	Lunch Break	
13.00-15.00	RTL and Presentation of RTL	After the workshop, individuals are asked to write down their future plan as individual and group.
16.00	Back to Surabaya	

Figure 5. Outbound schedule

Cervical cancer discussion

After outbound, we still had two discussion activities on Cervical Cancer (spokesperson for this event was Dr. Umi Rina Sari, MARS). This topic came up when we were watching the film “At Stake”. One participant showed their interest to discuss this topic deeper. More than 20 participants attended this discussion, consisting not only of members of the lesbian community, but also women of other NGOs and university students.

Lesbians and religion discussion

The second discussion is about “Religion and Lesbianism”. Participants in Writing Class 2 were asking for the topic. They missed our fasting break event in which we were discussing the same topic. Zainul Hamdi, the spokesperson of this event, put an emphasis on what is the function of a religion, that is, to make people feel comfortable. And, if religion is away from its function we should questioning ‘why’. He also restated that religion was a matter of interpretation that cannot be freed from personal bias.

After the birth of Dipayoni we have two additional routine activities. They are Writing Class, with me as facilitator, and Community Support Group, with Dian Yulia as facilitator. In community support group Wulan Widaningrum will take a part as counsellor for difficult cases.

Appendix 9: Initial community mapping on violences

Davi, the Coordinator of Counseling Program of Dipayoni, tried to map the problems that are usually faced by lesbians as follows.

No	Subjects	Group of origin	Problems					Needs			Attainment			
			DIS	KRM	KKRS	Ci	Co	RLS	KONS	SHL	KRJ	KONS	SHL	KRJ
1	S1	Public Park	1		1	1	1			1	1			
2	S2	Public Park						1	1			1		
3	S3	Dipayoni	1		1	1	1	1	1			1		
4	S4	Dipayoni				1	1	1	1			1		
5	S5	Dinoyo		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
6	S6	Public Park				1		1	1			1		
7	S7	Umum				1		1	1	1		1		
8	S8	Dipayoni	1		1	1	1	1	1			1		
9	S9	Art Place			1	1		1	1		1			
10	S10	Art Place				1	1	1	1					
11	S11	Group 1			1	1		1	1	1		1		
12	S12	Group 1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1		
13	S13	Group 1				1	1	1	1	1				
14	S14	Dipayoni			1	1		1	1	1				
15	S15	Umum	1			1	1	1	1	1	1	1		
16	S16	Dinoyo	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		1			
17	S17	Dinoyo		1	1	1	1	1	1		1			
18	S18	Dipayoni				1	1	1	1	1				

19	S19	Dipayoni				1	1	1	1			1		
20	S20	Dipayoni				1	1	1	1		1	1		
21	S21	Umum			1	1	1	1						
22	S22	Mall 1			1	1		1	1					
23	S23	Umum		1	1	1		1	1					
		Amount	6	4	13	22	15	22	21	9	7	12	0	0
		Percentage	26.1	17.4	56.5	95.7	65.2	95.7	91.3	39.1	30.4	57.1	0	0

Figure 6. Problem and needs mapping of Lesbian community in Surabaya[38]

Legend

DIS: Discrimination against lesbian

KRM: Involved in Crime

KKRS: Experience reproductive and sexual abuse

Ci: Coming In

Co: Coming Out

RLS: Relationship

KONS: Counselling

SHL: Shelter

KRJ: Secure job

From the data we can see that lesbians have the biggest problem with relationships and coming in (about 95.7%), the problem of coming out (65.2%), experiencing sexual and reproductive violence (about 57%), need of shelter and work (39% and 30% of the respondents), experiencing discrimination 26%, and the rest is involving criminal cases (17.4%).

[38]This mapping process is based on quick interview of 23 lesbians during her fieldwork visits to several groups of lesbian community.

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Chapter 7

Female transgender: Gender & sexual identities among transgender female to male persons in Jakarta

Prepared by:

Ardhanary Institute, Jakarta

Sri Agustine

Evilina Sutrisno

Lily Sugianto

Ignatia Maria

Irene Augustine Sigit

Afank Mariani

Dedication

For the transgender female to male individual, sexuality is a struggle:

As human beings born with women's biological characteristics but with men's gender role tendency, their self-identities related to choice of gender and sexual orientation become socially complex issues. They actually want to live according to their soul calling. They also wish to have lovers, even legal wives and children in their lives. However, their families reject them and punish them for humiliating the dignity of their families. Moreover, when being outside of homes, the communities discredit, insult, and excommunicate them. Some of them even have to deal with the law because of the alleged forgery of identity.

Abstract

Compared with the male to female (MTF) transgender practice, more popularly associated with a term *waria*[39], the practice of female to male (FTM) transgender, or people assigned to have women sexual characteristics who have a tendency to men's gender roles, has not been well studied and documented. Hence, the discourse about the FTM is hardly publicly recognized. In an effort to raise the visibility of the FTM practice to the people of Indonesia, a research project titled "Female Transgender: Gender and Sexual Identity of FTM Group in Jakarta" was conducted. The selected research area was Jakarta as an urban city representing Indonesia. The number of respondents who were interviewed was initially 20 people, but when the field work was carried out, there was a demand for two additional respondents from Jakarta and five people from other provinces' to contribute in writing to complete the data in this study. Thus, written interviews were also conducted with the respondents in other five regions, namely Bandung (West Java), Semarang (Central Java), Denpasar (Bali) and Yogyakarta. The total respondents became 27 people.

How does someone who is biologically female appreciate herself as a non-normative male? By non-normative male we mean individuals who grow male characteristics outside the "ideal maleness" norms determined by a society. From the research undertaken on this FTM identity, the research results show that persons who are biologically born and raised as women do not always appreciate themselves and their gender roles as women automatically in accordance with the definition of gender that has been socially determined. As individuals they also conduct themselves in a subjective way through a self-defining process. The process of self-defining for individuals begins in childhood and carries on through to adulthood, influenced by the gender values and norms that develop in the society, as well as the constantly changing social and cultural conditions. From this act of self-definition, a new identity and name or label, which is attached by them to themselves in order to refer to their sexuality, will emerge. The limits of this identity and label are very fluid. Of the 27 respondents of interviews, labels or self-designation to refer to sexuality are greatly varied. Each individual has her own definition that is different from that of the other respondents. This shows the diversity and complexity of the FTM identity itself.

The presence of FTM individuals in Indonesian society provokes oppression and violence against them. As a non-normative group, which takes the opposite gender norms of the standardized rules, they have to deal with various challenges to become feminine, starting with ridicule, harassment, rape, physical violence, and exclusion. Meanwhile, the movement for a fairer social change to the FTM identity has not been intensively conducted, either by the FTM itself or the sexuality movement and other human rights struggles. This becomes an important recommendation worth noting in this study.

[39] The term for someone who is biologically male but he appreciates himself as a woman. The term '*waria'* is taken from the word *wanita-pria* (woman-man).

Preface

In September 2007, Ardhanary Institute conducted advocacy training for women who identify as Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender (LBT) in Cimanggis – Depok. The attending participants were the representatives of an LBT interest group, Koalisi Perempuan, and LBT communities of Ardhanary Institute networks in South Sulawesi, West Sumatra, Bengkulu, Bali, Central Java and the Greater Jakarta (*Jabodetabek*).

In the training, there were three participants with female to male (FTM) transgender identity who shared their feelings during the lunch. One of the FTM participants shared this with sadness: "Why, in the LBT and LGBT movement, are FTM issues rarely discussed? Among women in the LBT and LGBT movement FTM persons are always considered to be lesbian. Moreover, in the LGBT movement, the 'T' in question always refers to *waria* (MTF transgender)."

A similar phrase appeared in the activities of Study Group[40] in 2008 conducted by Ardhanary Institute. The topic covered concerned the female LBT movement in Indonesia. For lesbian participants, the LBT movement in Indonesia was considered to have been visible, marked by the emergence of many organizations and female LBT communities in Jakarta and in various regions throughout Indonesia. However, according to an FTM participant, the 'L' element was surely visible, but the 'BT' was still invisible. There was very little information about FTM persons in Indonesia, so it was not as popular as *waria* in the society. In addition, FTM had no local designation, so this group was always categorized as lesbian. FTM participants criticized Ardhanary Institute and Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia, noting they were more involved in campaigning and disseminating information about lesbians, and as a result, the issue of lesbianism was more prominent. As a recommendation, the FTM participants asked Ardhanary Institute to create and publish storytelling books on the FTM group to raise the visibility of the FTM group to the general public, so that people would recognized that transgender people were not only male to female, but there was a female to male transgender group.

Suggestions and recommendations became important notes for Ardhanary Institute as an institution that works in issues of sexuality and promoting the rights of women in the LBT community in Indonesia. So, when Kartini Asia Network involved Ardhanary Institute in its research project on LBT women with several countries in Asia and Africa, Ardhanary Institute was undoubtedly happy to bring the hopes of the FTM group to the forefront of this project. Therefore, FTM issues were chosen for this study. Ardhanary Institute invited FTM transgender persons to participate. An FTM transgender person is an individual who was "labelled female at birth and choose to identify as male, whether or not s/he receives transgender medical treatment" (Newfield et al 2006, p. 1447-1448). This paper is the result of the study conducted over 12 months, from June 2009 to June 2010. Hopefully, it can be a voice for the struggle of FTM's rights in Indonesia.

[40] Study Group is a routine activity undertaken by the Ardhanary Institute once a month. Study Group is a forum to learn, grow and evolve for female LBT in articulating their self-identity and rights.

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We appreciate and feel indebted to our friendly and enthusiastic respondents - Billy and partner, Leo, Rey, Bonnie, Mike, Dee, Donny, Arie, Mathew, Nick, Frank, Joe, Alex, Deo, Ega, Leon, Danny, Andrew, Jack and four other anonymous respondents who did not want their names mentioned. They have willingly shared their experiences and time for the interviews. We dedicate this study to all of them and other FTM communities in Indonesia. In this research, we use pseudonyms to protect the identities of the respondents.

We have enjoyed unlimited support and friendship with our friends from the Kartini Asia Network: Shalini Mahajan (India), Siti Mazdafiah (UBAYA/ Indonesia), Tessa de Vela and Erika Rae Rosario (Philippine), Subhagata Akanksha Ghosh (India), Nomancotsho Pakade (South Africa), Kaushalya Perera (Sri Lanka), Anna Kirey (Kazakhstan), Delene van Dyk(South Africa), Hasna Hena (Bangladesh) and Lorraine Setuke (Botswana). Special thanks are never enough to express our gratitude to them.

The Women Research Institute staffs in Jakarta have provided us a valuable opportunity to attend a feminist research method training, which enabled us to conduct this research. Our best friend, Evi Lina Sutrisno, has discussed patiently and given feedback to this research report. And, last but not the least, our appreciation goes to the Ardhanary Institute staff - Lily, Mickey, Afank and Arie - who have shown their excellent dedication and commitment during the research.

We plan to write a storytelling book about the FTM life in Jakarta, which is based on this research. This effort is to realize the dream of our beloved FTM transgender friends. We strongly support their vision: to be able to equally stand in the struggle for the LGBTIQ rights.

Ardhanary Institute

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Organization profile

The presence of female lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LBT) individuals and groups in Indonesia has not gained recognition and acceptance, neither socially from the community nor legally from the state. They remain effected by a variety of forms of injustice, such as physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence, which occur at homes, schools, workplaces, places of worship, and within their communities. They are often stigmatized and receive various labels, from 'abnormal', 'sick', 'sin', 'dirty', and others, and are even threatened to be criminalized by law.

As a result of the above issues and in an effort to eliminate all forms of discrimination against female LBT in Indonesia, Ardhanary Institute was established as an institution of study, publication, and advocacy centre for LBT women's rights in Indonesia on November 14, 2005.

Ardhanary Institute uses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, the Yogyakarta Principles and The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which has been ratified by Act No.7 of 1984 as a benchmark of the organization.

Vision:

Ardhanary Institute aims to build society that respects and protects the rights of sexuality for LBTs.

Mission:

To achieve this vision, Ardhanary Institute has some missions as follows:

- To strengthen individuals by building groups.
- To build a new perspective on sexuality in society.
- To eliminate all forms of violence against LBT by developing an LBT Crisis Centre.
- To promote for the non-discriminatory policy against LBT's sexuality choice through public policy advocacy activities.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Ardhanary Sculpture, Location: Museum of Medan Merdeka Barat, Jakarta

Transgender practices in Indonesia have existed since the days of yore. Written evidence, stories, and prehistoric archaeology have created a beautiful mosaic in human physical appearance and culture of Indonesia. For example, what is represented in the sculpture of *Ardhanarishvara,* or Ardhanary, which is located in the museum of Medan Merdeka Barat, Jakarta. The name of *Ardhanarishvara* has a meaning of the Lord who is half-woman and half-man. Its figure reveals "a seemingly perfect, indissoluble unity, complete in himself/herself" who embraces masculinity and femininity (Goldberg 2002, p. 8).

Further historical evidence regarding transgender practices can also be found in Bali, which is located about 8 km from Singaraja and about 500 m from Sangsit. In the *Pura Dalem Sangsit* temple, there is a *klungkung,* or relief, visually depicting the Bali myth of *Bima Swarga*, or Bima in Heaven, which is part of the Mahabharata epic and tells of the journey of Bima to *swarga,* heaven, to find his father and bring him back to the earth. To achieve swarga, Bima must pass through the layers of space for the condemnation of sinners. Within these spaces, there was a space inhabited by a man who dressed as a woman and a woman who dressed as a man. Both persons did not experience the condemnation. When Bima asked why they were not condemned, the angel who accompanied Bima said that they did not commit a sin, they were only considered unusual or different from other human beings in general. They were located in that room waiting to get into swarga.

In South Sulawesi, there is also a tradition of transgender practices. For hundreds of years in the Bugis classical texts, a tradition of men who act as women, *calabai,* and women who act as men, *calalai,* has been recorded. They were known as *Bissu,* Bugis ancient religious priests in the pre-Islamic era. The Bissu were believed to relate directly to the Gods. Due to such specialization, their position was considered high by the local communities and they served as advisors to the kings. Until now, the Bissu tradition still exists although it faces discrimination and has to renegotiate its practices with Islamic values. It began with the crackdown of the Bissu at Bugis on the grounds of their activities which considered as idolatry by the DI / TII of Kahar Muzakar was supported by the state (Lathief 2004, p. vi). Under the control of predominantly Islamic society, the Bissu were forced to embrace Islam as their religion and they lost their power as a spiritual mediator between God and human being.

Historical texts of the 1800s and 1900s note that the Javanese women who dressed and acted like men in their childhood were called *wandu*; the term also used for identifying male transgender persons. In 1948, there was a woman in South Sulawesi who had a hair cut like a woman but wore her sarong like a man and worked as a farmer. In 20th century Central Sulawesi, there were reports of three women who 'turned to be' men and got married to women. One woman preferred to be called 'uncle' and would be angry if someone called her 'aunt'. These women were often called *bante*, cognately resembles to *banci,* or *(*sissy). In 1939 in West Sumatra, a woman who had been widowed for eight years and a girl asked the village chief to marry them saying that they had a relationship such as 'husband and wife' (Wieringa & Blackwood 1999, p. xxxv).

The above history signifies that the category of *banci* or transgender practices, have existed in Indonesia for a long time. Unfortunately, the history and facts are no longer popular in the present. For transgender groups in the present (both male transgender and female transgender), there is almost no space or gap in the social structure of society for them to 'live' in. A family finding that one of the family members is transgender will feel ashamed because it is considered to be a disgrace. Experiencing harsh social pressure, the transgender groups have to live in a grey area or in between existence and non-existence. This means they are part of reality; yet, their existence is repressed by the society.

1.2. Focus of study

The focus of study conducted in the research includes six themes:

- *Self:* it explores the process of sexual and gender identity formation. Using a life history approach, it investigates the self-identification process during the childhood and its continuity in adolescence and adulthood: how does sexual and gender identity formation take place in the FTMs' early life? How do they negotiate and re-formulate their sexual and gender identity in response to social oppression? How do they build sexual relationship with a partner? How do they perceive their roles in those relationships?

- *Proud:* It investigates the aspects in their lives that they feel proud of. The purpose of this investigation is to explore strong points and positive aspects that can be used to empower other FTM persons in facing the society's transgender phobic attitudes.

- *Challenges:* It explores challenges and other problems, such as stereotypes, prejudices, violence and discriminations, faced by the FTM persons in different levels: family, society and state. Particularly in state level, it investigates the discriminating policies against the FTM persons and the state's neglect on violence against the FTM persons.

- *Survival:* it examines the survival strategies of the FTM persons to solve problems and challenges. What are their personal strategies to survive daily life? How do they

negotiate their sexuality and gender roles within family and society? *Movement:* It explores the strategies of the FTM persons to establish support groups and to define a platform for the FTM movement. What should the FTM persons do to fight for their rights? How do the FTM activists encourage other FTM persons to participate in the movement? How do they build alliance with LGBTIQ's and women's rights movements?

- *Future:* it investigates how the FTM persons envision their future. What are their dreams of future? What plans do they have to achieve the dream? This topic is to explore the recommendation of advocacy strategies in campaigning the FTM persons' rights in Indonesia.

1.3. Research objectives and benefits

General objectives:

This study aims to raise the visibility of female to male (FTM) transgender persons who live their lives everyday in the midst of Indonesian society.

Specific objectives:

- To collect stories about the life of FTM persons.
- To collect data based on the experience suffered by FTM persons.
- To document the ways FTM individuals survive and improve their quality of life.
- To document successes with combating ignorance and prejudice in the life of FTM persons.
- To encourage FTM individuals to strengthen their communities, build their groups, and become involved in movements to voice their rights.

1.4. Research benefits

This research provides knowledge and information about the FTM persons in Indonesia which can be used to advocate the FTM and the LBT person rights campaigns. It will benefit the Indonesian society in general, including, but not limited to, academics, activists in LGBTIQ and other pro-democracy movements, which also concern to the rights of the LGBTIQs, parents, teachers, legal apparatuses, doctors, psychologists and counsellors who may have to handle FTM cases in their professional tasks.

2. Methodology

2.1. Thinking framework

This research applies theoretical frameworks from two well-known radical-libertarian feminists, Gayle Rubin and Judith Butler. Rubin argues that the existing sex and gender system is "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity..." (Rubin 1984, p. 159). Patriarchal society uses the facts of female and male physiologies (chromosomes, anatomy, and hormones) as a basis to build a series of identity and behaviour of 'masculine' and 'feminine' which is then developed and disseminated as natural. The 'normality' of a person, therefore, depends on his or her ability to show his or her sexual identity and gender behaviour in accordance to his or her biological sex.

Responding to the existing sex and gender system, Rubin rejects the assumption that there should be a fixed relationship between one's sex and gender role. Rubin argues that gender can be different from sex. As a way to fight gender oppression, Rubin suggests women develop any combination of feminine and masculine characteristics even though it may violate the 'common', 'normal' or 'natural' characteristics developed by the society.

Butler argues that gender is a fluid category. Rather than fixed as we commonly assume, it is more likely to change. It is not innate and can be played freely. It becomes the basis of gestures that appears beyond body or biological characteristics. Similar to Rubin, Butler rejects the binary model of sex and gender categorization. A binary model of gender is "a fantasy enacted by corporeal style that constitutes bodily significations" (Alcoff & Mendieta 2003, p. 207). According to Butler, gender is "an act, a performance, a set of manipulated codes, costumes, rather than a core aspects of essential identity" (Barriteau 2003, p. 110). To support her argument, Butler uses the metaphor of "drag", people who dress in the opposite sex. Drag queens (men who wear women's clothes in shows) and drag kings (women who wear men's clothes in shows) represent femininity as a set of code that can be fully written on the body of both female and male. Through the metaphor of drag, Butler also argues that there are many ways to express and negotiate gender norms, including the creation of new genders and making a gender enjoyable through parodies and rejecting the ideas of standardized categorization on masculinity and femininity. Using Butler's idea, we can see different kinds of genders, including the transgender (Butler 1999, 1993).

This research benefits from these frameworks since FTM persons adopt gender transgression. Their sexual behaviours are 'on the contrary' to the existing sex and gender system. They create, act, and perform new gender identities despite the discrimination and oppression against them.

Keeping in with Butler's argument that gender has fluid category, Livia and Hall (1997) investigate the limitation of language in presenting those who are categorized as queer or non-heterosexual categories. The lack of utterances for certain groups or phenomena not only make their presence invisible, but also unexamined. Naming is an act that brings something, someone, or a group into being. The process of naming systematically forms the object of which the society speaks. In other words, this shows that gender naming, construction and categories, expressed through a language, are discursive. This is in line with Sapir-Whorf's hypothesis on language determination and Foucault's softer version of language relativity, which show how "the language one speaks determine one's perception of reality" or, at least, "one's native language exerts a strong influence over one's perception of reality" (Livia and Hall 1997, p. 7).

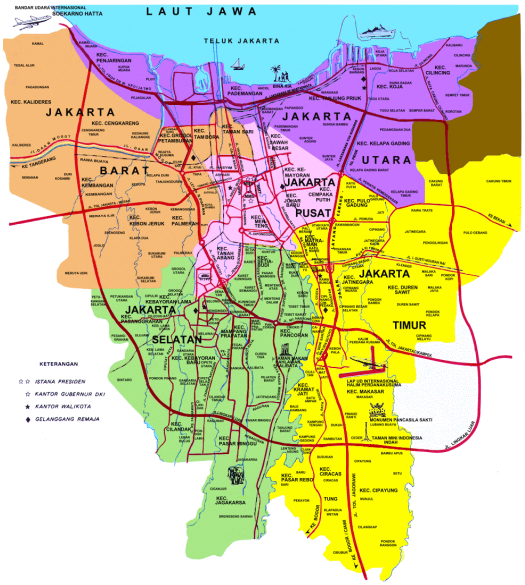
However, the moment when a group is characterized also reflects the value, norms, morality and standard of the society who forms it. Foucault's work on the history of homosexuality shows how psychological, medical, psychiatric category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized (Foucault 1990, p. 42). Thus, naming may bring negative consequences for certain groups, particularly when it is given by authoritative figures who systematically define these groups as "abnormal" or "immoral" as it was shown by Foucault in the case of the homosexuality in Europe.

This research benefits from this framework since it examines how language, both in its limitation and discursive power, reflects the social reality and power relations between the FTM persons and other social groups. As it will be explained in the next chapter, without self-designation there are obstacles for the FTM persons to be visible and to take a position among other groups. Most FTM persons do not come out as the way they are among the lesbian groups since their sexuality do not fit to the criteria of lesbianism and, unfortunately, there is no description in local cultures about their phenomena.

Moreover, languages, both English and Bahasa Indonesia, do not accommodate the transgender phenomena. In Bahasa Indonesia, we do not have (local) names for FTM persons. However, the pronouns in Bahasa Indonesia are more sensitive to age differences than gender. The personal pronoun of third person *'dia'*, for example, can be used for female, male, and object, while in English, we should address third person with either 'she' or 'he'. Regarding the lack of category for groups other than male and female in English, in this report, we playfully apply terms that, in our opinion, accommodate the situation of the FTM persons better. When we refer to the FTM persons, we use "s/he" and "hem" as personal pronouns, "hir" as possessive pronoun, "hirself/hirselves" as reflective pronoun.

2.2. Research site

Research was conducted in the Indonesian capital city, Jakarta.



It is located in the north-western part of Java Island with an area of 661.52 km^2, including 110 islands in the Thousand Islands and the sea area of 6,977 km^2. Jakarta is divided into five municipalities and one administrative district, the Central Jakarta Municipality, North Jakarta Municipality, West Jakarta Municipality, South Jakarta Municipality, East Jakarta Municipality and the Administrative District of Thousand Islands. According to the records of the National Statistics Board (BPS) of 2010, the total population of Jakarta reached approximately 9.5 million inhabitants.

As the capital city of Indonesia with rapid economic development, this city has bewitched many people to come and try their fortune. That is why the number of residents in Jakarta, according to the BPS, is increasing every year.

The LBT community of Jakarta is also growing. When one of the researchers (Sri Augustine) moved to Jakarta in the 1990s, it was hard to find any fellow LBT persons, especially places of gathering. Now, it is easy to find them. Information on gathering places and ways of interacting with the LBT community is accessible via internet; with just one click on the phrase ‘lesbian Jakarta’, the list of information will appear. Widespread use of Facebook as a social networking tool also becomes a means of convenience for anyone to find the LBT community in Jakarta.

2.3. Methodology

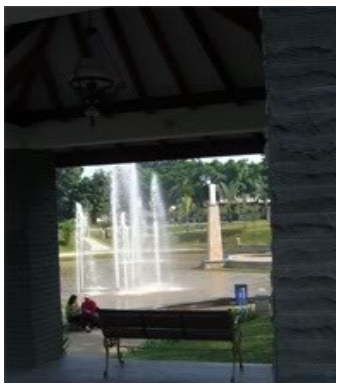
An oral history method was used, in which the research team (henceforth, the team) conducted interviews with the respondents. In addition, to get deeper into the stories and for the construction of communication and interaction among the respondents, focus group discussion (FGD) activities and chat forums via Facebook and mailing lists were utilized. To add more detailed information, the team also collected information on articles and literature from the Internet and legal cases faced by FTM individuals related to their identities.

2.4. Approach

The team contacted three FTM individuals in Jakarta (Alex, Aris and Arya) who were recommended by Ardhanary Institute to contribute their stories of FTM life experience. After meeting them, the team reported that the recommendation to create storytelling books on the FTM lives could be realized because the Kartini Asia Network had provided an opportunity to Ardhanary Institute to engage in a research project. Recognizing this information, the three FTM individuals responded very positively and enthusiastically. According to them, however, it was hard to find fellow FTM individuals in the LBT communities; they seemed to be hidden. Therefore, this research was expected to bring FTM individuals together to reinforce each other and share information.

As the three FTM individuals contacted by Ardhanary Institute did not know where fellow FTM usually gathered, the team sought information through social networks, Facebook, and mailing lists of female LBT managed by Ardhanary Institute. Through these networks, the team found multiple female LBT groups in Jakarta that formed groups through Facebook. Some members of these groups were also members of the Ardhanary Institute group on Facebook. However, it is still difficult for the FTM persons to claim their space in cyber world. Many FTM persons and groups are using the label of 'lesbian' to introduce themselves electronically. Our observation shows that only after deeper conversations with the members of a group, some of them will come out as the FTM persons because many lesbian chatting groups reject the members who come out as '*tg*' (transgender) – the popular abbreviation for the FTM persons. This reflects the lower hierarchy of the FTM persons among the LBT world.

Another difficulty in claiming space in cyber world is the lack of local designations for the FTM persons. The local designations, such as *waria, wadam* [41], *wandu* or *banci* (sissy), are used mainly for the MTF persons. When typing keyword 'transgender' in search engines, one can only find foreign transgender groups. Without a proper keyword, unfortunately, one cannot find Indonesian FTM groups in cyber world. Regarding the FTM persons invisibility, the team decided to pursue their existence by attending as many as possible electronic lesbian groups in Jakarta and conducting deeper conversations with the members to capture any signs of transgender.



Taman Barito, South Jakarta

Here are some female LBT groups in Jakarta found and contacted by the team: *Belokers* (231 members); *Lady Community-Belo9* (591 members); *Big Family Belokers* (346 members); *D'Lines* (105 members); *ClietZ Community* (1,615 members); *L-Word Indonesia* (823 members); *Lesbian in Indonesia* (1,582 members); and *Lesbian Indonesia* (620

[41] The terms *waria* and *wadam* are acronyms. *Waria* comes from *wanita* (woman) and *pria* (man); *wadam* from *wanita* and Adam, in which tne name Adam represents all males.

members)[42]. Of the eight groups, the team found 20 FTM prospective respondents living in Jakarta and five people from other provinces.

Another way to search the FTMs in Jakarta is to find out their gathering places. Five years ago, LBT community gathered exclusively in cafes or in the house of one member, but recently there has been a shift. LBT communities are more open to the use of public spaces to gather, such as parks. As they come to certain parks frequently, they gradually form park communities. They meet each other almost every day after school hours up to midnight. However, more members come during weekends and public holidays.

There are two parks in Jakarta that are utilized by the communities with a very large amount of space to come together. The places are Taman Barito (South Jakarta) and Kota Tua (North Jakarta). The team visited Taman Barito and Kota Tua. In both places, the number of female LBT who gathered reached 100-150 people with an average age of 17-30 years old. Their appearance in pairs almost entirely used the binary model of feminine-masculine. For those who look masculine, if they really could not be recognized biologically by the public as women (completely looking like men), they would be considered as 'successful *butchies* (in Bahasa Indonesia, *butchie sukses*).

In the park communities, the term transgender is not popular. From the visit to the two parks, the team managed to get closer to six people claiming themselves to be men trapped in women's bodies. We use this claim as a possible sign of being transgender since the label of transgender has never been used by them. To eight prospective respondents, the term transgender was not recognized and not preferred. Several community members told us that they have heard the term transgender from media or their fellow activists and felt that some characteristics of it match their condition. However, they neither like nor use this term. As it is happened in chatting rooms, the position of the FTM individuals in these communities is much lower than the lesbians. The social hierarchy in these groups follows a certain pattern, femmes *(*or *pemmeh* – in local dialect)-butchies-transgenders, where the femmes are considered as the most prestigious and powerful position. Reversing – yet still following – the binary model of masculine-feminine in heterosexual relationship, the femmes are the ones who dominant and controlling their butch partners. The FTM individuals who are not following this binary model were considered as lower or even outsiders.

2.5. Respondent selection

There are 35 respondents who participated in this research; 20 respondents from Facebook groups, six from the park communities, four from the LBT KPI interest groups and five from outside Jakarta. While this research focuses on the FTMs' lives in Jakarta, we consider that it will be important to include respondents from outside Jakarta. We plan to compare the lives of the FTM individuals who reside in the capital city of Indonesia and those of smaller cities. Does Jakarta, which is known for its metropolitan life style, make the negotiation of sexual

[42] Source of data obtained via www.facebook.com

and gender identity easier than those of smaller cities? What are the differences and similarities in daily coping strategies between the FTMs of Jakarta and those outside of Jakarta? We invited five FTM friends with whom the Ardhanary Institute has had close contact. Four of them – the respondents from Denpasar, Makassar, Yogyakarta, and Bandung – established initial contacts with the Ardhanary Institute through mailing lists and Facebook several years ago. They had also participated in several trainings conducted by the Ardhanary Institute. The respondent from Semarang was met in the Indonesian Women's Coalition meeting in 2007. All of them were enthusiastic when hearing about this research.

The criteria for selection of respondents are as follows:

- Living place. This is to represent the five municipalities in Jakarta. Later on, five respondents from outside Jakarta were included to provide a better comparison with those who live in the capital city. The five respondents come from various areas in Indonesia, such as Yogyakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Makassar and Denpasar.

- Aged 17 to 55 years. This is to examine whether different age affects the FTMs' perception of their self identity and survival in daily lives regarding their choice of sexual and gender identity.

- Education background. This is to explore how education – ranging from junior high, senior high, university, and foreign college graduates – helps them to perceive their self-identity and to survive daily live better.

- Occupation. This is to examine whether economic and job status as dependent students, independent workers, businesspersons, or unemployed influence the ways they solve problems related to sexual and gender identities.

2.6. Field work

The field work activities were carried out for three months, August to October 2009. The number of respondents interviewed directly was 22 people with the age range of 17 to 50 years old. Meanwhile, five others were interviewed in writing via email.

The interview schedule and place was decided directly by the respondents for their convenience.

The recording process of interviews through cassettes was conducted with the consent of the respondents. In the interviews, all respondents asked the team to use pseudonyms; nine of them used new names, while 13 others asked the team to use their nick names that were usually used by respondents in the community or on Facebook. Eight of respondents from Jakarta were willing to have their photographs published whenever necessary.

Transcripts of the interviews were made after the field work was complete, taking two weeks. Furthermore, the data documentation by Ardhanary Institute was taken with the consent of the respondents to be further compiled and narrated into storytelling books on the FTM community to be published by Ardhanary Institute.

2.7. Challenges and lesson learned

Finding the FTM communities in the vast and broad area of Jakarta with diverse female LBT communities was an interesting experience for the research team. Previously, the research team only interacted with female LBT persons from Ardhanary Institute networks. The female LBT networks have now expanded into other new communities in all areas of Jakarta.

The research team also gained valuable experience in understanding the respondents' feelings and experiences as FTM persons in depth. Initially, the research team saw the FTM group with a single label and identity; after this study the research team's point of view on such matter changed. The research team notes that the FTM communities, whether related to their identity and expression or their sexual intimate relationships, are very complex and diverse. This complexity and diversity shall be celebrated as a richness of sexual plurality in Indonesian society.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Profile of respondents

Code	Pseudoname	Age	Education	Occupation	Religion	Ethnicity	Domicile	Economic Class
R1	Billy	17	Junior high school	Unemployed	Islam	Betawi-Javanese	East Jakarta	Lower
R2	Leo	17	Senior high school	Unemployed	Christian	Javanese	West Jakarta	Lower
R3	Rey	20	3 yrs Diploma	Cashier at a cafe	Islam	Sundanese	Central Jakarta	Lower-middle
R4	Bonnie	22	3 yrs Diploma	Unemployed	Catholics	Menadonese	South Jakarta	Middle
R5	Sandy	22	3 yrs Diploma	Cashier at an internet cafe	Christian	Malay	East Jakarta	Lower
R6	Skate	23	Undergraduate	Student	Islam	Javanese	West Jakarta	Middle
R7	Joe	23	Undergraduate	Student	Catholics	Ambonese	North Jakarta	Upper-middle
R8	Mike	23	Undergraduate	Student	Agnostic	Javanese	Central Jakarta	Upper-middle
R9	Dee	25	Graduate	Owner of 5 Internet Cafés	Islam	Sundanese	South Jakarta	Upper
R10	Donny	33	3 yrs Diploma	Marketing staff	Islam	Javanese	South Jakarta	Middle
R11	Mathew	34	3 yrs Diploma	Bartender	Christian	Menadonese-Sangir Talaud	South Jakarta	Middle
R12	Nick	34	Senior high school	Unemployed	Islam	Betawi	North Jakarta	Lower
R13	Frank	34	Senior high school	Staff of an internet cafe	Islam	Javanese	Central Jakarta	Lower
R14	Alex	35	Undergraduate	Owner of an accessories and perfume shop	Islam	Malay	East Jakarta	Middle
R15	Deo	36	Senior high school	Unemployed	Islam	Malay	North Jakarta	Lower
R16	Ega	36	Senior high school	Unemployed	Islam	Javanese	North Jakarta	Lower
R17	Leon	37	Senior high school	Unemployed	Islam	Sasak	East Jakarta	Lower
R18	Danny	38	3 yrs Diploma	Security guard at a mall	Islam	Sundanese	West Jakarta	Lower
R19	Andrew	39	3 yrs Diploma	Graphic designer	Buddhist	Chinese	West Jakarta	Middle
R20	Rio	40	Undergraduate	English Teacher	Catholics	Javanese	Central Jakarta	Middle
R21	Arya	40	Undergraduate	Landscape designer	Islam	Betawi-Arab descent	East Jakarta	Middle
R22	Arie	50	Senior high school	Administrative staff of an NGO	Islam	Javanese-Dutch descent	Central Jakarta	Middle-lower

DKI Jakarta

Table 1: Profile of respondents DKI Jakarta

Code	Name	Age	Education	Occupation	Religion	Ethnicity	Domicile	Economic Class
R23	Jack	20	Undergraduate	Student	Islam	Sundanese	Bandung	Middle
R24	Delove	45	Undergraduate	Civil servant	Christian	Javanese	Semarang	Middle
R25	Andi	40	Senior high school	Fieldworker of an NGO	Islam	Bugis	Makassar	Middle-lower
R26	Robbie	40	3 yrs Diploma	Bartender	Hinduism	Balinese	Denpasar	Middle
R27	Dru	17	Senior high school	Student	Catholic	Javanese	Yogyakarta	Middle

Outside Jakarta

Table 2: Profile of Respondents outside Jakarta

3.2. Table per category

Area	Respondent
North Jakarta	4
South Jakarta	4
West Jakarta	4
East Jakarta	5
Central Jakarta	5

Table 3: Domicile (DKI Jakarta)

Area	Respondent
Bandung	1
Semarang	1
Yogyakarta	1
Denpasar	1
Makassar	1

Table 4: Domicile (Outside Jakarta)

Tables 3 and 4 show that the respondents of Jakarta are living in five municipalities while those of outside Jakarta are residing in three cities in Java, i.e. Bandung, Semarang and Yogyakarta, and two cities in outer islands, i.e. Makassar in Sulawesi island and Denpasar in Bali island.

Ethnicity	Respondent
Betawi	1
Javanese	9
Sundanese	4
Menadonese	1
Malay	3
Balinese	1
Bugis	1
Sasak	1
Chinese	1
Ambonese	1
Mixed ethnic origin	4

Table 5: Ethnicity

Table 5 describes that, although the majority of the respondents are residing in Jakarta, they are of various ethnic backgrounds. Indonesia has a total population of 237.6 million (Central Bureau of Statistics 2010) and around 300 distinct native ethnicities. The largest ethnic group is the Javanese, who comprise 42% of the population. The largest non-Javanese ethnic groups are the Sundanese and the Malays.

Age	Respondent
17-25 years old	11
26-38 years old	9
39-50 years old	7

Table 6: Age

In categorizing the age of the respondents, the team refers to common rule applied by the FTM groups in classifying themselves as youth (14 to 25 years old), middle age (26 to 38 years old) and old age (39 to 50 years old). Table 6 shows that age category corresponds to the number of respondents; the older, the fewer. Based on observation data, the team discovered that age is a significant factor in the social life of the FTM persons. In their view, young and middle age are the golden time to enjoy social life, ranging from drag king/queen events to romantic relationships. Older age, however, is a period to settle down and restrain oneself from it. The issues of, what they called, 'regeneration', means that the older group needs to step down from the performance stages and social life and hand them over to the younger ones. The tension between older and younger generations is represented by labels or callings to older generation, such as '*butu'* – an abbreviation of *butchie tua* (old butch) – or '*hantu'* – an abbreviation of *hanter tua* (old hunter). The word *hantu* in Bahasa Indonesia also means ghost or spirit.

During the respondent recruitment, the team found the FTM individuals of older generation restrained themselves from participating the research. “I am already old. Let the younger ones do it” was their common refusal.

Education	Respondent
Junior high school	1
Senior high school	9
3 yrs Diploma	8
Undergraduate	8
Graduate	1

Table 7: Education

Prior to the data collection process, the team assumed that higher education background contributed to better self-concept of being FTM individuals. While self-concept is defined as perception or mental image that one has of oneself and how it has been informed by group attitudes of which one belongs to and by stereotypes and cultural norms (Greenwald et al. 2002), we restrict the definition to gender self-concept which explains a FTM individual’s perception on hir sexual and gender orientation and its construction process by group attitudes, stereotypes, and cultural norms on sexuality. Observation data shows, however, education does not necessarily correlate to FTM gender self-concept. Instead, access to internet facilitates more acceptance to both feminine and masculine or androgynous characteristics. Several respondents told us that they learned the concept of transgender and FTM from electronic resources. However, they keep the fact that they are FTM individuals in Lesbian chatting rooms to avoid exclusion. They come out as FTM individuals in smaller and more private chatting rooms, established only for FTM persons.

Occupation	Respondent
Unemployed	7
Administrative/operator/security staffs	8
Teachers/Civil Servants/Designers	5
Business owners	2
Students/ Univ. Students	5

Table 8: Occupation

Table 8 shows that seven respondents (25.9%) are unemployed and eight (29.6%) are working in lower position jobs as administrative staffs, operators, or security guards. During interviews, several respondents admitted that they left homes and dropped out schools at a young age to avoid family/community repression and/or abuse. Others have difficulties entering the job market because of their sexual orientation and gender expression. However, our observation shows that younger and middle age FTM individuals in general have a better economic position in comparison to older ones. The younger ones benefit from the knowledge shared by the older FTM individuals who suggest their younger FTM fellows to come out

about their sexual orientation after they finish their studies. By coming out after finishing school, they do not have to sacrifice their future.

Religion	Respondent
Islam	16
Christian	5
Catholics	3
Hinduism	1
Buddhist	1
Other (Agnostic)	1

Table 9: Religion

Table 9 shows that most of respondents, but one, embrace formal religions suggested by Indonesian government, i.e. Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Keeping in with *Pancasila* (Five Precepts) as the state philosophy, Indonesian citizens have to believe in a monotheistic God. Islam is the major religion with total believers of 202.9 million or 88.9% of total population (Pew Research Center 2009, p. 5). During interviews, the respondents admitted that they encounter contradictions between their religious faith and sexuality orientation as it will be discussed deeper in the next section. Most of them feel threatened by Islamic fundamentalist groups which have lately become more violent against the LGBT groups.

3.3 Research finding

3.3.1. Self

This section explores how the respondents have formed their sexual and gender identity since the childhood up to present time. This is to show the turning points when they became aware of their transgender tendency and how they define their sexual and gender identities, which are different from the expectation of their family and society. As the transgender identity covers the issue of body perception, we also include how the respondents evaluate their feminine body and efforts to change or accept it.

During the period of childhood, all respondents claim that they were raised as girls and aware of this identity, although there were different moments when they realized it for the first time. Some noticed that they were girls through the skirts they had to wear on the first day of school. Some got the awareness through the family rules which distinguished girls from boys, such as restrictions for girls to talk and laugh loudly, to play outside, to help household tasks, or the exclusion of girls in family decision making process.

During the period of adolescence, they noticed their female body when their breasts were growing and they experienced menarche. They also learned about feminine attitudes from school, community, television, textbooks, comics, and religious activities, such as women's

Quran recitation for those who are Moslems and Sunday schools for the Christians and Catholics.

In their adulthood, 26 respondents still refer themselves as women in a biological sense since they recognize their vaginas, breasts, and menstrual periods. Moreover, the state's policy on sexual identity refers rigidly to one's biological nature, which forces Indonesian citizens to choose male or female category in accordance with their biological characteristics. This binary construction of sexual identity makes it more difficult for people with Klinefelter syndrome or transgender tendency to describe their sexual identity other than their genital appearance.

Despite this difficulty, several respondents show agency in choosing their gender identities which are different from their biological bodies and incongruent with the social expectation. To accommodate the social pressure and the state's system, the common strategy adopted by most of them is to separate the sexual identity given to them by the society and state from those they create for themselves, which they call as 'soul calling'. For them, the identity created by the society and state is merely knowledge, while those created by them is calling. Knowledge works cognitively, while calling works affectively.

> "(I consider) knowledge (of being a woman) as merely knowledge and do not internalize it into myself. As long as it is not internalized, this knowledge will not hurt my soul. Rather it will be hurtful to those who want to impose this knowledge upon me (without success) because that is what they want. Soul calling is usually internalized into oneself, although discreetly. It brings a deep meaning to one self and is harmful to one's soul if neglected." (Arya)

> "I know my body is of a woman, but I don't want to be a woman. A woman has to be feminine and passive. I am masculine and active because I am a man. That's what I feel since I was a kid. My soul revolts when people force me to do womanly acts. I am more a man. That's why I have always felt that I am a man. I am sure that I am biologically a man although other people say I am a woman. I don't care about what people say. I know the best who I am." (Nick)

> "I've always looked like a boy. My clothes, haircut, toys are all like a boy. Most of my friends are boys. I call myself a boy but my friends used to call me tomboy. How do I feel (about my sexual and gender identity) now? I found many terminologies for people like me. Some refer me as *butchie* (in English - butch). On internet, some categorize me as transgender or FTM. Some give attributes of trans-boy, trans-men or other names. I consider all of them and feel like trans-boy fits me well. It sounds cool although this term has not yet been popular in the (LBT) community." (Bonnie)

> "Since I was a little kid I always acted like a boy. All my friends saw and treated me like a boy. When we played outside, I would play boys' games, like soldier game, flying kites, playing marbles or soccer. But I made friends with everyone, girls and boys. Now I still believe that I am a man, however the male who is in the middle of two poles (feminine and masculine). I don't need to undergo an operation. I am comfortable with myself - comfortable as a man in a woman's body." (Donny).

The arguments of these respondents show that one can create gender identity in a different way from the sexual identity imposed by the society and state. This supports Rubin's argument that sex can differ from gender identity. The important details are the ways they use the term of 'soul calling' and 'feeling' to explain their choice of gender identity. They perceive 'soul calling' or 'feeling' as an essential part of their life which cannot be neglected. Moreover, 'inner calling', and 'feeling' also have meaning as an individual construction of and struggle for their gender identity which can be played in a different way than the social expectation as Butler argues.

DKI Jakarta

Kode	**Name**	**Age**	**Their definitions of gender identity**	
			Childhood	**Grown Up**
R1	Billy	17	Male	Butchie
R2	Leo	17	Male	Male
R3	Rey	20	Male	Can't address hirself as a male or female, but feeling somewhere in between the two
R4	Bonnie	22	Male	Trans boy
R5	Sandy	22	Male	Butchie
R6	Skate	23	Male	Male
R7	Joe	23	Male	Trans/ TG (between male & female)
R8	Mike	23	Confused	Butchie male
R9	Dee	25	Male	FTM or trans-boy
R10	Donny	33	Male	Male
R11	Mathew	34	Male	Butchie
R12	Nick	34	Male	Male
R13	Frank	34	Male	Lesbian male
R14	Alex	35	Female	Male
R15	Deo	36	Male	Male
R16	Ega	36	Male	Male
R17	Leon	37	Male	Male
R18	Danny	38	Male	Male
R19	Andrew	39	Tomboy	FTM

R20	Rio	40	Male	Male
R21	Arya	40	Male	Lesbian male
R22	Arie	50	Male	Male

Table 10: The definition of gender identity

Outside Jakarta

Code	Name	Age	Their definitions of sexual and gender identity	
			Childhood	Grow Up
R23	Jack	20	Male	FTM
R24	Delove	45	Male	Butchie male
R25	Andi	40	Male	Male
R26	Robbie	40	Male	Male
R27	Dru	17	Male	Lesbian male

Table 11: The definition of gender identity

Table 10 and 11 show that there are three common choices of identity when the FTM respondents reach adulthood: male, lesbian male, and transgender. The desire to be perceived as 'male' is dominant among the FTM respondents (48.1%). The team argues that this desire may come from the lack of recognition for the FTM persons in society and the LBT communities. The lack of naming for the FTM persons, as Livia and Hall (1997) argue, inhibits them into being. Then, they need to choose the existing category to fit in despite of inaccuracy that occurs. In the case of Bonnie, for example, s/he develops a belief that s/he is a man who does not comply with the characteristics of normative masculinity since s/he is "in the middle of two poles (feminine and masculine)."

It is interesting to study further the comparison between the FTM persons who live in a binary category system and the traditional *Bissu* of South Sulawesi who have the category that suit them well and find their place in the traditional society. Do the *Bissu* develop the desire to change their gender identity into male? How does the *Bissu* category, which exactly places them in between two genders, helpful or not helpful to understand themselves?

Despite the dominant desire to be male, there are eight respondents (29.7%) who change their identity from male to *butchie*, *butchie male* or *lesbian male* in their adulthood. While one can indeed feel differently about hir identity in different age periods, the team observed that the lower hierarchy of being transgender within LBT communities may inform the choice of FTM individuals about their identity. In a LBT mailing list hosted by Ardhanary Institute, for example, several lesbians ridiculed FTM individuals who felt uncomfortable with their female body. "You need to consider that you're still a woman, no matter how hard you try to deny it" or "you may try to flatten your breasts but your butt and voice show that you're a woman" are examples of discouraging comments one can receive as a FTM individual among LBT groups. To understand this phenomenon, the team adopts the model of self-concept construction developed by Greenwald et al (2002, p. 7-9) that explains the correlation among

the self, a social category and attributes to form an identity. In forming an identity, one considers the attributes of a social category constructed by society through norms and stereotypes which are in accordance with one's self condition. In other words, identity is a result of ongoing construction and negotiation done by one's self to fit hirself in attributes of a social category.

> "I have always been a tomboy since my childhood ... In the (lesbian) community they call me butchie. It's all right then. I accept that I am a butchie, just following how the community refers to a male lesbian." (Billy)

The third choice is to accept transgender as their identity (22.2%). Being transgender means they accept the combination of masculinity and femininity just right.

> "Since my childhood up to high school, I felt I was a man. When I am in college, I read books about sexuality and suddenly I feel ambiguous about my (sexual) identity. I don't feel 100% man. I am more 50% woman and 50% man. I find in internet that my feeling has been defined as transgender... I know myself better now that I am a reversed *waria.*" (Jack)

The adoption of transgender identity is more likely to happen in younger generation. Of this category, four out of five respondents are in the age of early 20s and only one is in hir late 30s. All of them are from middle and upper classes and have access to higher education and internet resources. However, further research is needed to verify whether or not these backgrounds influence a transgender identity choice in a larger population.

After the interview process was complete, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted in November 2009, attended by 20 participants (consisting of 10 respondents, five respondents' partners and five AI staffs). Self was one of discussion topics. The FGD began with participants sharing on their own self label and the reasons for choosing that label. During the discussion the team noted that self labelling in the LBT community was fluid. It was not easy to find a label that referred to the sexuality of participants. The use of the terms 'lesbian', 'butchie', 'femme', 'transgender', 'bisexual', and '*belok*'[43] were also highly varied. Participants agreed this diversity is due to a wealth of sexuality from within the LBT community that is not owned by the heterosexual population.

The problem was, according to one participant, that if the label is very soluble, it would be difficult to discuss LBT issues with the public, especially if they wanted to raise the existence of FTM persons to the public. MTF individuals have the label– *waria,* or transvestites, so the group was clearly identifiable. Clarity of identity or label made the MTF group exist in the

[43] *Belok* is a term used by a group of young LBT as a code to refer to their sexual identity. *Belok* means not straight. People connotation on the term *belok* is negative, but it is taken by the LBT group as a positive language. Not straight also means uncommon. Because of this uncommonness, they are unique people.

community. The same-sex sexual relations, which were popular with lesbians, also existed because of the common label. FTM groups did not exist because there was no local label to popularize them. Therefore, there was a discussion by the participants on what the most appropriate label to identify their identity could be.

Two participants between the ages of 40 and 50 proposed to re-popularize the local term used in the 1980-90's, s*entul*[44] by reason that sentul had a very similar character to that of the FTM character. However, this term was rejected by the younger participants who assumed the term sentul was not cool and sounded old-fashioned. Young participants suggested using the term *transboy* or *transmen*. This term was not preferred by participants aged 40-50 years because it did not sound Indonesian. "*A label that LBT is of Western culture will be stronger if we use the term*," one participant said. Other participants suggested the term *calalai*[45], but the term was also not approved because it was only popular in South Sulawesi, not comprehensive enough to embrace the diversity of Indonesian ethnic cultures. Another proposal came from the partner of an FTM individual in attendance; she proposed the term p*riawan* from *pria-wanita,* meaning men-women, as opposed to waria. However, the young participants still considered it to be less fitting, and worried if using the term priawan would invite the scorn and ridicule of others. When the FGD ended, there was no agreement about what label they would use as a group identity.

The body

As a self-identifying male individual who has a female body, talking about body issues with the respondents became very sensitive and complex. The research team must be careful and choose the right words in discussing such issues. In relation to the body, out of 27 respondents, only five respondents felt comfortable enough to talk about it. Of the five respondents in Jakarta who felt comfortable discussing issues of body, one of them said:

> Why am I comfortably talking about my body? Because I love my body. I also do not want to have a sex change surgery like the dream of some friends. With my soul as a man, I accept God's gift of this body's existence as it is. Doesn't it fantastic? You find a male in a female body! (Donny)

The process of accepting one's body may take longer struggle for FTM individuals. Although most respondents do not feel that they need to change their biological sexual characteristics through surgery, many of them do not feel comfortable with their body. Arie (50 years old), for example, claimed to have an almost long life struggle in accepting hir female body until two years ago when s/he had an opportunity to attend a workshop in gender, sexuality, and rights for LBT people. During the workshop, there was a session that facilitated the participants to love and accept their body. Arie said that this workshop was a turning point for hem to stop binding hir breasts and to accept hir body as it is.

[44] *Sentul* is a term for non-normative women who take the role of masculine (male) so that all their attributes and behaviors are identical with men. The opponent term of *Sentul* is *Kantil*. *Kantil* is described as feminine women who like to flirt (teasers) sexually, but they are passive socially.
[45] *Calalai* is the term used for women who dress and behave like men in Bugis society, South Sulawesi.

During the fieldwork, however, the team encountered one respondent, Rio, who did attempt to change hir body into a male body.

> "According to my parents, I've always acted like a boy since I was kid. I would protest and cry out loud when they put girl clothes on me. This went on until I was 12 years old. And I believe that I am a man. I am economically independent now, and I can go to a doctor who will help me to be a real man as my inner calling craves for. I have undergone a surgery to get rid of my breasts and now control my male hormone under doctor's examination. I am happy because I am a real man now. Look, now I grow moustache and sideburns." (Rio).

The case of Rio, which includes surgery to change hir body permanently, is relatively rare among the FTM respondents. There are several reasons to avoid mastectomy, hysterectomy, and penis construction. First, religious beliefs prohibit them to change the body which is already created and given by God to them. Several respondents, mostly those identifying as Moslem, said that when they pray to God (*sholat*), they have to pray as men. At the time of death, they wish their body to be taken care of and prayed for as male body. This is what they called as 'appreciating God's giving'.

Second, most of respondents cannot afford the cost of surgery. Arie (50 years old) told the team that when they were around 20 to 30 years old, it was common among FTM individuals of hir generation to have a wish to have a mastectomy if they had enough money to do it but it never happened. Those who finally could afford it changed their mind and realized that with the money they can buy a car or expand their business. Third, there is consideration of surgery failure and its risks, such as intensive pain and breast cancer.

Deeper conversations with the other 21 respondents show that, to some extent, they felt troubled with their bodies, starting from problematic hormones, breasts, voice to menstruation.

Hormones

In February 2010, the LBT communities in Indonesia were struck by a case of alleged forgery of identity. Alterina Hofan (32 years old), who married Jane Deviyanti in Las Vegas on September 9, 2008, was reported by his mother-in-law to the police with a charge of sexual identity fraud. The prosecutor charged him for violating Article 266 of the Criminal Code on forgery of identity in an authentic deed, in conjunction with Article 263 of the Criminal Code and Article 378 of the Criminal Code of fraud. However, a chromosome test proved that Hofan is a person with Klinefelter syndrome, having XXY chromosomes. The additional X chromosome prohibited his male genitalia from developing at the time of his birth. Thinking of having a baby girl, his mother officially registered him a female. When he was two years old, his penis started to grow. Based on the court's decision, Hofan was released (BBC News, May 17, 2010; Jakarta Globe, Nov 23, 2010).

The Hofan case unavoidably influenced the way of the FTM respondents in defining their sexual identity. Ten respondents out of 27 believed to have male hormones in their bodies as with Hofan. At the time of peak media coverage on Hofan's case, the team conducted an FGD session focused on self-identity and relationships. Three respondents out of 10 believed they had XXY hormones. When asked if they had undergone any hormonal examination, only one FGD participant said that he had.

> "I checked it out in a hospital in Semarang. The results revealed that there are male hormones in my body. Therefore, I did a hormonal treatment. The medical evidence shows that I'm really a man. I'm not a transgender" (Rio).

Two respondents who believed to have male hormones but had not checked it out stated:

> "Although I have not yet checked it out medically, I'm sure to have male hormones similar to Alter's in my body." (Alex)

> "I really do not like talking about this. As a man, I'm not happy living in a female body. I'm sure there are male hormones in my body ... as Alter has. Therefore, I'm so masculine." (Deo)

The responses toward Hofan's case show that these respondents wished to have a biological explanation to understand their sexuality and to win the state's recognition over their sexual identity. Intersex phenomenon, which has been defined as having ambiguous and non-consensual genitalia and/or sex chromosome anomaly (Harper 2007, p. 1, 145-146), obtains legal protection – although in Hofan's case, it was far from trouble-free. Transgender, which is based on psychological explanation rather than biological, on the other hand, receives much less legal and social acceptance.

Breasts

Breasts size is another issue of problematic body among the FTM persons. According to 25 respondents, breasts are identified with womanhood. This organ is among the least preferred by most respondents. Twenty respondents feel that their breasts are too big and give an ugly appearance to their chest so they need to bind their breasts with elastic fabrics tightly to flatten them (see picture).

> "I do not like my breasts, no men have breasts. I feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed to my wife during lovemaking. I went to acupunctural treatment to make them flat. The cost was expensive, but I was doing everything to make it happened. I went for six treatment sessions and it was

quite successful. My breasts are smaller and flatter, so when being bandaged, they will be flat and straight like a male chest. At first, I also intended to have a genital surgery, but my wife did not agree. So, I abandoned my intention." (Danny)

"I feel so embarrassed with my big breasts. They are hard to be hidden or corrected. Binding does not help." (Mathew)

Seven respondents found themselves lucky enough to have small breasts, although they still do not like them. Small breasts are easier to hide so that the owner can avoid embarrassment.

"My breasts are not big, so to make them flat I simply bind them." (Bonnie)

"In the community I used to get together, the *pemmeh* (femmes) like *butchies* who have flat chest. A butchie with big breasts will be definitely ridiculed by them." (Joe)

The team observed that the FTM respondents of the older generation are more likely to stop practicing breasts binding in their mid or late 40s. There are several reasons to put breast binding to an end, such as they feel that they are not young and attractive anymore, they likely have developed more stable relationships in which physical appearance is not an influential factor anymore, partners get familiar and accept their body, they do not appear in social events as frequently as before, and they experience chest pain as an effect of long breast binding practice.

Voice

In general, normative men have lower pitched and heavier voice than women's voices. Having a manly voice is also becoming the dream of six respondents who have higher pitched and lighter voices. Those who have womanly voices are more likely to be ridiculed by their femme partners and friends in the LBT community.

"Many people said that although my appearance really likes a man, my voice sounds coquettish. I'm often being laughed and mocked. So I want to change my voice to be heavy. I have had be a recipe to make a heavy voice from a transvestite friend who managed to play down her voice like women's voice. It even drove me to sore throat. So I stopped it. Well, never mind, I accept the fate." (R14)

Twenty other respondents said that they do not have any problem with their voice although lower pitched and heavier voice is more desirable.

Menstruation

Another consequence of having an adult female body is the experience of menstruation. All respondents said not to like and feel disturbed by the experience of menstruation. Some of them even wanted to stop their menstruation but did not know how. Menstruation is also regarded as an embarrassment to the respondents.

> "I really hate to menstruate. I really want to stop it, but did not know how. People said it could be done by taking birth control pills. But how could I get the birth control pills, while it is only accessed by those who are married and heterosexuals." (Mathew)

> "I've had an embarrassing experience, when I was approaching a girl. I ask her to date and dine at a café. Unexpectedly, at the first date she invited me staying at her boarding house. Of course, I was very happy. I felt successful to get her. When kissing her in the boarding room, my vagina became wet. It is a common thing if you're horny. But when I went to the toilet, I found that my period started. I was really confused because I did not bring any napkins. I wanted to ask her one but I was embarrassed. But, rather than having blood splattered, I dared to ask for a napkin. As I expected, she laughed at me out loud and said: 'how come a man get menstruation?' I was so embarrassed by her saying. After the incident, I no longer wanted to meet her even though she tried to contact me asking to meet via SMS (short text message), telephone, email, etc. She expressed her apology repeatedly. Once is enough, I was so ashamed. After that experience I bring napkins wherever I go as a supply; just in case my menstruation comes unexpectedly again. (Frank)

Relationship

This section explores how self and body concepts influence the nature of intimate relationship among the FTM individuals. In building intimate relationship with a partner, all respondents said that they developed the concept of masculine-feminine that similar to the binary gender model commonly happened in heterosexual relationship. Younger respondents called their relationship '*hubby-wifi'* [sic.] or '*papa-mama'*, while the older ones prefer Indonesian words '*suami-istri'*, which also means husband-wife, to describe their roles. All respondents identify themselves as *'hubby', 'papa'* or *'suami'*.

Although the binary gender concept was developed in most relationships, there were two main views on their sexual orientations with partners: heterosexual (33.3%) and same-sex/lesbian (66.7%) relationships.

Those who claimed that their intimate relations with their partners were heterosexual relations, for example Nick, Alex, and Rio, believe they are biologically and psychologically men. The nature of their relationships follows the common gender concept of heterosexual couples in society. Those who claimed that theirs were same-sex or lesbian relations, however, perceive themselves biologically women – unavoidably with some degree of resentment and desire to change their female to male body – and psychologically men who fall in love with women. In other words, they refer to their biological condition that they are female with male soul in defining their sexual orientation.

DKI Jakarta

Code	Name	Age	Relationship		
			Sexual preference	**Sexual relation**	**Relation term**
R1	Billy	17	Feminine woman	Lesbian	*Papa-Mama*
R2	Leo	17	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Hubby-Wifi
R3	Rey	20	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R4	Bonnie	22	Feminine woman	Lesbian	Hubby-Wifi
R5	Sandy	22	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R6	Skate	23	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	hubby-wifi
R7	Joe	23	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R8	Mike	23	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R9	Dee	25	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Papa-Mama
R10	Donny	33	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R11	Mathew	34	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R12	Nick	34	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R13	Frank	34	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R14	Alex	35	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R15	Deo	36	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R16	Ega	36	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R17	Leon	37	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R18	Danny	38	Feminine woman	Lesbian	Suami-Istri
R19	Andrew	39	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R20	Rio	40	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R21	Arya	40	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Suami-Istri
R22	Arie	50	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri

Table 12: Relationship (DKI Jakarta)

Outside Jakarta

Code	Name	Age	Relationship		
			Sexual preference	Sexual relation	Relation term
R23	Jack	20	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi
R24	Delove	45	Feminine woman	Lesbian	Suami-Istri
R25	Andi	40	Feminine woman	Lesbian	Suami-Istri
R26	Robbie	40	Feminine woman	Heterosexual	Suami-Istri
R27	Dru	17	Feminine woman	Same-sex relationship	Hubby-Wifi

Table 13: Relationship (outside Jakarta)

All of respondents prefer women with feminine characteristics as their sexual partners, no matter whether they defined their sexual orientation as heterosexual or same-sex/lesbian relations. The feminine partners are preferably obedient, passive, tender, loving, attractive, flirtatious, sexy, and identify as heterosexual or bi-sexual.

> Since I am still a college student, I don't think about having a stable relationship yet but now I date with a girl. However, I have had already the idea of an ideal partner. She must be feminine. I am the one who propose her to date, treat her good meals, and pick her up on campus. When we get together with friends, she may not flirt around, but when there are only two of us, she should be flirtatious to me, of course (Jack).

All of respondents avoid having lesbian partners at all costs although they may name their relationship same-sex/lesbian. There are two main reasons of avoiding lesbians. First, the position of FTM individuals is consistently lower among lesbian communities. Because of their desire to change their female to male body, the FTM individuals are laughed at and/or harassed by their lesbian fellows. By adopting patriarchal values in which men should have a higher position and be respected by their women partners, the FTM individuals would have difficulties negotiating their lower position with their lesbian partners in a romantic relationship.

Second, it has been commonly known that during sexual activities, the FTM individuals do not want their genitalia and sexual areas, such as vagina, breasts, and buttock, to be touched by their partners since having female genitalia is their biggest embarrassment. This reflects uneasiness and rejection feeling against their female body as it is discussed previously. Many FTM individuals are wearing complete clothes when they are making love. They are the ones who actively explore their female partner's body and not the way around. Their sexual satisfaction is psychological rather than psychical. In lesbian relationship, on the other hand, mutual stimulation is common.

> "I hate my partner touches my breasts or vagina. I don't allow her to do so and I wear clothes when making love. (The team asked, "Do you feel satisfied sexually? How do get sexual satisfaction?") I am the one who give her satisfaction. When she feels satisfied, I am also satisfied." (Arie)

The gender division in most relationships is very clear cut. Most FTM respondents reveal that in public spaces they are dominant and their partners are submissive. However, in the domestic sphere, the feminine partners are more controlling. It is not uncommon that the feminine partners are performing domestic violence against their hubby, husband, or suami.

> "It is our pride to show off our pretty wives in the (LBT) community. My partner shows an obedient attitude when we get together with friends. She keeps silent, sits next to me, seldom speak out unless someone starts a conversation with her, brings me drink, and always serve me. Her attitudes make me proud of myself. But, when we are at home, she is very mean. She is nagging constantly about everything, hard to satisfy, and very jealousy. I am the one who has to serve her meal, wash clothes and dishes. She controls my social life. She always checks with whom I have phone conversation or send texts. Even she wants to know my Facebook password. That's why I make two Facebook accounts hahaha... When she is jealous, she hits, slaps and kicks me. At the beginning, I did nothing since I felt not good to fight back a woman. However, once I lost my temper, I fought her back until she was severely bruised. But, after that, she stop cooking me meal and I was starving. She becomes nicer and flirtatious when she wants to make love with me and I like it. This is her erotic characteristic. However, she refuses to make love for a long time when she is infuriated. So, I always succumb to avoid worse situation." (Danny)

It is interesting to note that the pattern of domestic violence among the FTM intimate relationship is the opposite pattern of straight couples, in which male partners are more likely to be perpetrators. The team assumes the main reason of domestic violence occurrence in FTM intimate relationships is due to unbalanced power relations. It is not uncommon that the feminine partners have better socio-economic status and greater opportunity of choosing sexual partners. About 51.8% of the FTM respondents are economically dependent on their feminine partners. Beside the intimate relationship with the FTM individuals, 81.5% feminine partners are married or have relationship with straight men. Several FTM respondents revealed that during domestic conflicts, their feminine partners often threaten to go back to their straight husbands or find another FTM person. This threat terrifies the FTM individuals who realize difficulties in finding intimate partners willing to accept their condition. They become psychologically dependent and vulnerable to their wives.

> "As a husband, I have to be responsible to my family both economically and sexually. I am working hard for my wife and child since I don't want to lose them. If I have to break up with my wife, I'd rather die. I live and work for them only. I guarantee their life. My shop, car, house and its content are

> registered legally as my wife's property. It doesn't matter I have no wealth as long as my wife feels happy." (Alex)

Nonetheless, there are few intimate relationships which successfully develop a more balanced power relation. In this type of relationship, gender roles are fairly shared in the domestic sphere but the normative binary gender model is still maintained in the public sphere.

> "My partner and I are equally busy in our work so we help each other doing house chores. In the (LBT) community, I am still her guardian, particularly when there are other butchies trying to seduce her. I used to hit her whenever we had conflict. But, I never do that anymore after I read a booklet from Ardhanary Institute. Now I understand that it (hitting) can be categorize domestic violence. About feeling jealous, both of us are easily getting jealous. We adopted a child and take care of him in turns since both of us want him as our son. We also share his living cost fairly since my wife is also earning money." (Dee)

To the team, these data recommends Ardhanary Institute to launch better campaigns and strategies in promoting equality and eliminating domestic violence in intimate FTM relationships.

3.3.2. Proud

Being proud of oneself is an important aspect needed to develop healthy selfhood. A good dose of pride is an essential element for the development of self-esteem and one's personal meaning. In early life, being proud of oneself can be nurtured through the appreciation of significant persons. In one's adolescent period, pride grows from self-appreciation, although the appreciation of other people may still play a significant role (Rieveschl & Cowan 2003, p. 110-112).

Self-esteem and personal meaning also contribute to the hope and optimism of someone in the face of a bad situation in life, such as failure and social rejection. Whenever any adverse event or circumstance occurs, self-esteem and personal meaning are believed to bring self-revival from an unwanted situation (Rosenberg et al. 1989). This topic explores the positive aspects of the FTM respondents' lives – particularly their strengths to deal with transphobic attitudes in daily life – and factors resulting in self-esteem.

The team identify that the development of the FTM respondents' proud and self-esteem follows two patterns. First, pride and self-esteem are the result of personal achievement, ranging from economic to educational success, and self-acceptance.

> "I have already had 2 stores now. I can support my wife and child and provide a stable life for them. Even, my family who had rejected and mocked me (for my sexual identity) becomes economically dependent on me now." (Alex)

> "I am the only child of a wealthy family so that my parents provided me good education and I was working in an international company based in Jakarta. I quitted my job since my parents wanted me to continue their business. I work hard to manage our two internet cafe and successfully opening three more cafes. Now, we own five internet cafes; three are in Jakarta, two in Bandung." (Dee)

> "I am a skilled graphic designer. This makes me proud of myself since this skill gives me good reputation." (Andrew)

> "I am a translator and English teacher. My English language skill allows me to enjoy financial security." (Rio)

> "I am a professional garden designer. This achievement makes me proud of myself. Only few people have this skill. This is why people always look for me." (Arya)

Several respondents are proud of their sexual identity. They feel self-acceptance helping them to cope with life challenges.

> "Self acceptance and being appreciating of what I have, become a panacea in eliminating frustration." (Arya)

> "I've learned to accept myself as I am since I was young. That's why I don't feel troubled expressing myself. Self acceptance encourages me to go through challenges as an FTM individual." (Andi)

> "When I accept myself, I feel light; no matter people oppose and challenge me. I am proud of myself because I am unique and uncommon." (Nick)

Second, pride and self esteem result from the acceptance of significant others, such as intimate partners and parents, and one's ability to conform to social norms, such as religious values. In other words, the FTM respondents use external factors to value themselves or develop social reflection pattern, so to speak. For example, several FTM respondents feel good after positive appraisal from their intimate partners.

> "I feel my life is meaningful because my wife is sexually happy." (Leo)

> "I feel proud of myself when my partner reaches sexual satisfaction." (Delove)

> "I was proud when my wife told me I was a responsible husband, kind and capable of pleasing my wife." (Ega)

Parental and family acceptance may also significantly influence the FTM respondents' self-esteem and pride.

> "After finishing my study at a college and got a job, my parents finally accepted me. I stopped being beaten and scolded. My parents told me that I have to adjust myself in society so as not to be abused. (They said) I have to do good things to others, obey and worship God and the most important thing is being economically independent. Now, both my parents passed away, but I will always remember their words throughout my life. Being accepted by both my beloved parents makes me proud." (Donny)

> "My father supports me since I was a kid. This makes me strong." (Andi)

Being raised with knowledge and feelings of not complying with social and religious norms, several FTM respondents develop good feelings about themselves when they can prove their ability to conform to social expectations, such as religious values and happy family norms.

> "Although I was cursed by people, I remain religious and devote God." (Donny)

> "Although I am like this (to be an FTM individual), praying and thanking God make me peaceful" (Frank)

> "No woman other than my wife in my life. We are a happy family, particularly after we decided to adopt a child. I feel my family life is complete, harmonious and religious." (Alex)

3.3.3. Challenges

Being FTM individuals in a transphobic culture like Indonesia is not easy for the respondents and there are many challenges they must deal with. Findings from this study indicate that the respondents faced challenges at different levels. The first level is oppression and abuse within family and home. The data shows that parents and siblings of FTM individuals may use physical and emotional punishment and rape to 'correct' their child/sibling's sexuality. Rape is done by th efather, brother, and/or uncle as an 'introduction' to the FTM individuals so that they understand 'correct' (heterosexual) intercourse.

Out of 27 respondents, 48.1% experienced physical violence, 25.9% psychological violence, 22.2% sexual violence, 14.8% exclusion from family, and 3.7% economic neglect. About 25.9% of respondents received multiple violences at the same time. Family perceives FTM sexual orientation as immoral and against any religious values. It is common in Indonesia that the family also experiences discrimination and social pressure from neighbours or religious groups to control the sexual orientation and activities of their children. Families feel embarrassed so that they have to restrain themselves from social activities and avoid harassment and ridicules from community members.

> "My partner was beaten up by her parents so that she got black and blue bruises after getting caught going out with me (we live in different housing complex, but in the same block). The information that we were lesbians came from the neighbours who often saw us together. After beating up their

> daughter, they came to my house with other family members, such as her uncle, aunt, and brother. When they came, I was in campus. There was only my mother at home. My mother called me by cell phone and I hurried home. Once home, I saw many neighbours watching my mother as if she was on a trial. Then, I was pulled forcibly by my partner's father to sit beside my mother; they started to take me on trial. The words of sin and moral turpitude in God's eyes were repeatedly told to me. I was considered to cause her moral damage. Therefore, I was asked to leave their daughter. After they went home and the neighbours were gone, my mother cried. She immediately entered the room without speaking a word to me. I knew my mom was hurt, and I was hurt, too. After the incident, I avoided meeting my partner for months, but we still communicated to each other secretly. Now, we've often made an appointment to meet again at a place far from campus and the housing complex to be safe from spying by neighbours and family." (Bonnie)

The second level is discrimination and violence against the FTM individuals in society, such as in communities, schools, workplaces, houses of worship, and other public spaces. About 44.4% respondents reveal their experiences of being discriminated by friends, teachers, priests or fellow workers. These are ranging from unpleasant comments, sexual harassment to exclusion from their community.

> I was insulted by the boys in my neighbourhood. They exclude me from the social gatherings. Nobody wants to talk to me. When I encounter my neighbours on the street, they look at different direction as if I were not there. (Skate)

> I usually entered gent's public toilet. However, once they know that I am a woman. The men in the toilet caressed and squeezed my butt and said, "Why do a female like you enter a men's toilet? Are you a *bencong* (transgender)?" (Leon)

> I was applying a job as a bus driver in a government-funded transportation company in Jakarta. The people in the office looked at me from my toe to head, back and forth, and they called me "Lesbi!" several times. During interview session, they told me that they wanted the female drivers to be feminine and long-haired. So, I was declined the job just because I came with short haircut and tomboy style. (Arie)

In addition to the above, other problems faced by some respondents include: the difficulty to get a job due to performance problems, access to health services, and the use of public facilities such as public toilets. Associated with public toilets, some respondents said that they were often expelled and harassed at the time of using the facility.

The third level is discrimination from the state. The complicated issue occurs when the FTM individuals apply for identity cards. In Indonesia, every adult citizen needs to register

themselves and provide their data before the civil registry office. Their personal data, such as name, place of birth, sex, marital status, religion, job, and address, will appear on the identity card. Every adult is obliged to show their identity card when asked by authoritative figures, such as police and civil servants. The existence of the FTM sexual identity has not been accommodated by the state so that the FTM individuals are harassed or refused when they want to register their sex as male.

> I had completed hormonal therapy. My appearance is perfectly male. However, I still cannot register my sexual identity as male in my ID card and passport. (Rio)

Another case shows that police neglected and violated the rights of the FTM individual.

> I received psychological violence from my parents. They could not accept the fact that I am a male. I received physical violence from the parents of my partner. They hit and reported me to the police. I was arrested. In the police station, the police were on the side of my partner's family. The police did not consider my black and blue body since my partner's parents hit me and severe bruises as they drag me off the street. The police blamed me (with a reason) why as a female I want to be a male? To the worst, the police tried to proof whether I am a female or male by touching my body. I was screaming as loud as I can and they cancelled their intention. Thanks to Ardhanary Institute and Madam Nursyahbani (Katjasungkana) who provided legal advocacy for me. I went off the police office because of their hard effort. (Alex)

The rise of Islamic religious conservatism and the failure of the government to protect the rights of LGBT groups make the living of FTM people in Indonesia full of fear and terror. Sudden and sporadic attacks from Islamic fanatic groups may occur unexpectedly. For example, during the 4th regional conference of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transexual Association (ILGA) in Surabaya (East-Java) in March 2010, the Front of Islamic Defenders (*Front Pembela Islam*/FPI) – a hard line Islamic group – were forcing the congress members out of Surabaya. Responding the FPI's threats, the Surabaya Police decided to ban the conference with a reason of vulnerable security (Jakarta Post, March 24, 2010). The LGBT people bitterly face the fact that they lost their rights and protection in Indonesia.

3.3.4. Survival

In the face of challenges, especially acts of discrimination and violence, all respondents have their own ways of surviving. Some said that they needed to build a group or organization of lesbian, gay and transsexual members as a tool of struggle. Some thought that it was necessary to maintain a positive image so that gradually the public views would be positive towards them. However, some resigned to viewing their situation as fate, being human beings created by God with different characteristics from other communities in general.

Here are some of the respondents' responses:

> "We should have groups and organizations such as the lesbian, gay and transgender have, so we have the means of struggle." (Arya)
>
> "Maintaining a positive image to the community is very important that we will be appreciated by them." (Delove)
>
> "As long as we always do good things to all people, we'll be fine." (Mathew)
>
> "I do not know how to stop the unfair actions to me and people like me. Well, just live your life whatever would happen." (Leon)
>
> "To minimize the rejection of society, I am active in social activities. I am also active in Ardhanary Institute and learned a lot. So if anyone asks about me, I can explain." (Arie)

3.3.5. Movement

In this section, the team intend to explore the thoughts and strategies of respondents about the FTM movement as, from our observation, the FTM movement is very weak and hardly moving forward, so to speak. Our observation confirms the result of a FGD about the LGBT movement with 20 participants in August 2010. The participants agreed that the FTM movement in Indonesia has been invisible and has not yet brought any significant meaning. The first obstacle is the invisibility of FTM individuals due to their lower position to the LGBT groups. The participants criticized the existing LGBT organizations which did not pay attention to the 'T' (transsexual) element, let alone the FTM individuals. The FTM identity submerged under the lesbian identity category.

Second, FTM individuals have less information access to understand their sexual identity and rights. The lack of local names and expert recognition on FTM phenomena contribute to fewer discussions in Bahasa Indonesia about this issue. Transfer of knowledge among FTM individuals themselves has not yet occurred.

Third, the members of FTM communities have not yet found a common framework to work together as it has been achieved by the lesbian movement. Unsurprisingly, only a few respondents are able to articulate their rights. The FGD participants recommended the Ardhanary Institute to initiate regular meetings for FTM individuals and facilitating the establishment of a FTM group similar to that of MTF groups which have owned stronger organizations.

The team identifies, however, seven respondents (25.9%) who have developed an understanding of their rights and the ways they achieved it. Four respondents are working or volunteering for NGOs whose working programs are eliminating discrimination and violence

against women and LBT groups. One respondent got hir awareness when s/he was studying in a graduate program in Germany where s/he found information access about sexuality. Another respondent joined a LBT group mailing list hosted by the Ardhanary Institute. And, one respondent learned about his rights when having breast surgery and sex adjustment surgery in 1998.

The team also found several respondents – most of them come from the established class – who were ambiguous about an open movement for the FTM rights. They were afraid of the movement making the FTM people more visible and vulnerable for the attacks and/or discrimination from society and Islamic fundamentalist groups. They were also concerned about life and economic safety as one respondent notes,

> "I've been safe and well-established (*mapan*) with my life. If there is a FTM struggle movement against society, this will greatly endanger the lives of many FTM who do not want to be frontally open and against society" (Dee).

These conditions show that raising awareness and improving organisational skills among the FTM individuals are in need prior to the establishment of a strong movement.

3.3.6. Future

In relation to dreams about life in the future, almost all respondents said that they expected Indonesia to be more open toward the view of human diversity in the country. They wanted to be accepted as part of Indonesian society and guaranteed human rights by law so arbitrary acts upon them would not happen again.

Here are some excerpts of dreams and expectations of respondents about the future:

> "Indonesian people are plural; it is the undeniable reality. We must return to the philosophy: Unity in Diversity, in order that the society becomes open to the pluralism." (Dee)

> "I want to be successful, please my wife and adopt a child, to have a harmonious, peaceful and beloved family. And one of my biggest dream is my family is recognized by society and law." (Nick)

> "There is a special organization for people like us in Indonesia." (Donny)

> "Being accepted by the family and society." (Dee)

> "There is a recognition, security and legal protection, so there is no more lesbophobia and transphobia." (Arie)

> "After finishing my study at college, I want to have a job and become independent so that I have the strength to resist the humiliation of the family and society. I am no longer dependent on them." (Jack)

4. Conclusions and recommendations

On an individual level, the team concluded that FTM individuals are struggling to understand and define their sexual identity. While respondents' self definitions – some refer to themselves as non-normative male, transboy, transgender, and butchie – relate to various experiences and knowledge. It shows, on the one hand, the richness of the FTM phenomenon in Indonesia and, on the other hand, the fluidity of sexuality itself. The lack of a local term for the FTM people unavoidably inhibits FTM individuals from sharing a common group identity, which causes difficulties in advocating for a political identity for their group.

The team found that most respondents perceive their body parts as problematic – although a few claimed they can accept and are comfortable with their body – and have experienced all types of violence – physical, psychological, sexual, and economic – from family and community members due to their gender and sexuality identity. We recommend the establishment of a counselling center which can provide services and information for FTM individuals who need to work through their problems. As the team found that the majority of the FTM respondents are still using the external standard to appreciate themselves, a self-help group or group therapy may facilitate the FTM individuals to develop better self-acceptance, self-esteem and pride about themselves.

Although some respondents catagorized their relationships as same-sex, the FTM respondents develop and maintain the binary gender model of heterosexual couples. Nevertheless, their intimate sexual relationships cannot always be interpreted as heterosexual relations. The high prevalence of domestic violence in FTM intimate relationships is another issue to be addressed. While in public spaces FTM individuals are showing off power over their feminine partners, they are more vulnerable towards violence in the domestic sphere. Campaigns on gender equality and non-violence attitudes are imperative to eliminate domestic violence among FTM relationships.

The FTM community has not been organized. They remain invisible compared to the lesbian movement. We recommend several strategies for a longer term FTM movement. First, there is a need to seek a local term not only to refer to gender identity and FTM sexuality in Indonesia, but also to provide a political identity to the FTM people.

Second, it is important to build awareness and knowledge about FTM phenomena among LBT organizations and groups. The fluidity and variation of sexuality should be promoted among these LBT groups to avoid discrimination against those who do not conform to common stereotypes of the dominant groups. There has to be an FTM organization that specifically works on and contributes to the struggle for sexuality and FTM rights.

Third, public campaigns for the FTM people need to address human rights issues, including – but not limited to – the rights to enjoy one's sexuality. Human rights issues, hopefully, can be a bigger umbrella that embraces many interest groups, including religious ones. The public campaigns may take form of publishing and printing the life stories of FTM individuals collected in this research.

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Appendix: Interview guidelines

- INTRODUCTION

  1. Explaining briefly the research goals, objectives, etc

  2. Explaining informed consent: Do you approve recording this interview? Do you want to use another name?

- SELF: Can you tell me about yourself?

  Sex & Gender

  - Basic Identity: Name? Age? Are you a student or do you work? Religion?

  - Information about parents: Where were they born? What are their religions? Do you live with them? Who is more dominant; Mom or Dad?

  - Information about childhood: How do you identify yourself? What toys did you play? Did you play with girls or boys? Or both? What clothes did you wear? What did your parents want you to wear? Did you feel comfortable with that?

  - Transgender labeling: In your opinion, what do you call a female who feels she is a male? What does it mean to you? Is it similar to what you feel?

  - Social influence: Does your community influence your appearance?

  - Personal choisces: Did you change your appearance? When and why?

  - Personal labeling: What term do you use to identify yourself as a female to male? When did you start using that and why? How did you find the term?

  The Body

  Can you tell me about your body and physical condition? Do you have any problems? If so, please tell me the reasons.

  Relationship:

  Can you tell me about your relations?

  α. When did the first time you fall in love? With whom?

  β. When was your first experience with a female?

χ. How do you refer to your relation?

δ. Who is more dominant? What is your role? What is your partner's role?

ε. How do you call your partners?

ϕ. Does she like it?

γ. How does your partner call you?

η. Do you and your partner live together?

ι. If you had children, what would you want them to call you both?

- PERSONAL MEANING/ PROUD:

1. When was the first time you felt you are a female to male?

2. Do you feel different from others?

3. Do you feel shy, pressured, sinful, or others due to your sexual preference?

4. Can you give an example of such experience?

5. How do you overcome the issue?

6. What makes you feel proud of yourself and your life?

- CHALLENGES:

1. What challenges did you face about your identity? How did your family and community members react? Did you come out? Did they reject you? If so, what type of rejection did you have to receive?

2. What is religion, in your opinion. Do you feel you are a part of your religion? What about religious institutions, do you feel accepted?

- SURVIVE:

How do you survive the problems?

- MOVEMENT

1. What is the meaning of movement to you? Are you involved in any LGBT organization? Do you feel you are a part of LGBTIQ movement?

- FUTURE:

  1. What dreams do you have about your future?

  2. What changes do you need the people to make towards achieving your future goals?

- CLOSING: Do you need a copy of this interview? Do you want to select the part of your story/interview to be omitted from the report/publication?

Chapter 8

Surfacing Lesbians, Bisexual Women and Transgendered People's Issues in the Philippines: Towards Affinity Politics in Feminist Movements

Prepared by:

Isis International, Manila

Tesa de Vela, Mira Ofreneo, Mario Cabrera

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1. Introduction

As the struggle for equal rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people advances in the Philippines and in the Asian region, fundamentalist forces have also heightened. In the Philippines, the annual lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) pride march has been protested by Christian fundamentalist groups. In the recent Philippine elections, the Commission of Elections (COMELEC) contested the entry of the first LGBT political party Ang Ladlad on moral and religious grounds. In Indonesia, the Third International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)-Asia conference was stopped by Muslim fundamentalist groups. The rise of religious fundamentalism has been documented in other parts of Asia.

In this context of increasing fundamentalism, Isis International Manila has been advocating for LGBTIQ rights in Asia. Isis is a feminist development organization that advocates for women's rights primarily through communication and movement-building. Isis has been bringing feminist analyses into LGBTIQ spaces such as ILGA-Asia and ILGA and bringing LGBTIQ issues into feminist spaces such as the Asia Pacific Non-Government Organization (APNGO) Forum and the Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID). Isis has been engaging in intermovement dialogues between LGBTIQ movements and feminist movements within the framework of affinity politics.

Affinity politics is located in the broader framework of social inclusion and the belief that the struggle for freedom and human dignity is shared by all human beings. Affinity politics recognizes the specificity of needs and issues of each group and the diversity of forms of oppression each group experiences. Unlike identity politics, affinity politics argues that the basis for coalition-building must be affinity rather than identity, or the recognition of difference and not sameness. Within affinity politics, women can embrace the cause of LGBTIQ people and people from whatever position and can work in solidarity with one another.

Through the Kartini Asia Network, Isis engaged in a research project to surface lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) women's issues in the Philippines towards achieving affinity politics in feminist movements. The Kartini Asia Network is a women's studies network in Asia that bridges the academic and activist communities through action research. The first objective of this Isis research project with the Kartini Asia Network is to understand the issues of LBT women in the Philippines. The second objective of the study is to explore how feminist organizations can systematically address LBT issues.

Past studies have documented how lesbians in the Philippines have experienced discrimination and how lesbians have organized to fight for equal rights. Historically, homosexuality in the Philippines has been conceived of as a sin and sickness. Though homosexuality is not illegal, it is generally viewed as immoral. Because of the social stigma surrounding homosexuality, Filipino lesbians have experienced diverse forms of discrimination in different areas of life. Together with gay men, lesbians have organized politically to demand for social acceptance and legal protection through anti-discrimination laws.

Very few studies have documented bisexual and transgender experiences in the Philippines. Bisexuality and transgenderism have been largely invisible. This invisibility stems from the

lack of recognition of the existence of bisexual and transgender identities. To this day, bisexuals remain invisible and unorganized. In recent years, transgender persons have gained visibility politically and have organized to demand for recognition.

There has been no study on how women or feminist organizations in the Philippines have addressed lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women's issues. To further articulate the issues of LBT women in the Philippines, this study asks: "What are the issues of LBT people in the Philippines?" To further articulate how women's organizations in the Philippines can systematically addressed LBT issues, this study asks "How can women's organizations systematically address LBT issues?"

2. Methodology

2.1. Context

The description of this project in the original research design states that the overall objective of this 14 month action research is to examine the understanding of lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender people's issues and concerns and how it is positioned in Philippine feminist movements, particularly in the areas of sexual health and violence against women. The study was described as having two general research objectives. The first objective aimed to know how LBT represent their issues and concerns in the domains of sexual health and violence; and to examine if these are included in the current practice of women's organisations. The second objective aimed to advance LBT issues and concerns by exploring how these can be included in the feminist praxis in the areas of sexual health and violence.

As we conducted the data gathering activities of the project, we felt the need to change the project rationale somewhat. Increasingly we discovered that pre-determining the issue areas of concern as primarily health and violence posed some limitations to a holistic understanding of the LBT life conditions. Limiting the issues to health and violence would also pose hindrances to the advancement of the LBT agenda in feminist praxis.

2.2. Objectives, design, changes in the design

As such, the project rationale is rephrased as surfacing LBT issues in the Philippines towards achieving affinity politics in feminist movements. The research objectives were also reformulated to reflect a more inclusive inquiry into LBT issues and the advocacy agenda.

The original research objectives were stated as:

1. What are the social representations of LBT issues and concerns in the area of sexual health and violence?

2. How can LBT issues and concerns in the area of sexual health and violence be addressed in Philippine feminist praxis?

The final research objectives were reformulated as:

1. What are the issues of lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender people (LBT) in the Philippines?

2. How can feminist organizations systematically address LBT issues?

2.3. Methods chosen and why

Based on the rephrased research questions, modifications were made in the selection of a conceptual framework, as well as an addition of a data gathering method. The conceptual framework had shifted from the original intent of using Social Representation to a framework

deemed more appropriate, Affinity Politics. This was primarily because of the study's desire to contribute to a more diverse appreciation of LBT issues. The researchers felt differences within and among the LBT community would not be sufficiently realized with social representation as its frame of analysis as it looks at the collective representations of issues. On the other hand, such differences among LBTs would be better captured and emphasized with the use of affinity politics that seeks to develop empathy and support for political convergences based on the differing realities and struggles.

The additional data gathering method included in the design of the research were the key informant interviews (KIIs). In the process of seeking LBT organizations for the conduct of '*kwentuhans*' (small focus group discussions, or FGDs), the researchers discovered that many groups were no longer in existence or active. We also discovered many individuals who played important roles, particularly in lesbian and bisexual organizing, that were no longer affiliated with any organization. The knowledge, experience, and insights of these individuals were deemed crucial to a more holistic understanding of the LBT organizing and advocacy context in the Philippines.

Recognizing the pioneering work lesbian feminists organizing had contributed to the present LGBT political landscape, six KIIs were conducted with individuals affiliated with one or more lesbian feminist group at one time or another. These groups included The Lesbian Collective (TLC), Womyn Supporting Womyn Center (WSWC), Can't Live in the Closet (CLIC), and Lesbian Advocates of the Philippines (LEAP).

In total, four focus group discussions and seven key informant interviews were conducted. A pilot FGD with lesbians and feminists was also conducted in developing the research design.

Finally, to guide the analysis of issues of lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered women, this research adopted the ecological model of life spheres. Five spheres were identified:

- the self,
- relationships and micro-contexts,
- work,
- community or movements, and
- social institutions and macro-contexts.

As such, the presentation of the issues of LBT women and strategies for addressing these issues followed the ecological model, specifically;

1. Self
2. Relationships and micro-contexts

2.a. Family

2.b. Intimate relationships

2.c. Peers/friends/*barkada*

3. Work
4. Community/movements

4.a. LGBT movements

4.b. Feminist movements

4.c. Other social movements

5. Public/social institutions

5.a. Law/legal system

5.b. Health/medical services

5.c. Public spaces

5.d. Other social institutions

3. Findings

3.1. Lesbian feminists and the beginnings of lesbian organizing

Interviews were conducted with lesbian feminists who had been involved in lesbian organizing within the broader context of movement building in the Philippines. The conversations with these key lesbian feminists of varying age groups and involvement in the women and lesbian movement building provides the research with a glimpse of their personal experiences of coming out in the movement, initiating lesbian discussions within feminist groups, and the current state of lesbian organizing.

The interviewees relate the different levels of struggles given the different types of invisibility experienced within the progressive movement for social change. They talk about how, despite the challenges, they forged on to find and create safe spaces for lesbians. This was based on a sense that there was a felt need among lesbians to just be able to gather and freely talk and support each other. Personal sharing and discussions led to creatively looking for openings to assert lesbian issues of sexuality and identity as an advocacy concern for feminist movements, both locally and globally.

Discussions on lesbianism in global conferences: Malu Marin and Ana Leah Sarabia noted two major conferences in the late 1980s and early 1990s that took up lesbian concerns even as side events and these were the Sisterhood is Global Dialogues in 1988 and International Women and Health Meeting in 1990. Marin noted that these conferences were able to achieve a number of things for lesbian organising, including the recognition of lesbianism as a political issue. It also encouraged lesbians to come out and share their stories and surface the need to address lesbian issues within the feminist movement.

Discussions on lesbianism in local feminist organizations: Certain existing feminist advocacy domains provided entry points for discussion on lesbian issues. Specifically, these included themes such as sexual discrimination, women's health, and women's rights. According to Aida Santos, two feminist groups in particular initiated discussions on lesbianism. One was Kalayaan, who held education discussions, or EDs, on the issue of homosexuality. Another was the Women's Resource and Research Center, who would encourage and support the coming together of lesbians to discuss their issues.

Lesbian groups and organizing in Manila: Eventually **The Lesbian Collective** (TLC) was formed in February 1993 by a group of young lesbian feminists. This loose collective of young lesbian feminists noted three key accomplishments. According to Giney Villar, key accomplishments of TLC included the visibility during the women's day march in 1993 where, for the first time ever, a lesbian contingent joined the women's march and crafted a lesbian statement that debunked common negative myths about lesbianism which was read during the program of the said event. In an article written by Malu Marin in 1996, she also recalls another contribution of TLC, that is, TLC also participated in discussions with women's groups on ways to address homophobia within their institutions. TLC did not have a very long organisational life as it was not spared from internal conflicts, as well as affected by the divisions within local feminist movements and the broad social movement. However, TLC clearly played a key role in the history of lesbian organising. In being the first group to publicly assert that lesbian issues be recognised by the local feminist movement, it

contributed to building the confidence for some of its individual members to form other lesbian groups that continued the organising and advocacy work of lesbianism as part of the feminist agenda.

Among these newly formed lesbian groups was the **Womyn Supporting Womyn Collective** (WSWC) that started out as a lesbian committee within the Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization (WedPro). One of the major contributions of WSWC was to gain lesbian visibility in media through a feature article by the Philippine Daily Inquirer about the founding members Giney Villar and Aida Santos. The article inspired a number of lesbians to come out to share their stories of love and struggle. This prompted WSWC to set up its hotline and diversify their communication systems so that they could reach many lesbians even in the farthest regions of the Philippines. As narrated by Aida Santos, the members of WSWC then had to undergo training in counselling with the Women's Crisis Centre so as to be equipped in handling the calls received. Aside from establishing the hotline services, WSWC also wanted to know and address the issues that lesbians faced. As such, the First National Lesbian Rights Conference was convened. The conference sought to provide the space to gather lesbians to talk about issues of health, sexuality, and discrimination in various life situations and conditions.

Eventually, WSWC left the nest of WedPro and established itself as an independent lesbian organization that continued on with its education and support group work. WSWC continued to hold fora and various discussion spaces in collaboration with other lesbian groups, such as LESBOND (a lesbian group based in Baguio,) and the Asian Lesbian Network (ALN) in support of the ALN conference in 1998 held in Manila.

Can't Live in the Closet (CLIC) was formed in April 1994 and their primary strategy was to use media to raise issues on lesbianism. They saw film as a non-threatening way to start up conversations on lesbian issues. They often hosted film showings followed by discussions, which CLIC describes as a non-threatening and effective way to talk freely about lesbian issues. CLIC also sought to make educational materials to lesbians available. As such, much of their work was directed at producing information, education, and communication (IEC) materials, such as newsletters and primers, for popular dissemination. A key example of this was the material entitled **On Our Terms: A Lesbian Primer (1999)**. CLIC was also responsive to lesbian issues of discrimination at work and played a major role in building coalition support for the labour case filed by a lesbian couple regarding discrimination they felt they had experienced from an NGO engaged in peace and human rights work.

Lesbian Advocates Philippines (LeAP) was formed by Filipino lesbians involved in lesbian rights advocacy in April 2000. The focus of their work in the last decade has been to engage in action research that aims to improve quality basic health services available to lesbians. The data gathered in their action research helped produce materials that tackled discrimination, health issues in both the general sense, as well as those specific to sexual health of lesbians. LeAP also went into organizing in the communities, aptly named as LeAPunan. LeAP continues to maintain links with its members through the maintenance of an e-group. It also engages in legislative advocacy work together with the current and diverse set of LGBT groups in the Philippines that are at the forefront of raising awareness on LGBT issues in contemporary times.

Lesbian feminists on achievements and challenges: In the narratives of these key lesbian feminists, they acknowledge the roots of lesbian organizing in Manila as a growth nurtured within feminist organizations. Feminists in the 1990s provided the space for lesbians to come

together and eventually gain the capability to build organizations that continue to provide spaces for lesbians of varying ages and diverse concerns. As the groups identify and prioritized their issues of focus, there developed a natural link to other 'sexual minority groups', such as gay persons. Initial conversations with such groups led to deepening an understanding of sexual diversity as a shared concern of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people. This did not mean, though, that ties with feminist groups needed to be cut off. It just meant there was a felt need by lesbian groups to strengthen ties with other sexual minority groups towards advancing the call for the inclusion and recognition of LGBT rights as human rights.

In noting the current connections of lesbian groups, they are able to note gains in LGBT visibility and recognition in various sites. In the area of *psychological health* specifically, the 1994 Philippine Psychological Association removed homosexuality in the list of mental disorders. In the area of *legislative advocacy*, there have also been some gains in linking with progressive law makers in trying to claim basic rights of sectoral representation, calling attention to discrimination in hiring of homosexuals and legal recognition of same-sex partnerships. One of the most recent bills filed is HB 956, or the Anti-Discrimination Bill, filed by Rep. Riza Hontiveros of the Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, or AKBAYAN. *Mass support for LGBT sectoral representations* was also evident in December 2010 when human rights, feminist groups, some local government officials, select congress representatives, senators, and even the Commission on Human Rights, issued statements in defence of the third disqualification case of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) against the sectoral representation filed by Ang LADLAD, a political party of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Filipinos. This support had resulted to the recognition of Ang LADLAD as a sectoral party to run for representation in the National Elections in May 2010.

Lesbian feminists also noted some growth in mass media, that is, in way of more positive depictions of lesbian and gays in television and film and major daily newspapers providing support to lesbian and gays through advice columns maintained by lesbian and gay writers. Furthermore, the advent of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) has provided spaces for expression and participation of LGBTs of various walks of life.

Also important to note, as pointed out by a lesbian feminist who directly suffered discrimination when coming out as a lesbian in the communist party, is the advancement in the acceptance of LGBTs in progressive political movements – even by way of acceptance of same-sex unions in political left parties.

Challenges in organizing and movement building: In as much as they note achievements on various sites, lesbian feminists continue to be reflective of the challenges faced in lesbian organizing then and now. In noting past difficulties in lesbian organizing, they acknowledge the effect of the split within the left that eventually affected women's groups and also stunted the growth of the lesbian organizing in Manila. Some of the lesbian feminists who continue to be active in lesbian organizing also noted a decline in lesbian membership. They note two reasons behind the decline in lesbian membership: the first being that, maybe it is much easier to live as a lesbian now because of various forms of acceptance in social institutions; and the second was the advent of new ICTs, such as networking sites, that are perceived as new forms of activism.

3.2. Women's Crisis Center (WCC)

3.2.1. LBT issues

The self

Importance of coming out and visibility: In the excerpts below, the issue of coming out is described as being 'authentic' and speaking 'the truth'. As a counsellor, the speaker explains the need and importance of expressing the authentic self. She believes that a counselling session is one such space that allows for 'the truth' to be revealed. She also explains that it is in being witness to lesbians and gays coming out and hearing them share their life experiences that she, as a heterosexual woman, is able to develop her knowledge and awareness on such issues.

> *If I look at my own development and consciousness about lesbian issues, I can only credit to one is having lesbian and gay-lesbian women and gay men- really talked about their experience ... For example, I distinctly remember one saying: I can hide my lesbianism with ribbons in my hair ... but the day came when it was really time for me to be authentic ... the day came when my own daughter asked me whether I thought the woman across the room was hot.* (P.15, TER)

Youth coming out during counselling sessions: It was also pointed out by another participant of the WCC kwentuhan that, in a group counselling session among sexually abused young women, several women opened up about their sexual orientations and attractions for the same-sex. This had also affirmed the idea that such counselling sessions did provide women with the space to freely express their sexuality (this is further discussed in 3.3. Applied Strategies).

Identifying and creating such spaces for women to come out was deemed as important for the building of women's self-esteem and empowerment, that is, towards the general development of a healthy sense of self.

Relationships and micro-contexts

Intimate relationships

Violence in intimate relationships: As a crisis center that services women who are victims of violence and abuse, the WCC was able to share some of the cases that they had handled. While many of their cases dealt with women being abused by their husbands, they had also encountered cases of violence among women in same-sex relationships. In some cases, the nature of the violence was one-way, meaning one particular woman inflicted the violence to the other. Yet, in other cases, the violent behaviour was mutual. What struck us in these cases of violence in same-sex relationships among women was the desire to work it out. The partners neither accepted it nor did they split. In one such case, the woman explains that she believes it would be easier for her to work it out with her partner than look for another partner.

When comparing the behaviour of these women who experience violence in same-sex relations with that of heterosexual cases of domestic violence, WCC explained that some of the women really appeared 'powerless'. They were described as fitting the stereotypical demeanour of a 'victim'. However, they also recall a case where the lesbian had a very strong demeanour and, in many situations, she would fight back and defend herself.

WCC also recalls a case of a woman who was in a same-sex relationship and, at the same time, being battered by her husband.

Rape in the community: Another issue raised was the rape of 'tomboys' by men in the community. The use of rape by these men in the community was described as intentionally directed at tomboys to send the message that these tomboys are still women. The use of rape is, in a sense, a way to prevent tomboys from expressing their gender identity as tomboys. It is a way of saying that the tomboy identity is unacceptable in their community.

Infidelity issues: Among the issues raised in the area of intimate relationships was infidelity. The scenario was described as having similarities among heterosexual couples where infidelity is used by women to get back at their husbands for being 'unfaithful'. Similarly, women in same-sex relationships, because of being very much hurt and affected when their partners are 'unfaithful', will resort to committing acts of infidelity as a way of punishing their partners for the betrayal.

Community/movements

Feminist community expanding its services: Within the life sphere of community and movements, WCC made no mention of the LGBT movement, but instead focused on the feminist movement or community. As a longstanding feminist organization, WCC talked about the ways in which they are constantly challenged with the need to expand their knowledge and approaches on various issues and concerns.

Among those was the issue of women's sexuality and, in particular, lesbianism. They had recognized the importance and need to expand their programs and services. They made specific comparison between the desires to have a program for men to that of a program for lesbians.

Public/social institutions

The law and legal systems as discriminating and homophobic: Important to note in the WCC kwentuhan was the experience of a tomboy client who was a victim of rape and sought medico-legal assistance. Apparently, this case was not taken seriously by these agencies the tomboy sought assistance from and was confronted with further humiliation and sexual harassment.

3.2.2. Applied strategies

Upon reflecting on the current approaches that the WCC were undertaking in addressing LBT issues, the following strategies were identified:

The WCC cites the **values and principles of feminism** as the fundamental framework for their approaches as a center that tries to understand and help women in crisis. As such, they explain that feminist principles demand that all types of women are accepted, that all women that come to them are assured of their respect and confidentiality, and that all women that come to them are not and do not feel judged or discriminated against.

However, a challenge that was posed and recognized as indeed an area they had not yet considered was: what if the individuals did not identify as women? Concretely, this referred to the tomboys or masculine looking females who did not identify as women, but still very much needed crisis intervention.

As a practice, the WCC organizes and conducts learning sessions which they call, **'issue-discussions'** when there is an issue they feel they need to gain a deeper understanding of in order to enhance their crisis interventions. It was through this approach that they felt they could get a better understanding of lesbian/tomboy issues and concerns, as well as develop their skills in handling such cases.

Another practice of the WCC that is based on feminist principles is the screening of non-**homophobic social work applicants.** One of the participants of the kwentuhan relayed how one particular applicant responded to their interview question on personal views about lesbianism.

3.2.3. Proposed strategies

In the area of proposed strategies for the inclusion of LBT issues, WCC had much to share and revealed much enthusiasm. Their specific proposals can be categorized into two broad areas for the development of LBT inclusive strategies:

For truly effective and inclusive crisis interventions, the WCC recognizes their need to **expand their knowledge on the issues and concerns of LBT persons**. There is recognition that a feminist organization such as the WCC could not simply apply heteronormative frameworks and approaches in crisis intervention to LBT cases. They recognize that there is much to learn and explore in understanding marginalized sexualities and gender identity. There is also recognition that such learning entails the questioning of **heterosexual assumptions** and **binary thinking**.

Some of the areas WCC identified for knowledge and framework building included problematizing the **concept of love** within romantic relationships and how this is linked to actions of violence, both in same-sex and heterosexual relationships.

WCC also mentioned the need to expand their knowledge and gain an in depth understanding of the **dynamics of same-sex relationships**, most especially if they are to effectively counsel such clients.

However, while recognizing the importance of a distinct understanding and distinct approach for handling such cases, for instance of same-sex intimate violence, WCC believes that the fundamental concern is still the issue of **inequality** and the sources of **power**.

Such new thinking around LBT issues was also linked to the ways in which theorizing and framework building is being done to understand the **male standpoint**. That is, to better understand the men who commit violence and to have them account for their violent behaviour, to not simply label such men as perpetuators of violence without hope of restoration. This kind of thinking was deemed as possibly providing insights into new frameworks for crisis intervention approaches that could be useful for same-sex relationships that sought to **overcome the violence** and make the relationship work.

Also critically assessed by WCC was their counselling approach. They recognized that, despite having and developing the skills to ask about highly sensitive issues, such as experiences of violence, they had not developed the same sensitivity and skills for **probing sexualities** and sexual practices of their clients. This was deemed important if one was not to assume all women that sought crisis intervention are heterosexual.

It was also seen to be particularly essential for one counsellor to **pro-actively seek to speak with the partner** of her client when handling cases of intimate violence in same-sex relationships, given they are both women.

Upon reflecting on the current office processes and organizational development of the WCC, two areas of improvement were identified. One was in the area of **developing LBT inclusive educational materials**, specifically providing reading materials on same-sex violence, putting up LBT posters in the office, and the like. Such approaches were deemed necessary by WCC if they were to truly reach out and be inclusive of all types of women.

> The other area identified was in consciously and **systematically documenting lesbian cases**, that is, to not simply see such cases as exemptions or anomalies in their work. In fact, WCC pointed out that had Isis, through the course of conducting this research, not asked them about these cases, they believe they may not have really paid such attention given the many demands of their work.

3.3. Likhaan

3.3.1. LBT issues

The self

Tomboy identity and body dilemma: Given that tomboys do not identify as women, but more so as men, they were often alienated from the physical structure and needs of their female bodies. The tomboy identity and its disassociation from the female body was raised as an important concern by Likhaan, particularly because of possible health implications. At best, the tomboys were described as not being sensitive to the needs of their bodies, and at worst, they were described as being in denial that they had any physiological health care needs at all; for example, wearing loose clothes to cover the shape of their breasts and out right denying that they menstruate.

Taking on negative masculine stereotype qualities: Another serious problem among tomboys identified was the ways in which they take on the negative masculine stereotypical behaviours of dealing with problems through, for example, resorting to excessive drinking, smoking, getting into fights, and the like. Sadly, the problems they encounter were often cited as related to the discrimination they encounter as tomboys; for instance, not being able to get employment. As such, they feel their negative behaviour is justified, acceptable, and even expected of them as tomboys.

Desired physicality sought through hormone pills: Given that male to female (MTF) transgendered individuals identify as women, their desire to look like women is an important everyday concern. Apart from dressing in women's clothes and taking on stereotypical feminine qualities, hormone pills play an important role in achieving their desired physical state. Likhaan explained that often transgendered individuals, which they often referred to as *baklas*, would often take hormone pills for enlarging their breasts and for beautifying their skin.

Relationships and micro-contexts

Family

Likhaan's general observation is that there is **more acceptance now** of same-sex relationships than there was years ago. In the past, the beating up of homosexuals by family members was not uncommon, while now it would seem families are more tolerant.

The nature of acceptance by the family is described as **gradual acceptance**. That is, allowing the family some time to see and understand that such sexual relationships and gender identities can work and prove to be healthy and productive. The level of acceptance is also very much dependent on the economic contribution and stability that LBTs are able to achieve, in a sense, in exchange for family acceptance.

It is particularly important for **same-sex couples** to be accepted in the family and be allowed to **live with their families**. For many, the ability to financial sustain themselves and live on their own is very difficult given the discrimination they experience in trying to getting work.

Also described was a kind of **conditional acceptance**, where, in a particular case of a transgender and the family, the parent found it difficult to beat-up his transgender 'son' given 'he' proved to be more responsible and reliable than his other 'normal' children. Interestingly, there seemed to be an unsaid social expectation that parents and families are supposed to reject and be violent to such children should they prove to not be responsible and reliable members of the family.

Intimate relationships

The issues raised in the area of intimate relationship were mainly related to cases of **intimate violence in same-sex relationships**, as well as, the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The violence in same-sex relationships were described as being born out of feelings of jealousy where the 'butch' in the relationship was identified as the perpetuator of the violence. The issue of STIs, on the other hand, presumably from multiple relationships, was not clearly and explicitly explained. It was, however, deemed as a serious and increasing problem.

Another issue raised was the desire of those in same-sex female relationships to find ways in which they could **strengthen their relationships** and make them more stable and lasting.

Peers/friends/barkad

Also discussed during the kwentuhan with Likhaan was a case where, in one of their communities, there is the rampant **rape of tomboys** (this is further discussed in the following sections). In such cases, some tomboys are impregnated. When this happens and they decide to have the baby, these tomboys are rejected by their peers, that is, other tomboys. They are perceived as no longer being tomboys because they chose to have the baby. Not only do their **peers refuse their sympathy and support**, they also pressure the tomboy to marry the biological father of the baby that is the rapist.

Work

Difficulty in getting employment: Among the serious issues faced by tomboys was their difficulty in getting decent employment. Lesbians, who are more feminine, can easily pass as heterosexuals, and therefore able to avoid this level of discrimination in gaining employment. Tomboys, on the other hand, because of their masculine physical appearances, are immediately discriminated. In fact, Likhaan points out that tomboys are discriminated against much more than gays when it comes to employment opportunities.

Community/movements

Feminist community: Being a longstanding feminist organization, Likhaan had deep and critical reflections about their approach to LBT issues and concerns. They described their approach as extremely **supportive of LBT issues**, but it was indeed not seen as core to their work in women's health.

Likhaan explains that, while they, as a feminist organization, had joined LGBT pride marches and events, they also know of certain lesbian individuals who are part of their safe abortion advocacy networks. Clearly, they could see the importance of supporting each other's primary or core issues as a movement, and the importance of **intermovement involvement**.

Admittedly, they recognize they do not have the expertise to provide health care services to LBT persons in the way they are able to provide it for heterosexual women. However, Likhaan explains that **what they may lack in expertise, the make up for in sensitivity** to the needs, conditions, and lifestyles of LBTs.

Likhaan also recognized their particular **limitations in their knowledge of bisexual issues**, conditions, and lifestyles. In fact, they were not really sure who among the members of their community identified as bisexuals. Bisexual women seemed more invisible to them than lesbians, tomboys, and/or transgendered individuals.

Similarly, Likhaan was unsure and **vague about the definition of transgender persons**, or who and what qualified as a transgender person. The term transgender is not used in the community, but rather the term bakla. Likhaan had also explained that transgender individuals do not go to them and seek their health services.

Other communities: The general perception and response of the broader community ranges from seeing **transgender persons as comic relief**, to stereotyping **lesbians as ugly women**, to labelling **tomboys as having no future**, and to the **systematic rape of tomboys** by members of the community.

Public/social institutions

Law: In the area of national legislation, Likhaan was quick to point out that **lesbian rights** are often **excluded in the law** and the law making process. They cited the Magna Carta for Women as an example of how excluded and unintegrated lesbian rights are from a document that is considered key in advancing women's social status. Likhaan explains that, clearly government programs do not recognize and include lesbian issues and concerns.

Health services: As a feminist organization that is primarily geared towards understanding women's health issues, providing services to grassroots communities, and lobbying the government for appropriate law and services directed at the development of the national health care system, Likhaan sees a great many serious concerns for LBT persons in these area.

Clearly, the health services in general are **inappropriate and insensitive** to the needs of LBT individuals and therefore not encouraging of their to seek health care. There are serious health concerns among the LBT community that Likhaan identified that remain unaddressed. Among the concerns highlighted were the **increasing cases of STIs**, the **not seeking of medical help**, and the **unguided use of hormone pills**.

Public spaces in general: A number of basic everyday concerns in the realm of public spaces in general were also raised. Such concerns centred primarily among tomboys and MTF transgender persons. For Likhaan, it seemed MTF transgender individuals, as compared to tomboys, are more visible and accepted in public spaces. For instance, they explained that tomboys are not seen in **public toilets** as often as transgendered women.

Likhaan also pointed out that they know of MTF transgender persons who have to deal with being forced to wear **masculine school uniforms**, that is, pants and a shirt. This was described as a constant and everyday issue of having to change immediately out of their uniforms after school and put on their skirts to dress in a way that is more comfortable for them, in a way that truly expressed who they are.

3.3.2. Applied strategies

The strategies applied by Likhaan are framed within their strong commitment to be supportive of LBT issues and concerns. However, it is also framed within the recognition that Likhaan has not developed the expertise for addressing LBT issues, given it is not seen as a core mandate of the organization. As such, the strategies included three main approaches/activities:

Being **responsive to requests** coming from lesbians and tomboys for papsmear services was one approach. This entailed holding special activities directed at providing such services specifically geared towards the papsmear needs and concerns of lesbians and tomboys. It also

required developing customized educational materials, given the existing brochures were deemed inappropriate.

Sponsoring an **LGBT prom night** in recognition and celebration of diverse sexualities was another approach. Though seemingly a social event, it did indeed have a clear political value.

Heightened sensitivity to the issues, concerns, and lifestyles of LBTs was and remains a major strategy, particularly given the recognition that they still lack the expertise.

3.3.3. Proposed strategies

Likhaan had a great many thoughts and ideas about what needs to be done in order to strengthen services for LBT persons, and in particular, enrich the feminist communities' inclusiveness of LBT issues and concerns. The propose strategies and approaches include the following:

The **development of knowledge and skills**, that is, expertise in handling LBT issues such as same-sex intimate violence, knowing and addressing LBT specific health concerns, addressing issues arising from multiple relationships without judgment, and the like.

Need to develop expertise on how to approach same-sex intimate violence

Need to develop knowledge and expertise on lesbian health needs

Need to develop skills in handling STI cases born out of multiple relationships

Strengthening sensitivity in providing health services in general, that is, **questioning heteronormative assumptions** when dealing with all clients.

Designing **educational materials** as direct servicing orgnizations that are more inclusive, not too technical, and based on local contexts.

Enhancing political strategies that will allow for an **intersectional analysis and approach** to women concerns, rather than what currently appears as an issue-specific and compartmentalized approach.

Organizing at the grassroots level, particularly among lesbian and tomboys, towards enriching their political participation in development.

Conducting research studies that are specifically geared towards learning more about the lifestyles of LBTs and their health implications.

Need to study effects of hormones pills being taken by trans

3.4. R-Rights

3.4.1. Lesbian issues

The self

Sexual awareness: Lesbians sometimes suffer from self-doubt when initially becoming aware of their sexuality. As shared by a member of R-Rights who considers her awareness of her sexuality as very late, she tried to facilitate this process of awareness for herself by going to the lesbian parties and bars and just tried to be with others whom she knew had the same experience. She recalls that, at some point, she was looking for something more than the party scene; she wanted to be with people in advocacy work for lesbians. Her involvement in such, she believes, facilitated her full knowledge of herself and her sexuality. She talks about this experience in the following narrative:

> *But since I came out very late, I felt like I needed to socialize too. I think it was about two years that I was attending those parties, but t came to appoint when I was asking myself, what will happen after I attend all of these. So you buy the ticket, and you go inside and mingle, there are nights that you feel a like a winner when you are taken home or somebody takes you home, but after that what else. That was when I started feeling it was never going to grow from there. That was when I started meeting people who were doing advocacy work. I got reconnected with Germaine who was also my sorority sister.* (Roc8)

Internalized oppression: In attending the party scene, the researchers also came across bars that had lesbian ledge dancers to be watched. This practice bothered some of the R-Rights members and they began to wonder how lesbian dancers felt about performing for others. At one point, they even attempted to ask these dancers.

> *– But then when you start asking them, "do you feel discriminated? Then they respond that they do not feel discriminated. But still I sometimes have the feeling that bar owners could still do very much whet they want. Under covered curtains – when they are not seen"*(Roc, 9)

> *There is ledge dancing, and then there is just the cover.* (Ger. 9)

During this exchange, it got them to think that these dancers may have been suffering from a painful resignation about her situation, a situation that to feminists translates to internalized oppression.

Limited access to lesbian sensitive doctors: Trust and comfortability are key elements in a patient-doctor relationship, elements that are sometimes elusive to lesbians. R-Rights have registered that there seems to be a difficulty for lesbians to go for medical check ups because, in the course of these check ups, they are sometimes asked very inappropriate questions. There is great difficulty in finding lesbian-sensitive doctors who will not ask inappropriate questions or do unnecessary examinations. The group notes that butch lesbians find this particularly problematic.

Concerns for long-term effects of breast binding: Another concern raised by the group was the practice of breast binding among youth. In earlier research, this has come up as

a concern because the experience speaks of an alienation from one's body. As this concern comes up again in this study, the group raises concerns over long-term effects of breast binding. The R-Rights group brought up this concern within the context of the availability of breast binders in the market that the youth can easily access without the proper information of its long-term effects, such as its possible connection to breast cancer. As they too do not have answers to this, they see this as an area for study that can allow lesbians a more informed choice about the practice.

> *Especially the younger ones are really into breast binding. But they do not really know what its' implications are to the younger ones who are into breast binding.* (Ger 25)

> *There is no available information on that, nobody is really checking the practice. Unless there are really medical practitioners who will say that 'We don't encourage that.'"*(Ang 25)

Relationships and micro-context

Intimate relationships

Butches' negative masculine stereotypes: The group acknowledges that butch-femme role playing in relationships happens and individuals and couples find that a comfortable set-up. What they consider problematic, however, is that certain butch practices take on the negative masculine stereotypes, such as excessive drinking of alcohol, subordinating their partners in relationships, and sadly, even violence. R-Rights refers to this as falling into 'male-trappings'.

Forcing sex on the femme partner: Another issue they brought up with regards to relationships was some femmes complaining of having forced sex initiated by their butch partners. This sometimes results to bleeding that could be alarming.

Mutual violence: In trying to clarify the issue of violence in relationships, the research team probed into how violence happens and who is the perpetrator. The R-Rights group acknowledged that there are cases of forced sex on the femme that sometimes results in further violence. As such, at times it may be easy to assume that in cases of violence in intimate relationships, the butch is always and only the perpetrator of violence. However, it would seem that often the violence is mutually committed by both parties in the relationship.

The three issues mentioned by R-Rights, of falling into the male trappings, forced sex, and mutual violence, were captured in the following exchanges:

> *In the role playing of butches and femmes. So the butches try to get into all the male trappings. Where they drink a lot, smoke and womanize. There are even cases in Cebu where they even say 'I'm live in with my wife' (laugs), so sometimes we feel that they also got all of the negative qualities of males."*

> *Ger So in incidences of violence, is the butch reported as the ---*

Tes: Perpetrator.

Abb: *No, not in all cases.*

ALL: Mutual.

Ger: *In fairness, sometimes the femme put up a good fight too.*

Ang: *But there are also times that soem femmes complain that they are sometimes forced to have sex and she bleeds in the process.*

Tes: *— Ah, so she is forced to have sex?*

Ger: Sex. *Yes, sometimes there are cases like that. Sex.*

Abb: At that age.

Ger: . *She would bleed, and that is her complaint.*

Ang: . *We don;t tell them -- don't do that. We had somebody talk to them about the possible consequences of that, of something being damaged inside.*

Non-recognition of rights of partners: R-Rights also noted that concerns of lesbians within relationships are also very varied depending on the age range. Older lesbians sometimes worry about their recognition as partners, especially in relation to property they acquire as partners, or sometimes the custody of children, particularly in the event that one's partner passes away.

First dates and handling relationships: If older lesbians are more concerned with their recognition as partners, younger lesbians are concerned with relating and handling relationships. Beginning relationships, both intimate partnerships and friendships, is a concern, especially for those who have recently come out. For instance, handling themselves on dates or even asking someone on a date. Handling oneself in sexually active relationships is also cited as another area of concern for younger lesbians.

> *The younger ones do not have concerns about property yet, because they are dealing with their first girlfriend. What they problematize how to go on a movie with their girlfriend, and then there are others that are concerned about property. So concerns are very different. I think, we need to acknowledge that we are also not very young and our concerns may vary, it may not be very concrete as concerns are very individualised. But some of the issues of the younger ones is coming out, acceptance of friends, dealing with themselves and their sexuality, or even issues they may have with their girlfriends. Then that is how we go about talking about sexual relations, or even sex talks that they may need.* (Jaz 8)

Work

Inappropriate questions during interviews: The experience of discrimination exists in various stages of job application, from hiring all the way up to career advancement. It was

noted that discrimination against lesbians in the pre-employment phase ranges from outright rejection or being asked inappropriate questions. In several R-Rights sponsored fora, participants would wonder if questions on sexual orientation are a legitimate interview query. When these questions come up, R-Rights always clarifies that questions of this nature are not necessary because a person should not be discriminated because of their age, gender, or sexual orientation. Yet, some companies have not gained the sensitivity to veer away from such questions.

Discrimination in hiring: Lesbians, in knowing the possible discrimination they face when applying for jobs, have tried hard to look for jobs that they perceive as gender neutral. Some of these jobs have been factory work. However, some members of R-Rights shared the accounts of lesbians who had attempted to apply as factory workers:

> *Yes there is still discrimination until now, we even know of some butches who go for factory work thinking they will not be discriminated against, but then employers tell them we do not accept people like you." That is factory work already. Other struggles that butches go through is having to wear dresses and conforming to dress codes.* (Roc 8)

When R-Rights members hear of stories and narratives like this, they try to share more positive experiences of how the workplace can be more accepting of people's diverse sexual orientation. They also know of certain positive practices of commercial institutions like PureGold who seem to practice preferential hiring for tomboys, whom they feel are very more reliable and trustworthy as bus conductors. In some instances, PureGold have hired and assigned tomboys to check receipts.

Forced conformity in the workplace: Conforming to very traditional lady-like dressing is one workplace practice butches have a hard time dealing with. They are very uncomfortable with such a dress code.

Stereotypes on job and tasks: Another struggle of butches is to be stereotyped on certain jobs and tasks. Some of the tomboys that they have encountered have experienced being rejected for certain types of jobs, such as being housemaids, perceived more appropriate for 'real women'. Rather, the stereotypical jobs deemed more appropriate for tomboys are those as janitors or security guards.

Community and movements

LGBT movements

Tensions between young and old lesbians: R-Rights is an LGBT organization with strong lesbian leadership. Lesbians in the organization take an active part in programme management and they also have a growing following among young lesbians. What has been aired out by the younger members is that they do not like the 'politicking' that they witness in the LGBT movement, so the more senior members have assured them that they merely need to focus on what they do best, which is LGBT advocacy using media and ICT. Another tension that has been noted is the perception of young lesbians is that the first generation lesbians are sometimes 'too serious'. The way R-Rights tries to bridge these differences in perception is to initiate spaces for exchanges and discussion among first generation lesbians

and the younger generation of lesbians. In these exchanges, it is hoped that there will develop a better understanding of issues and advocacy strategies then and now.

Limitation of lesbian feminism as a theory: Lesbian organizing in Manila was heavily guided by lesbian-feminism that took strong stands on sexual identity, sexual politics, equality, and relationship concepts such women-loving-women. For some, these concepts could work, but the frame does not quite capture the experience of butch lesbians or those living in the community who do not problematize being called a tomboy. They also noted that a label like tomboy is a shared term of both butch lesbians and female to male (FTM) transsexuals. While concepts of women-loving-women sometimes do not exist for lesbians in the communities, some may even be more comfortable being referred to as butch or tomboy. These initial thoughts have led the group to reflect on the limitations of LGBT labels that do not seem to capture the diversity and complexity of LGBT realities.

Non-visibility of bisexuals: R-Rights have really sought to work with LGBT individuals, but in recent years, have been occupied with how to bring in more bisexual individuals into the discussions. They have even designed certain activities to encourage the participation of bisexuals and to initiate engagement with them. Unfortunately, their interaction has been limited to certain individuals only.

Stereotypes on bisexuals: The group also shared candidly about their perceptions on bisexuals as not having a serious problem given they can engage with both men and women. They also said that there is a general perception that bisexuals are confused and/or promiscuous people.

> *Yes, even the Queer discussion with sponsored was mainly to flush out the bisexuals.* [laughs] *That was the purpose because we felt no one was speaking our. But then I became reflective later on that maybe they do not have a problem. So I thought why should we create problems for them?*
>
> *They are probably also confused about they are viewed, plus they may be aware of the stigma on them of being promiscuous, that may cause them to feel ashamed to come out and declare. They may feel uncomfortable to be out a seen as promiscuous with men and women."* (Page 17)

The Experience of 'passing': R-Rights also expressed empathy towards the plight of trans women, particularly on the use of toilets, which they feel is easier for tomboys to pass unquestioned than it is for trans women to pass unquestioned.

Feminist movements

Exclusion of lesbian issues in local and international policies for women: One of the primary works of R-Rights is on asserting LGBT rights for legislative advocacy, and they have had the experience of working with women's groups on initial consultations for this. This working relationship speaks of two faces of the experience – one of acceptance, especially when they are invited for initial consultations, the other is also of rejection. The experience of rejection is a bit more painful because they feel strongly about the inclusion of lesbian rights in major policies at both the international and national levels. Historically, lesbian concerns have been sacrificed in favour of winning a tactical agenda. To this date, R-Rights still speaks of experiences relating to this, especially in working on the recently approved Magna Carta for Women:

They did admit that it would be difficult passing it as it is, and they really do not need the additional complications, but I'm not sure of they expected us to understand that we needed to be sacrificed, and then expect our support now even if we drop your concerns, we are sure to take care of you later. But then do we really fall into that trap all over again? It is not that we feel so hurt that we do not want to work with women's movement anymore. Maybe we have been so used to discrimination and this is another form of discrimination we are facing. But I would not be ready to just say we are hurt, but maybe something that we all need to do in order to win a tactical agenda. Maybe the women's movement feels they have done their part in trying to accommodate lesbian issues. But I do not agree that we should work like that, I've suggested other ways of working. As early as seven years ago I already drafted a list of words that needed to be incorporated. If they worked towards including those, then we have agreed. I could have done the rest, that is my job anyway – to draft and pass laws. But then when that was never incorporated, then I am sorry we cannot continue on like this. (Ang p. 22)

Exclusion of health issues of lesbians in policies for women: R-Rights further points out that the exclusion of lesbian concerns in major policies has also impacted the availability and appropriateness of health services. To date, they have noted that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and provisions on sexual health and reproductive rights do not have clear provisions on addressing health issues of lesbians. This may explain the lack of appropriate health care services for lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people.

R-Rights continues to be mindful of ways on how to engage with feminist groups. It is clear to them that they need to work with feminist groups in asserting the rights of LGBT persons.

Public institutions

Law: In the course of R-Rights legislative work, they have noticed the lack of protection for LGBT rights and, ironically, the lack of or limited inclusion in the human rights agenda.

Non-recognition of partner rights: Even if lesbian couples have been together for 50 years, they are not protected within their relationships. This is a condition that many couples continue to be insecure about, whether they are talking about property they have acquired as partners or custody of children.

Lack of laws guiding and protecting lesbian relationships: Unlike heterosexual relationships, lesbians do not enjoy state protection of their marriages or civil unions. R-Rights notes that lesbian relationships are not included in laws on concubinage and even adultery; this non-inclusion may also stem from non-recognition of their partnerships to begin with. They note this as coming from a concern for keeping and protecting the integrity of their relationships, noted in the following narrative:

> We can engage in violence and the state never cares, we are not covered by existing laws. Same way as in concubinage, the law that punishes a woman for being caught having sex with another man. But what if the wife is caught with another woman, that is not covered by law [laughs and simultaneous speaking]. Do you realise that? So if

you come to think of it actually works to our favour if the law stays as it is. That would be nice. But then we do take up the responsibility for our relationships. We are ensuring that these are built into the laws, within the sense of being responsible for our relationships. (Ang 23)

Exclusion of LGBT rights in human rights: Another issue noted by the group is, not only are LGBT rights not recognized in general, but these are also not included in the entire agenda for National Human Rights. The irony of this is that many human rights activists identify as LGBT, but even their basic rights are not recognized or protected.

Denial of LGBT political representation: R-Rights talked a lot about the disqualification of the LGBT political party that sought to be approved by the commission on elections, otherwise known as the COMELEC. It was explained that the COMELEC first announced the disqualification of 'Ang LADAD', the name of the LGBT political party, on moral and religious grounds. 'Ang LADLAD' has tried to register as a sectoral party three times, and they have also been disqualified three times. On their first try, they were disqualified on the basis of their claim to be a marginalized group as untrue. On their second attempt, they were disqualified because their mass base and membership was deemed questionable. Then in 2009, the COMELEC disqualified them on moral and religious grounds, at the same time saying they are a threat to the youth because they are promoting immorality and pornography.

Public spaces

Victim blaming in violence against lesbians: As was noted in earlier sections of the R-Rights discussion, violence against lesbians does exist in various sites, including that of intimate relationships. However, cases like these are unreported and unaddressed. Sometimes it is even the lesbian victims of violence that decide not to speak about the experience of violence for fear of being judged. In some cases, authorities have indeed been unsympathetic to lesbian issues of violence.

Prohibition of same-sex union celebrations: The R-Rights group also articulated the experience of being discriminated against in public and commercial spaces where they sought to celebrate same sex unions:

3.4.2. Applied strategies

The self

Understanding violence against women within the lesbian context: As there were issues on violence within intimate relationships that kept coming up, the R-Rights group noted that they noticed there was a clamour from lesbian individuals and groups to learn more of lesbian experiences of violence. The need to learn more about their experiences of violence range from learning more about the provisions of violence against women (VAW) and its inclusion in the lesbian experience, availability of services, and institutions providing immediate intervention such as shelters. This clamour speaks about the community's

willingness to address issues of violence that are coming up, even if it is within the context of intimate relationships.

Relationships and micro-context

Intimate relationships: Most of the current intervention raised by R-Rights is to address issues of intimate relationships that have come up even within the course of their work on upholding LGBT rights within the context of current laws and legislative advocacy to improve these. In doing this, they try to be mindful of creative ways these can be addressed and diversify the ways they are able to impart knowledge on handling oneself within intimate relationships.

Addressing questions on relationships: Even within their education sessions on LGBT rights and advocacy, questions on handling intimate relationships often came up. R-Rights would take this as an opportunity to discuss what makes for a healthy sexual relationship. One of the basic things they raise is the importance of being grounded on the value of respect for oneself and one's partner. This can guide the relationship from decisions on sex to handling conflict within relationships. In bringing these up, they are also mindful not to be 'preachy' and for others to also have the space to share their experience and knowledge. This way, they are able to nurture an environment of knowledge sharing and dialogue.

Taking responsibility for our relationships: Another way R-Rights sees the need to be responsible for relationships is to assert the inclusion of lesbians, bisexual, and transgendered people within current laws and policies for women. In this way, they are able to address issues of violence that comes up in various ways. This includes sharing basic guidelines in maintaining relationships that includes mindfulness in choice of partners or girlfriends (especially having relationships with minors that may be misconstrued as rape).

Support from lesbian individuals and groups: Support is also deemed necessary for individuals and groups to have the knowledge on addressing issues within their relationships, be these issues of new sexual practices, or addressing conflict within relationships.

Work

Basic requirement for employment: Another area of concern that R-Rights continues to address is that of work and employment. They remind LGBT individuals about the basic requirement for employment, that is: training, experience, knowledge, and eligibility. They remind them of these requirements so as to be aware of how they are interviewed and regarded in the workplace.

Positive hiring practices: Another strategy that R-Rights developed is to come up with more positive messages. As they keep track of discriminatory practices regarding hiring, they have also noted more positive ones and these are shared as information to LGBTs in the different discussions they had.

Community/movements

LGBT movements

Upholding the rights of LGBT persons: R-Rights continues to provide legal assistance to the LGBTs by giving them the full benefit of the law to work for them, be it on criminal procedures, guide to relationships, or employment procedures. They have even developed these in easy pocket size materials for easy reference and referral for immediate needs: Pink – criminal procedures, Blue – same-sex offences, and Lilac - employment rights.

Understanding other identities: R-Rights also continues to reflect on how to better understand other identities, such as bisexual and trans identities. They have noted that the existence of the trans discourse has now lead them to better understand the context of the butch as holding similarities with the FTM trans. Since then, they recognized the varying degrees of feminism and have learnt tha women´s groups can be more inclusive to the trans. As a group, they have also developed a way of respecting the identity of bisexual and transgender individuals by allowing spaces for exchange where they can learn more from each other. This understanding and openness has also led them to be more open to how terminologies continue to evolve across time and class; for example, from *tibo* to FTM, from *bakla* to MTF. To date, R-Rights continues to find ways to engage with bisexual individuals more.

Intergenerational dialogue: To address the differences between older and younger lesbians, R-Rights have attempted to bridge this understanding through intergenerational dialogues. In this space the younger lesbians get to speak about the things that concern them at this current stage, while older lesbians are acknowledged for their commitment for their achievements in the history of lesbian organizing.

Forms of activism for the younger generation: R-Rights have also sought to acknowledge and harness the potential of their young members. In the different discussion sessions of R-Right, younger members are encouraged to surface their experiences and concerns, while they are also given the hand to manage projects that harness their potential. Media and ICT have been noted to be a strong medium for the younger generation. This has been the space they have created for their activism and how they raise awareness on different issues affecting LGBT persons. Since the launch of the Rainbow Radio in 2009, their younger members have been the ones shaping the programme, from the content to its technical operation.

Feminist movements

Inclusion of LBT persons in current policies for women: R-Rights described their working relationship with feminist groups as having both positive and negative experiences. They continue to engage with various groups towards the inclusion of lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people in existing policies at the national and international level. A sample of this engagement is to work with groups on the inclusion of intimate violence for same-sex relationships within the current violence against women law.

Terminology that is inclusive of LBT persons: R-Rights have also noted how they are more concrete in the ways they want to be more inclusive of LBT issues within certain

policies and services. They have come up with a list of words that can be used to include LBT struggle in women's policies.

Referral system: As R-Rights takes violence very seriously, they have also sought to maximize the services of the Women's Crisis Centre as they encounter lesbian experiences of violence.

Support for Ang LADLAD: R-Rights have also noted how feminist groups such as WedPro and Likhaan have issued statements of support for Ang LADLAD when the COMELEC had repeatedly disqualified the political party.

Other social movements

Mass and social movement support for Ang LADLAD: Aside from support received from feminist movements on the COMELEC disqualification of Ang LADLAD, mass and social movement support was also felt during these times. The youth, policy makers, Commission of Human Rights, and some government officials showed support for LGBT political representation through sectoral politics. The disqualification also provided timely discussion as it neared the ride march and Human Rights week. This show of support made the resolve of Ang LADLAD to fight, even if it had reached the Supreme Court. The discussion they took on was that of the area of asserting their rights.

Public institutions

Engaging with the Commission on Human Rights: As the Commission on Human Rights showed support for the Ang LADLAD case, R-Rights, together with other LGBT groups, used this opening to gain support for other LGBT issues, such as the inclusion of LGBT rights in the National Human Rights Agenda.

Radio for LGBT advocacy: R-Rights recently launched 'Rainbow Radio', one of few radio programmes in the Philippines and Asia that tackle LGBT rights and issues. Reaching the masses to also raise their awareness on LGBT issues is one of their core commitments. As well, Rainbow Radio has provided them with inexpensive means to reach the masses and be able to talk about the issues at the community level.

LGBT rights within Human Rights discussions: R-Rights also noted that they want to continue working with human rights advocates and engage with them on the inclusion of LGBT rights. Human rights is a shared concern that both can benefit from while deepening each other's grounding on LGBT understanding that is based on human rights.

3.4.3. Proposed strategies

The self

Appropriate health care for lesbians: R-Rights notes that health care for lesbians could be an area of research so that lesbians have access to proper information, care, and

services. It is important that information is accurate and backed by current research on, for example, the effects of breast binding.

Relationships and micro-context

On intimate relationships

Integrated efforts towards addressing intimate violence: R-Rights noted that, in as much as they want to be responsible for their relationships, they also need to understand how to deal with issues of violence in intimate relationships. In the cases they have encountered, they have also identified that there are various ways violence may be addressed from counselling and immediate intervention. They also need to work with groups like the women's crisis centre who are more experienced in these interventions. It was noted by R-Rights that they can benefit from engaging in alternative frameworks that is more apt to understanding intimate violence within lesbian relationships. They identified various ways to address intimate violence ranging from counselling to immediate intervention, and noted that referral systems should be established. This commitment to establish responsibility within relationships should also be matched with policy intervention that is inclusive of the lesbian experiences of violence.

Community/movements

LGBT advocacy with various groups: R-Rights noted that they are entertaining collaboration work on LGBT advocacy with various groups. They remain open to working with women's organizations, development organizations, and human rights groups. They feel that LGBT advocacy can reach various levels if they are able to establish working relationships with them. SARILAYA, a broad network of women's organization with a very strong mass base at the community level, have already expressed an interest in working on LGBT awareness at the community level. Human rights groups have also expressed a need for engagement with R-Rights for developing proper handles in approaching LGBT rights from a human rights perspective.

Public institutions

Raising public awareness on LGBT issues: R-Rights have also noted that LGBT **individuals** can only be understood if there is an environment of respect for them. They need more materials to be available for public education on LGBT rights and issues.

3.5. Fire (a bi-sexual icon)

3.5.1. Bisexual issues

The self

Safe sex issues: Safe sex is a primary health issue bisexuals are concerned about. In our interview with Fire, she asserted that bisexuals find it difficult to address safe sex issues because most of them are not wary about engaging in safe sex. Using the word 'scareless' to describe the attitude of bisexuals towards engaging in sexual activities, she alludes to bisexuals having no fear of engaging in unprotected sex. As reflected in her statement below, she additionally cites the stigma of society towards being a 'bi', which includes being bigamous or polygamous, as one of the hindrances why bisexuals cannot pursue the goal of being educated about safe sex.

> *Well just on the safe sex part a lot of people are scareless* [laughs] *as you know as scareless as can be ganun talaga [really like that] uhm basically that on the health issues yes uhm and of course there's also the stigma of you know being bi and being labelled as someone who is bigamous or polygamous gusto sabay sabay lahat lagi* [likes all at the same time] *... it's still of course important to be educated about what will prevent you from getting anything that you would not want to get as much as possible I think it's just the same seriously with the LG other LGBTs or the LGTs actually.* (p.19)

Stigma: Stigma, on the other hand, lies at the core of bisexual issues affecting the self as it is often reflected in the labels, characteristics, or qualities associated with bisexuals. In her discussion of safe sex concerns quoted above, Fire said that being bisexual involves being seen as a person engaging in multiple relationships at the same time, as the words 'bigamous' and 'polygamous' are used to describe bisexuals.

Relationships and micro-contexts

Family

Forced heterosexuality: Within the context of the family, forced heterosexuality emerges as a pressing issue. As Fire shared during the interview, families, particularly parents, impinge pressure on bisexuals to transform themselves into being heterosexuals and are forced to believe that it is possible. Unlike lesbians who are forced into marriage to appear straight to the public and to cover up their real sexual orientation, bisexual women can actually settle for a man they like and marry him. However, not all bisexual women would want to settle down with a man. Fire asserted that this is something families find difficult to understand. Bisexual women are forced to accept that they can actually be married to someone of the opposite sex (*kasi pwede naman*), without considering whether they would really like to be married to a man. Because of this, bisexual women experience the pressure of having to choose whether to follow what they want or obey what her family tells them to do. Fire stated that sometimes, the pressure these women get from their families cause them get carried away and revert to becoming heterosexuals, as revealed by the quote below:

If your parents or your family recognize you as a bisexual they would really push for you to go the other way I mean and sometimes of course you will also get carried away you'll do it right because you can see it's not like, your experience not like you're a lesbian and then you are forced to get married to this person to look straight or something, it's not as bad though like that, with at least, fine. I'm just gonna look for some guy I like because it's possible eh but you see that hopefully but it can't be like that you have to be free to decide for yourself and that's one thing that you know people should understand that you can't tell us to eh like since you're like this, or, it is possible this way, you can be this way, see, and that's the problem people would really you know do that because they think it's okay with you supposedly but the pressure to be made to choose. (p. 17)

As shown above, bisexual individuals receive the same reaction of being pushed to become heterosexual like gays and lesbians experience the moment they reveal their sexual orientation to their families. Again, the salience of forced heterosexuality is remarkable, as evidenced by three repetitions of the expression *kasi pwede* (because it is possible), in reference to a lesbian or bisexual woman being married to a man.

Intimate relationships

Negotiating and establishing identities: Bisexual individuals consider engaging in intimate relationships as one of their major issues. Within the context of intimate relationships, bisexual persons encounter some difficulties in negotiating and eventually establishing their identity to their partners. It happens that some partners want bisexual women to identify themselves as lesbian rather than bisexual. During a one-on-one dialogue, Fire cited her own past experience of being in a relationship with a girlfriend who did not accept her being bisexual. She shared that, at that time, she had to put aside her bisexual identity and put on a lesbian identity in order to please her girlfriend. As a consequence of this, she was identified publicly more as lesbian than bisexual, not just in her relationship with her girlfriend, but also in her profession as affirmed by her response below:

And at the time that I was writing the Dimlas column I was identifying as a lesbian and at the time I was writing the Friday column I was also identified as a lesbian yeah because I have an ex girlfriend who just hated that I was bi so fine just move it there you know uhm when I was writing for native swish. I was also identified as a lesbian so most of my writing is lesbian identified any literature or uhm fiction it's lesbian identified. (p.4)

Peers/friends/barkada

Ostracism in peer groups: In their own friendship circles, bisexuals face issues that are related to the concerns they have in regards to the self and, likewise, the other relationships they engage in. Fire reported that bisexual individuals are ostracized in their peer groups for their sexual orientation. They are secluded by their own peers due to the stigma attached to them—being abnormal, polygamous, having sex left and right. With the seeming omniscience of the stigma towards bisexual persons, Fire aired that they are further driven away from their social groups as people avoid them. Again, using a personal story below, she shared an example of how this stigma affects the people's perception of bisexual individuals:

...there are people I know who have been ostracized for being lesbian or gay or bi even because again, they feel you're abnormal, you're bisexual so you're polygamous

so you know you're having sex left and right. I don't want you anymore because you know I have I actually know someone who wouldn't drink from uhm [clears throat] *my friend's glass who is a guy friend because he is bi and another girl and he drinks with everyone of us like when it's her turn* [to drink] *it seems like she doesn't like it, feeling as if she's gonna get sick .. so it's like what for her. I asked her, "what bothers you about si him* [the guy] *and then she said eh because he's bi so? We would it be the same if you were gay she goes well yeah kasi because she feels as if she will get sick but for her, the risk is higher because she feels the guy has more sexual partners because that guy is bi but it's not necessarily true.* (p. 20)

Community/movements

LGBT movements

Representation: Within the LGBT movements, bisexual individuals are also challenged by issues in representing themselves. As articulated by Fire, even if bisexual persons are recognized in the LGBT movement, the inclusion of B (which stands for bisexual) is "really just a letter", meaning many bisexual issues are not addressed by LGBT movements. Fire shared her realization that there is a lack of attention towards bisexual issues because there is an assumption that their issues are similar to that of lesbian and gay persons. Due to this, they feel taken for granted, as she narrated:

I think people just take it for granted even bisexuals would take it for granted that way like we are included because those are also our issues but the problem is there are other issues and it's really more of about your identity as a bisexual it's more of how you would present yourself as a bisexual and more of your advocacy as a bisexual that is, that is the issue because right now, we're just a tagged along in the group. (p. 4)

Invisibility of bisexual individuals: Furthermore, Fire stated that, the fact that bisexual issues are not addressed in the LGBT movements is a reflection of the bisexual community being non-existent or invisible. She even said (as a bisexual), "*kami yung wala pero nawawala kasi kami kasi tinatago niyo kami yun lang naman ang issue ko* [we are not included, but we are not included because you are hiding us, that's my only issue]". Although there have been past efforts to address their issues, Fire pointed out that the lack of unity and unsettled issues in their group caused the breaking up of bisexual organizations like Indigo, as she narrated:

Indigo Philippines is a break-away group from Dimlas , Dimlas is [likes] *of Manila Society it was run by Nina* [Recluna] *and* [Livera] *before we're okay it was a, it was almost a bit of a thing going on so all of her core members left her including me yeah so we had some issues.* (p.2)

Pressure from LGBT community due to the denial of bisexual existence: Another hurdle faced by bisexual individuals within the LGBT movements is the pressure they experience from their own LGBT community, which has an apparent denial of bisexual existence. In a dialogue with Fire, she laid out that bisexual women are driven to decide to take on butch identities in the LGBT community because they are told that being bisexual is a 'phase' towards becoming lesbian, and that this phase is marked by confusion of the person

identifying herself as bisexual. As a result, very few bisexual women are strongly bi-identified. Some of them give in to pressure and eventually identify themselves as lesbians, while others become "*straight*" (p.6). This invisibility of bisexual women also led Fire to speak about encouraging them to join pride marches as an arduous task, as she figuratively described it to be as hard as "*pulling an arm out of somebody*" (p. 31-32).

Feminist movements

Marginalization in the feminist movements: Other than being marginalized in the LGBT movements, bisexual women additionally succumb into marginalization within the feminist movements. In a discussion with Fire about bisexual women in feminist groups, she shared that bisexual issues are not addressed, if even recognized. For instance, within women's groups, advocating strategies to combat violence against women excludes bisexuals. This is shown in her response, saying that: "*there aren't any* [in reference to women's groups including bisexuals in their advocacy to fight violence against women] *uhm... I worked with women's groups for VAW a lot of lesbian groups I help out you know all that*". Fire, during this dialogue, also noted that, even if bisexual women are said to be included in the LGBT community, their issues are not discussed and unanswered. Oftentimes, their concerns are thought of as the same as lesbian issues.

Public/social institutions

Public spaces

Social stigma: Social stigma, again, plays a crucial role in pinpointing the issues of bisexuals in the social sphere, particularly in public spaces. In the earlier discussion of issues regarding the self, the stigma of society towards bisexual women includes being characterized as bigamous or polygamous, abnormal, or having sex with multiple partners. Within the LGBT community, on the other hand, bisexual women are described as undergoing a phase or a transition from a heterosexual to a lesbian identity. Meanwhile, in public spaces, all these descriptions of bisexual women converge. In the interview with Fire, she recounted:

> (one issue is that people are as if saying you're bi because you're still deciding) or the other off side is you're bi because you know you're just really promiscuous and you just really want to have a good time with everybody. (p.27)

Bisexuals are 'less abnormal': Moreover, in public spaces, Fire indicated that the bisexual identity is seen as more acceptable for heterosexuals because they are viewed as 'less abnormal', as people who still have hope to change (*may hope ka pa*) because they are stereotyped to act in feminine ways. Other than that, the public expects bisexual women to be faithful to the person they are in a relationship with because they are seen to be individuals who do not have alternate partners. As told by Fire, people in society perceive bisexual individuals as "*having the chance to live a more convenient lifestyle*" once they decide on eventually assuming a heterosexual identity.

3.5.2. Applied strategies

Community/movements

LGBT movements

Joining pride marches: Fire mentioned that joining pride marches has helped bisexual individuals in asserting their visibility within the LGBT movements. Yet, being secretive and quiet about their identities, she aired that, it has been difficult to encourage bisexual persons to come out and speak about their issues, let alone be recognized as bisexual. They fear putting their sexual orientation at the stake and of being judged, which leads to this challenge faced by Fire in organizing a group to represent bisexuals. But, with her efforts and the cooperation of some bisexual individuals, she said that they were able to successfully join pride marches in the past, to represent their group as members of the LGBT community. Fire recounted:

> *2005 or 3 or one of those years we had it in Quezon City so one of those years that was tough it took like I don't know 2000 cups of coffee just to get people to say yes... Six or seven of us marched and then, but that was one of our best ones and it could've been better.* (p. 8)

As shown in the account provided by Fire, the mention of the phrase "*it could've been better*" appears to communicate that, although efforts for improving bisexual visibility are made, it still has the potential to grow.

Inclusion in the LGBT movements: Beyond recognition comes inclusion. In the interview with Fire, she further cited that the inclusion of bisexual persons in the LGBT movements is a primordial requirement for their issues being properly recognized and addressed. However, she also said that, being actively recognized in these movements mandates a discussion of issues among bisexuals that can be made possible by meeting with bisexual friends through informal gatherings like lunch meetings or coffee sessions. In proposing this strategy to promote bisexual participation in LGBT groups, Fire narrated her experience in organizing a bisexual group in the past:

> *We used to have a more active group like when they were still here we used to meet up like every month uhm and it wasn't really like we don't really go on drinking sessions* (...) *for some strange reason that crowd wasn't into that mostly it was just coffee and then we'll talk about issues and stuff like that like what are their issues. I just wanted to know if it's only me who has issues and then different kinds of bisexuals and they would bring their friends.* (p. 15)

Public/social institutions

Public spaces: Fire enumerated several strategies which have already been employed by bisexual persons with the goal of helping the public understand them on a deeper level. She said that the following steps have already taken by bisexuals to build education and awareness in the public sphere: (1) sharing research information, (2) writing in magazine

columns or websites, (3) being interviewed for a radio show or a magazine article, and (4) organizing an online bisexual network in the form of e-groups (i.e., yahoogroup).

Use of information and communications technology (ICT): As mentioned earlier, Fire articulated that bisexual individuals have already embarked on using the internet as one of their channels to foster the public's awareness of bisexual issues. Through information and communications technology (ICT), specifically the internet, bisexual individuals are given the opportunity to mobilize fellow bisexuals, even those who want to keep their identities private, in educating the public and helping them understand bisexual experience. Below is a statement from Fire who personally shared how the internet serves as a space where bisexual persons can be open in sharing their thoughts and experiences:

> *They're open* (...) *well the reason they're open is because it's online so you don't see them and most of them I just know by their email addresses, nicknames but I don't really know them. Although I've posted pictures of myself and so that they know that I'm a real person.* (p.13)

3.5.3. Proposed strategies

Public/social institutions

Public spaces: Although proposed strategies for addressing bisexual issues are directed at building public education and awareness about these issues in general, they also address concerns bisexual individuals have in their own LGBT community. For parsimony in discussion, proposed methods provided by Fire in the one-on-one discussion are discussed below under the context of public and social institutions.

Educating the public: Fire mentioned that the key for bisexual issues to penetrate the public sphere is to explain their concerns to people, which includes being thorough and patient in answering their questions about bisexuality, even if it becomes offending at times. She stressed this point by saying:

> *I have to explain... my partner was telling me, like it's good you're so patient in explaining and I said because if I, the day that I become impatient would be the day you know I'm gonna stop caring about everyone who's like me and myself I can't stop caring about that so I have to explain* [laughs] *all the time repeatedly like a broken record sometimes and people are so used to it but the good thing is yun nga when people really do process it and are willing to listen... sometimes you will be surprised, the questions are very surprising they will really be very direct na so you haven't chosen yet? It's really like that so actually, you will be offended sometimes.* (p. 14)

According to Fire, educating the public entails not only addressing the questions of the public regarding bisexuality, but also a need to explain thoroughly what bisexuality is about. Bisexuality is not identified through one's sexual practices, nor is it a gender, in addition to male and female, as other people mistake it to be. According to Fire:

> *I can't deny that there are people who would define themselves as bisexual basically because of their the way that they practice sex so some of them identify as bi because*

it's really for them it's about having variety in having sex with different kinds of people so there are like things people like that and it's fine. (p.28)

Clarifying bisexuality as a sexual preference: Fire said that it is deemed necessary to clarify that bisexuality is a sexual preference or orientation, one's "*preference in having a partner*". In relation to this, it is therefore important to let the public know that, although bisexual individuals may choose a biological man or a biological woman as a partner when they decide settle down, they want their bisexuality to be treated as something permanent. In verbalizing this point, she said:

I just want things to be permanent I want to settle down like everybody else well not everybody but like a lot of people would like to do so that's it but, but that doesn't erase my preferences at all. (p.27)

3.6. STRAPP

3.6.1. Transgender issues

The self

Acceptance: Acceptance of the self is a key issue among transsexuals as it encompasses both their health and their well-being. The need to be in harmony with their bodies is one of the reasons why transsexual women undergo sexual replacement surgery (SRS) and/or hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Based on stories shared by Naomi, a member of STRAPP, in a focus-group discussion, transsexual women like her may achieve this 'harmony with their bodies' by undergoing a transition of the self. This transition, as she explained, does not necessarily demand a change in external genitalia. Some transsexual women accept their bodies as they are, while others feel the need to undergo SRS and/or HRT for them to feel synchronized with their bodies. In a one-on-one discussion with Naomi, she expressed:

We need to find that [you know-the] *harmony, harmony with our body. And that harmony for some people is a transition of their body and for some* [...] *is just to accept the body and not really fight with the genitals. Coz otherwise you're also affirming that women are women because of their vagina. So you may not have a vagina, but you can still be a woman because your identity as a female was not defined by the absence or the presence of that vagina.* (p.30)

Passing as a woman: In relation to this issue of 'self-body harmony', an ordinary need of going to a public toilet was cited by Naomi as one of the events that make the discord between the transsexual women's self and body more prominent, as it reflects how well they pass as a woman. Even if transsexual women identify themselves as women, 'not passing well as a woman' when they go to public toilets is a contradiction to this identity. Moreover, while this issue is heavily social by nature as it involves other people who make transsexual women feel humiliated by not being identified as they choose to be, it is likewise an issue concerning the self, particularly their health, as not being able to go to public restrooms makes them more vulnerable to having excretory ailments such as urinary tract infection (UTI). Naomi shared this:

> [And] we have a member who was diagnosed with UTI because of the fear of accessing female toilets… I won't pee even when I need to pee (like that). So that poses a health risk also. Can you imagine a person doing that for years? I used to do that. (p.18)

Medical and health services: Other than the issue of public toilets, medical and health services are two areas which largely affect transsexuals' well-being, since gaining access to these renders greater threat to their identity as women. However, because they emphasize the impact of medicine and healthcare services as provided by institutions present in the transsexuals' social sphere, they will be discussed further in a separate section of this report.

Relationships and micro-contexts

Family

The family, as the central unit of the society, has a strong influence on transsexual women's lives. Under this micro-context, coming out, acceptance, and domestic violence are concerns ever present in their lives.

Coming out and acceptance: In speaking about coming out, two transsexual women, Joy and Naomi, who participated in a focus-group discussion for this study, agreed that it is important for them to come out as transsexuals and not as gay. Naomi described how she came out to her mother as transsexual through a 'mother-and-daughter' talk:

From Naomi's experience, it is shown that coming out to her mother involved an in-depth discussion on sexuality, which required her to share her academic knowledge about it. Later in her sharing, she also narrated how she came out to her brother, how her brother reacted to her coming out, and how acceptance of her being transsexual was shown to her by her family.

As shown in the quote above, being accepted as transsexual in the family is not an instant process. Again, based on Naomi's experience, she had to give her family a comprehensive explanation of sexuality before they were able to accept her as she is. However, gaining positive feedback from coming out and eventual acceptance as a transsexual woman in her family, are experiences shared by all transsexual individuals. In the same focus-group discussion, Brenda expressed how tired she has become of hiding her identity from her father whom she could not come out to. She recalled how she had a difficult time concealing her identity to 'pass as a man' for her father: *"I'm tired na. I can't hide anymore. Last year, when my father went home, I was still wearing jacket to cover my chest and I would be simpler like- just wear pants and a simple top."*

Peers/friends/barkada

Coming out and acceptance: Similar to the family, the peer group implicates transsexual women's lives greatly. Coming out and acceptance are concerns transsexual women find hard to confront when dealing with their friends or barkada. Joy shared her experience of transitioning from a man to a transsexual woman and recalled that friends, especially the ones that individuals in her position know for a long time already, call them using their male name. She stated: *"the old time friends. They call you with your legal name. Like you're fully dressed and then, hoy! Christian! Halika dito! [Come here!]"* Naomi likewise aired the same ordeal, saying that long time friend usually find it hard to accept the

transformation she has gone through: *"For example, me, my long time friends have had difficulty accepting the changes that I've gone through."*

Work

Discrimination: In the work setting, transsexual women particularly face issues of discrimination. Despite fulfilling the requirements or qualifications for the job they are applying for, they are often rejected by the companies they apply to, from the recruitment to the hiring process. In a personal story shared by Brenda, she explained how difficult it was for her to apply for a job:

Also, the discrimination transsexual women go through in the workplace is exhibited in the preference of employers to hire *desente gays*, or decent gays, over them. In addition, the labels attached to them also reflect this discrimination. Brenda identified these specific forms of discrimination against them when she said:

Stereotyping: Besides being discriminated against in applying for work, transsexual women are additionally stereotyped to occupy certain jobs, such as that of entertainers in Japan, or of someone having a career in fashion. On the contrary, while they are seen to suit these jobs well, the society in general is not open to having transsexual women in the teaching profession. Brenda, a secondary education graduate, shared her experience of being turned down to teach because of being transsexual:

> *It's been actually- I've had the same experience it's been very difficult for me* [to] *because my major is secondary education, so I should be teaching in a high school* [inaudible] *difficult for me to find work. Because most people will second guess the kids and say that "oh the kids are not ready for someone like you." Well let's ask the kids* [laughs]. *Of course they will never ask the kids because they're thinking for the kids.* (p.31)

Sex work as an alternative 'job': The absence of jobs where transsexual individuals can be accepted pushes some of them to engage in sex work. With the need to address their needs in the different aspects of their life, Naomi acknowledged the reality that some transsexuals resort to prostitution, saying:

> *... not all transwomen are born rich yet the issues are pressing and many who are unable to find work will also of course go to the most convenient and they will either do sex work so they can earn a lot in a short time or they will buy cheap and endanger themselves.* (p.66)

Community/movements

LGBT movements: Under the umbrella of LGBT movements, transsexual women, or *transpinays* (as they want to be called), have issues with their misrepresentation by gay persons, the insensitivity to transsexuals, and finally, the discrimination shown towards them. Although LGBT movements are theoretically intended to advocate the rights and concerns of transsexuals, the focus group discussion conducted for this report revealed that transsexual

women's concerns are not appropriately addressed due to the issues they have within the movements.

Misrepresentation of transsexual women: As iterated by Naomi, local gay scholars misrepresent transsexual women as they advocate a confusing connotation of the term *bakla*, as it is used to refer to both a gender and a sexual orientation. Given this, the said word bakla is used to refer to a homosexual person and at the same time, it is used to label someone who performs the actions or behavior of someone who possesses a feminine gender. In pointing this out during the discussion, Naomi put it this way:

In addition to the response of Naomi, Joy C. responded similarly and said that the term bakla has come to envelope several associated terms in sexuality. In the focus group discussion, she contended that the term has been conflated due to the misrepresentation of gay scholars, as she told: *"conflated na yung terms (the terms are already conflated) so that includes the homosexual men and transgender women."*

Insensitivity towards transsexuals: Another incremental issue transsexual women deal with under the LGBT movement that came out of the focus group discussion is insensitivity towards them. They feel this insensitivity of those in the movement in the way they are judged; depending on how likeable or acceptable they are when they identify themselves as a woman. In her response, Brenda stressed that, instead of looking at transsexual women of different types and varying degrees of being a woman, people in the movements tend to compare them to each other, and are judged based on how closely they resemble women. In imparting her thoughts, she declared:

> *...if I'm in the room of fellow trans women, one of us will be most likeable, one of us will be least likeable, but that observation will readily surface compared to having 10 different kinds of women, well biological females through and through,* [either who] *likeability factors also*. (p.5)

Naomi expressed the same sentiment as Brenda, saying that it is almost automatic for people in the movement to compare transsexual women, or transpinays, to each other. She cited the following example:

> ...if a gay man for example meets the three of us and says: hey Joy, you are the most beautiful among you three). Ï repond with Hey, bakla, don't make us fight because all three of us are beautiful. You don't have to say she is beautiful because we all are. Will it kill you to say that all three of us are beautiful? (laughs) But it's almost automatic for people. (p.48)

Condescending attitudes toward transsexuals: In addition to being compared with each other, it also surfaced from the discussion that condescending attitudes within the LGBT movements also influence the transpinays. Again, the labels attached to them mirror that those in the movement are insensitive to the plight of transpinays from one generation to the next. For example, being called 'x-men' or 'transformers' by members of LGBT groups goes to show how they are looked down upon by those in LGBT groups.

Discrimination: The last issue within LGBT movements which emerged from the focus group discussions with transsexual women is discrimination. According to the transpinays in this study, discrimination against transpinays is apparent in the way their issues

are seen as shallow by the LGBT movements, indicating a seeming dismissal of their experiences. Subsequently, the condescendence they receive from other members of the LGBT movements make them feel disempowered when, on the contrary, they should advocating the empowerment of transsexual women. This grievance was let out by Naomi, when she said: *"Well personally, I will not have a problem if someone all of a sudden identifies as a laptop, but you are assuming that gender issues, the trans people face, are cosmetic and they're shallow and they do not cost anything and you can just easily dismiss them and you're doing so with that question"* (p.35).

Public/social institutions

Law

Legal recognition of name and sex change: When it comes to law, the most essential issue concerning transsexual individuals is to attain legal recognition for their change of name and sex. In a discussion with Naomi, she said that, in the Philippines, it is no longer surprising that decisions made on changing names and sex of transsexual women are influenced by religion, particularly Christianity. She likewise pointed out that the decisions of the court are also influenced by homophobic and transphobic attitudes in the Philippines:

> *Philippines, no. You would be surprised if you read the decision in Mary's case. It starts with a quote from the bible, of course the creations part* [laughs] *and a quote from the Malakas and Maganda myth. So, affirming the gender binary. That was very homophobic. That was very homophobic and transphobic*. [It kept resigning to] *as "he", "you're a man, you're body is man- made and even if you change your-- your genitals, it doesn't change your sex; you're still a man. Even if you have a vagina.* (p.6)

Transphobia among legal authorities: To show an example of how apparent homophobic and transphobic attitudes among law enforcers influence decisions on legal name and sex change, Naomi narrated a legal case of a transsexual woman:

> *V* [Veronica] *actually applied for a change of name and sex in her birth certificate. It was approved at the regional trial court level. But we heard that the court of appeals and the solicitor in general have been in connivance constantly checking trans cases like V's* [Veronica's]. *So it was, it was overturned.* (p.44)

Medical and Health Services: The health sector is one of the most crucial institutions for transsexual women, or transpinays, as it is at the heart of their transformation from a being male to becoming female. In this domain, however, transsexual persons still encounter issues which make their experiences more difficult. In the sharing of Joy, Joy C., Brenda, and Naomi through a group discussion, intertwined issues on medicines and medical procedures for transsexuals (i.e., SRS, HRT, facial feminization surgery (FFS), etc.), pathologization of transsexuals, financial considerations, insensitivity of healthcare workers, discrimination, and the lack of stand among transsexuals in addressing their health concerns, emerged as the major concerns of transsexual women.

Medicines and medical procedures for transsexuals: In speaking about medicines and medical procedures for transsexuals, Brenda verbalized that, if SRS for transsexual women

will be supported, it will propagate the medicalization and pathologization of transsexuals, like what was raised in a debate on the results of a study in Sweden. She shared:

> [But] *a big fraction* [of the Swedish government] *also of that study defended that, "if we will continue to sponsor SRS, we are treating, we are medicalizing the trans woman. It means that they must transition to be considered women, so meaning their transition must be at their own choice and must be at their own effort because that is what they would want for themselves. But if the Swedish government would continue sponsoring SRS, it means, we would really want to treat the trans women because for them to be women, they have to transition". So which is in a way, a reasonable contention also, in fact, a good contention. At least we know that this country is a trans accepting.* (p.21)

In addition to medicalizing transsexualism, the side effects brought about by undergoing medical procedures such as HRT and FFS are important concerns of transsexual women. In the group discussion conducted in this study, Brenda and Naomi shared that, as they age, the more hormones they need to maintain their female physical characteristics. Other than that, the side effects of the medicines and the medical procedures they have may differ depending on the age they first underwent those treatments. As said by Naomi, taking hormones to restrain the testosterone when young may induce growth spurts and, therefore, young transsexual individuals who are under this treatment tend to be very tall. Meanwhile, Brenda pointed out that, the effect of taking hormones is different if you are a male-to-female transsexual than if you are a female-to male transsexual, such that, when the person is the former (male-to-female), the effects are reversible. However, if the person is the latter (female-to-male), the effects are irreversible. They also shared that the effects of taking hormones may vary from one person to the next. It can aggravate asthma (as in Brenda's case) and may also cause thrombophlebitis or thromboembolism which can lead to stroke.

Financial considerations: The financial difficulty of transsexual individuals, insensitivity, and discrimination that healthcare professionals show them, propel some to self medicate which may be dangerous. Health professionals are transphobic and turn down transsexual persons who seek medical aid. To discuss this issue, Naomi shared a story of a transpinay and her personal experience:

> *Kasi* [because] [inaudible] *medical supervision, it involves a lot of money, kase you have to pay for consultation fee, you have to pay for every laboratory tests and you have to pay regularly for the bills* [inaudible]. (p.52)

> *Ako* [Me], *I'm self medicating. I haven't consulted an endocrinologist. Because, 10 years ago when I started to take hormones, I tried to consult one at the Medical- ano yung tawag dun* [what do you call that] *medical something- Makati Med and after telling her my issues she said "okay, thank you for sharing but I cannot help you because this is against my belief.* (p.51)

Transsexuals' lack of stand in medical issues: Finally, the last issue related to medical and health services that was raised by the participants of the focus group discussions is the transsexual person's lack of stand in addressing their issues. This was identified by Joy C., saying:

Public spaces: Expression of one's gender, discrimination, and safety are the main issues of transsexual persons in the public domain. As mentioned previously in the discussion

of issues on the self, going to the toilet is an issue that is both about an individual and social issue faced by a transsexual woman.

Expression of one's gender: Whereas its individual facet focuses more on the 'self-body harmony', in the social, more specifically public space, the emphasis is more on the recognition or acknowledgement that they are expressing the female gender. Brenda asserted this:

> *Let's say in restaurants or fast food chains, so maybe sometimes they limit the identification of a female in the form, physical form and they forger the physical aspects of your existence so for example, when they see you looking like a woman, they'll call you ma'am or miss but when you start talking and you don't exactly sound a- your voice is not as high-pitched as most women, then they'll shift, right and they will call you sir already. So, that's an issue because it's like you're telling me that just because of my voice- you heard what my voice sounded, I should be a male and not a female but you did acknowledge that, I am a female because you initially call me ma'am without hearing me talk* [...] *and it's also a concern of transsexuals because it ruins our mood. I usually experience that transition.* (p. 13)

Discrimination: Discrimination is another poignant issue transsexual individual's face in the public sphere. From the workplace, public areas (such as toilets), healthcare providers, and even in their own families, which have been discussed above. Transsexual individuals view discrimination towards them to be coming from all aspects of their lives, and Naomi recognized this by telling: *"What are the issues that we face? Many of course, so personally we experience discrimination in all aspects of life, we experience violence and-of different sorts noh, verbal, physical."*

Safety: Lastly, transsexual individuals are also concerned about their safety every time they enter public spaces. In the example below, Naomi identified being in trains to be unsafe for transsexual persons because of untoward behaviour to them, whether they take the male or the female carriages. She said:

> *Because, I hate the male trains in MRT because it's smelly and jam packed, and they would touch you, they would rub against you, like that— so, it's really more unsafe. It's really more unsafe so you choose the female trains and risk being* [suspected to harass women]. (p. 19)

3.6.2. Applied strategies

The self

Establishing their own identity: Establishing their identity by looking for a group that advocates their rights is one of the strategies employed by transsexual women to promote their identity. Since the word bakla has brought confusion as to their identity, transsexual women have started to label themselves as trans or transpinay, as shared by Naomi.

Seeking support from organizations helping transsexual individuals: In response to the self-body harmony transsexuals want to achieve, Naomi also imparted that there are

western groups that transsexual individuals can approach to aid them financially in undergoing SRS. In the local scene, however, she pointed out that it will still take a long time for their organization STRAPP, as she narrated:

> *For example in the west, like there are organizations, they sponsor the SRS of their members or they help their members with their SRS. Of course it has been discussed in STRAPP, but I think we will be old and gray before we're able to set up a fund ...* (p.20)

Relationships and micro-contexts

Family

Educating the family: Since the family has a strong influence on the life of transsexual women, Naomi implied that it is important to educate them and help them become more sensitive towards transsexual persons. In educating the family, she shared the steps she had to make:

> I told her (Naomi's mother) about gender identity, sexual orientation, the difference between gay, homosexuals, trans woman. And it's different, I told her. At least she understood because the two of us have a historical background like this- knowledge on what a trans sexual is, it's really different, and then she was very supportive. (p.3)

> even with my older brother, he supported me (...) after me explaining it academically, (...) from then on, I had to like, discuss the issues then, so since I will be presenting the (inaudible) for the women, he start addressing me as her sister noh,in how to address proper (inaudible) so from then on, he and his wife taught my niece, nephews (to call me) they are still young, so-- (laughs) from then on, "tita" even with the cousins now, it's ok). maybe, [to them] I graduated, I have like a decent work. (p.3)

Giving of neutral names to children: Naomi likewise mentioned that at present, there are already parents who give their children neutral names so that they will not need to have their names changed if they grow up and face transsexual issues. She said this by sharing:

> *We also have friends who are like that now ... because they know how difficult it is for a trans person to change names, they give their children gender neutral names so they will not have difficulty if they have to grow up and face-have trans issues.* (p.2)

Community/movements

LGBT movements

Establishing their own identity in LGBT movements: Having noted earlier that the meaning of bakla has been conflated, Naomi mentioned that gay persons can use the said term to refer to their sexual orientation. Transexual individuals, meanwhile, coined their own term, transpinay. They have also been exerting efforts to be as inclusive as possible, according to Joy C., which is why they have allowed transsexual males, or *transpinoys*, and the intersex

group to join their organization. Brenda further noted that women's groups are also helping them by incorporating their concerns as women's issues.

> *So, you* [gays] *are bakla and and you're homosexual and we- and we concede that it's a sexual orientation term because it has become that, it has evolved into that. Now, bakla is homosexual. So, therefore, it does not apply to us so there was a need to coin the indigenous term. So, trans pinay.* (p.11)

> *Speaking of the movement, if you're going to look at our name, its like-STRAPP, Society of Transsexual Women in the Philippines, but in reality, we want to try to be inclusive as possible. Like for example, we have transpinoy*. (p.25)

> Iit's like,we decided to embrace it so that eventually we give birth to a trans pinoy movement. ….not only that, we also embrace the intersex group. Yeah, coz they don't have their own grouping (...) Intersex issues sometimes overlaps with trans issues. (p.26)

> *If not single-handedly and as a group and through the help of everyone, like, hopefully, in your case you're helping us as well. You're incorporating our issues with women's issues because our issues are your issues and you know, vice versa also.* (p.27)

Public/social institutions

Education

Building awareness in the academic scene: In the area of education, transsexual women in the Philippines have already gained recognition in some academic institutions and have been invited as speakers in certain classes. By speaking before students, they are able to build public awareness and educate them about transsexual issues. Based on Brenda's experience, the talk she gave even became the topic of three blogs.

Health services

Fighting against the pathologization of transsexualism: As previously emphasized, the health sector and the services rendered by it are crucial to the lives of transsexual individuals. Now, the issue of transsexualism being a disorder, a pathological or medical condition, is being contested since it has ignited discrimination towards them from all aspects of the society. As narrated by Naomi, a global campaign called "Stop Trans Pathologization" is now ongoing to help address the need for transsexualism to be removed from the list of diseases.

> There's one camp saying, "let's delicit completely" because this is not a mental disorder and so many trans people are happy! They only become depressed because of society; when society starts to oppress them and start closing doors on them, don't give them-when society starts not giving those jobs, not giving them access to education, health care, and etcetera. But there's another camp that says, "we classify it but retain it coz there are perks to doing that. Governments are more compelled to sponsor trans health and include it in their national health care plans". Yeah, because it's a medical condition or it's treated aside. (p.21)

There's a campaign now, globally, called "Stop Trans Pathologization". So we want to take out the trans issues out of the framework of disease, disorder. (p.24)

Public spaces: Transsexual persons are in public spaces in their everyday lives. Since they are vulnerable targets of humiliation and discrimination in these areas, they devised some ways to protect themselves.

Educational and awareness-building videos: During the discussion, Naomi mentioned a video that was created to enumerate the questions that should not be asked to a transsexual person because of their offensive nature. She narrated:

> She made this video. Um, what not to ask a transsexual. It was many people, their etiquette, and their common courtesy gets joined out to the window. That when they meet a trans person, "Are your boobs real? Can I touch it?" "Did you already undergo surgery??" " (Did you have a sex transplant already?" First of all, there is no such thing called sex transplant ! (laughs) That is not allowed (p.14)

Media exposure: Supplementing the strategy mentioned above, the appearance of transsexual individuals in television shows also helps them in developing the public's awareness of transsexual issues, as Brenda recounted:

> But it has helped, right, the presence of Justine and Rica in those shows, those are very popular shows because at least now, Filipinos have heard the term trans gender. And trans pinay. At least they've heard these terms and there's a representation through them na, "Okay, we need to hopefully,right, in the coming months or years there'll be more representation. (p.26)

Going to 'neutral' restrooms: Meanwhile, to protect transsexual persons on the public toilet issue, Naomi said they advise fellow transsexual women to go to establishments that have gender neutral restrooms for them to avoid the hassle of being questioned or humiliated. She said:

> Oo (yes), they're gender neutral. Even in Seattle's Best. So when we go to malls, we also point to our sisters which bathrooms are safe to access. thenfor example, we went to see This is It at Greenbelt 3[12 o'clock], eh of course, we need to use the toilet and one of us went inside and the janitor told her, ma'am, this is for women". [Basta she went in] and the janitor chose not to make a fuss. (p.17)

3.6.3. Proposed strategies

The self

Characteristics instead of disease 'checklist': In the area concerning the self, it has been proposed that it is important to identify transsexual women using a 'characteristics checklist', but at the same time, stressing the point that the purpose of this checklist is mainly to identify who transsexual women are and not to impose that they have a medical problem. On the other hand, Brenda said that in counseling transsexual women, it is suggested for them to be made aware of the 'likeability factor' as the criteria in which they are judged.

So if we just probably need to identify who a trans woman is just to inform everyone, "Okay, a trans woman is a trans woman because of the following." So just to give let's say, a checklist showing that she indeed identify [cross genderly], then you can retain it there for that purpose mainly a checklist purpose. (p.21)

Kasi (because) in counseling some trans woman, you can explain along the way a psycho education na (that) you know, likeability is a factor. We cannot really stop and prevent that because gender stereotypes, the binary stereotypes are there. It reigns supreme. We also have to cup the terms with that and live with it. Kasi (because) eventually that likeability enforces you to nurture your insecurities when you can already [deep] your insecurities slowly. (p.5)

Public/social institutions

Education

Being active in academic research and dialogue: In the area of education, engaging in research on transsexual women and joining colloquia or forums are seen to be lucrative strategies for educating people about transsexual issues, as well as for gaining a deeper understanding of transsexual individuals in the academic realm. Brenda articulated this by narrating her own personal experience:

Dr. Carlos Garcia coz I said, I actually mentioned maybe it's about time we become more active in highlighting studies focusing on gender identity- he said my research was acknowledged because as a research entity ng (of the) graduate school we must allow for diversity but not really allowing advocacy, i said "we're not advocating trans sexuality, we're advocating rights, so if you are transsexual, it's the person's right to be a woman. (p.9)

(...) a forum of research, a colloquia could actually help facilitate that and the thing is your presenting them with information. In a discussion with a very good friend of mine, my adviser and my research, Dr. [Samuel Ter], when he came over the Philippines, we were talking about our research, he wondered, "why am I so [old psychology school]" (I said, "I am a transwoman. I share the same concerns as all other transwoman like me; it's just that I'm in the field of psychology. I can't change my field radically and singlehandedly. I cannot do away with some practices; we have to slowly do away with it. So, we present them-for example in UST, they're used to quantitative studies but it came up with my research as qualitative, it was one of the few qualitative studies done in UST (...). (p.9)

Health services

Review of how transsexualism is presented: In the health sector, the issue considered to be most essential for transsexual individuals to address is the pathologization of transsexualism as it is considered to be a psychological disorder. To counter this, Brenda proposed that there is a need to review how transsexualism is presented, as well as the terminologies used to describe it.

But it is maintained there as a pathology, as a pathologized condition similarly with (...) schizo type disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, then it will be treated as

the same and when you present that to the [lay] people, the lay person will only simplify everything by just calling it a disease diba. So siguro (maybe), take the actual responsibility on how it should be presented, siguro (perhaps) let's review the nomenclature, let's review the terminologies. (p.21)

Public spaces

Education and awareness-building: Public spaces are venues for stereotyping and discrimination against transsexual persons. Given this fact, employing strategies to protect them is a necessity. In a focus group discussion conducted for this study, Brenda suggested that people should be educated in a friendly manner about how transsexual women should be addressed in public. Naomi, on the other hand, stressed that the public should be educated that gay persons and transsexual women are different because identifying as gay means men pretending to be women, while transsexual women are women.

Like that. As long as you're friendly with a-educating them. I think that would help, perhaps in these instances, you can give tips that sound like sweeping generalization. Everybody else could present similarly as I do, call us ma'am. Let them correct you if you don't want to be called ma'am. So that it's more respectful because it's appropriate to our- to who we are, right? Not all women look like real women [laughs]. (p. 11)

"And that's just one of the proofs that things are changing cause even the pageants are starting to move away from Ms. Gay because we're not gay, diba (right)? For example, Ms. Gay in the States would be for female illusionists who are really men in their daily lives but they just become women on stage. So, it's really Ms. Gay, because they're gay. They are men who sleep with other men. When they join pageants, they're female illusionist." (p.12)

Being articulate and standing up for one's self: To add to those strategies, Naomi also proposed that transsexual women should also learn to be articulate and stand up for themselves when people around them are doubtful. On the contrary, she also realized that they must also learn how to choose their battles in the public sphere, as she points out the toilet issue, saying:

But, coz me, I know how to defend myself but some people don't know how to defend themselves. Some of them, they will just cry, they will just accept their embarrassment, their humiliation. And they will just bow down their heads and walk away. But that's unacceptable noh, in STRAPP. When it's safe, you ask them to stand up for themselves. But if there's a lot at stake, you choose your battles. (p.17)

Being proactive: Naomi suggested that if a transsexual person's safety is at stake, they should just go to a secure place where they can pee when in public areas. She contended that by doing so, transsexual individuals will not risk being humiliated in public.

But if you're a trans person and you feel you're not safe, and then just go to Starbucks. Because there, you will safely access the toilets. You give options to yourself kasi diba [because right], *when you go out, you just want to be comfortable, you just want to have fun, minus the hassle of being humiliated in public. ...* (p.17)

4. Needs, gaps, and obstacles

The main need and gap of this action research is the implementation of the advocacy action plans based on the key findings of the study. Below is a description of the actions plans. Currently, Isis International and Kartini are in the midst of exploring and securing partners from the social movements and donor community for the effective realization of the action plans, a crucial element of action research.

I. Affinity building for the advancement of sexual rights: A series of inter-movement dialogues

The results of this research will be shared at the dialogue and serve as the springboard for discussion among the various groups. The dialogue will be framed in the context of respect and understanding, and directed at facilitating and building affinity for each others' issues as a social movement.

Local level of dialogues:

(α) LGBT groups with each other

(β) LGBT groups with feminist groups

(χ) LGBT groups with feminist groups, and other human rights groups

Regional/International level dialogues:

(a) Regional/international LGBT networks with each other

(b) Regional/international LGBT network with regional/international feminist network

(c) Regional/international LGBT networks with regional/regional feminist networks, and other regional/international human rights network

Outcome: A public statement on the state of LGBT rights locally / regionally / internationally and a declaration to work towards its advancement signed by the various groups who participated in the dialogue.

II. Say it Loud, Say it Proud: Social mainstreaming of LBT issues and concerns through IEC materials

Development of local IEC materials of three types:

(a) Visibility materials e.g. office posters, media articles, sponsored ads, etc.

(b) Teaching materials e.g. teaching aids, PowerPoint presentations, modules, etc.

(c) Informational materials e.g. brochures on intimate violence in same-sex relationships, transgender health concerns, etc.

Target Audiences: Government Offices, Non-Government Organizations, Schools, and Media Agencies

Launching of IEC materials

Launching of IEC materials through talks, lectures, and/or interviews; for instance, talks with government organizations (GOs) and NGOs, lectures in schools, and interviews on media shows that end with the sharing of the IEC materials on LBT issues and concerns.

III. Transforming research findings into multi-media campaign plans

Via the Isis Activist School for Feminist Development Communications, two types of training sessions can be organized to help the Kartini research fellows and/or our respective local networks (i.e. our research respondents) to develop research findings into campaign plans.

The two types of training sessions are:

[1] A training for local groups directed at developing a local campaign.

[2] A regional training directed at developing a regional campaign.

Generally, the training has 4 phases:

Phase 1: Training needs assessment and module development

Phase 2: Training proper and campaign development

Phase 3: Implementation of the campaign, monitoring and feedbacking

Phase 4: Evaluation and feedbacking for escalating/snowballing of the campaign

IV. Collaborative LBT research projects

Based on the results of the research, a LBT research agenda can be drafted where feminist groups, together with LBT groups, can conduct collaborative research studies on specific issues and agendas of the LBT community using feminist research methodology. For example, STRAPP, together with Isis, can conduct a study on the promotion of international standards of health care for transgendered people.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Summary

In summary, a comparison across lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women's issues is presented for each life sphere of the ecological model. The shared issues for LBT persons and the issues unique to each group are noted. The issues for the self and relationships or micro contexts are presented first. This is followed by the sphere of work and the sphere of social institutions and macro-contexts. The strategies for these spheres are then presented. The issues and strategies specific to the LGBT movement and to the feminist movement are presented at the end of the section.

Self and Relationships (Micro-contexts)

Shared by LBT persons: Given the overall context of social stigma faced by LBT persons, acceptance of one's gender identity/expression and sexual identity/orientation by the self, by family, and by friends was an issue common to LBT persons.

Unique to lesbians: Lesbian women raised the issue of engaging in self-destructive or harmful behaviours like substance abuse and self-mutilation. Most striking were the unique issues of butch lesbians or tomboys including issues with the body (e.g. breastbinding and discomfort with one's body); masculinity (e.g. engaging in negative stereotypical masculine behaviours such as drinking, smoking, and womanizing); and, sexuality (e.g. one-way sex or not wanting to be touched during sex). An unfortunate reality is the systematic rape of tomboys in the community. Also unique to lesbians was the specificity in issues in intimate relationships as seen in the intersection of sexual orientation with gender (e.g. differences in issues of butch and femme lesbians), age (e.g. young and old lesbians), and class (e.g. lesbians and tomboys).

Unique to bisexuals: Issues uniquely raised by bisexual individuals are being forced to become heterosexual by their families and having to negotiate a bisexual identity in their intimate relationships**.**

Unique to transgender persons: Transgender women, or transpinays, unique issues revolve around the body and what they refer to as 'harmony with the body'. Linked to this is the need to be recognized as one's expressed gender by others, sometimes referred to as 'passing as a woman'. Also connected to the body are transgender health concerns, for example, HRT, FFS, and SRS.

Work

Discrimination based on gender identity/expression: The experience of discrimination at work was related to gender identity and expression. In particular, the non-hiring of tomboys (butch lesbians) and transpinays (MTF transgender persons) seems primarily based on their expressed gender. Tomboys and transpinays are also often relegated

to stereotypical work such as security guards and hairdressers. Tomboys also raised the dress code (i.e. having to dress as a woman) as oppressive. Transpinays reported resorting to sex work given the inability to find work.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation: In general, the experience of discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sexual orientation was raised as a key issue.

Social institutions (macro-contexts)

Most prominent among the social institutions and public spheres discussed was the law or legal system, health or medical services, and public spaces.

Law/legal system: Lesbian and transgender individuals raised the issue of non-recognition of LGBT rights in the law in general and the absence of laws to uphold specific LGBT issues in particular. Also noted was homophobia and transphobia in the legal or court system.

Health/medical services: Lesbian and transgender individuals had similar concerns with health services in general, which they described as inappropriate, insensitive, and inaccessible. The health profession was critiqued for the lack of knowledge and expertise on lesbian and transgender health care. Also, lesbian and transgender individuals expressed fears and anxieties in seeking healthcare.

Public spaces: Unique to tomboys and transpinays is raising the use of female public toilets as a human rights and health issue, referred to as the 'right to pee in peace'.

Unique to transgender individuals: A unique legal issue for transgender individuals is the need for their name and sex change to be legally recognized. A unique health issue is the treatment of transgenderism as pathology by the medical, psychiatric, and psychological professions. Also raised was the inaccessibility of medical services due to the financial costs of medical procedures such as HRT, FFS, and SRS. Transgender individuals raised the issue of being recognized according to one's gender identity and expression by others when in public, i.e. passing as a woman, and safety concerns in public places.

Implications of shared issues of tomboys and transpinays: At this point, we note the striking similarities in issues raised by tomboys and transpinays that relate to their experience of the body and to their gender identity and expression. A major implication of the study is to further explore the social construction of gender and sexual orientation in Philippine culture, particularly the meaning of the words *tomboy* and *bakla* which are the local terms that have often been used to refer to the (masculine) lesbian woman and the (feminine) gay man. For instance, is the meaning of tomboy equivalent to lesbian, butch lesbian or female-to-male/FTM transgender? Are there diverse meanings to the word tomboy depending on the social context? On the other hand, the rejection of this group of transgendered women of the use of the word bakla because of its reference to gay men and their creation of the word transpinay to refer to transgendered women is an important phenomenon. Is the meaning of bakla then equivalent to the male-to-female/MTF transgender, to gay men, or both? How do diverse groups construct the meaning of bakla? A major implication of this study is to explore the social construction of tomboy and bakla in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT), and to further understand the meaning of gender identity and sexual identity vis-à-vis subjective experience.

5.2. Possible strategies

Past and present strategies were analysed in relation to the life spheres they correspond to and the issues they address. Strategies can be developed to respond to issues of LBT persons in general or to issues specific to a particular group as shared by the participants. Possible strategies are given below.

Self and relationships (micro-contexts): To respond to issues of LBT persons, their families, and friends, a general strategy is providing LBT-sensitive counselling services. Such a strategy can address the overall issue of acceptance and coming out by the LBT person and one's significant other. Other strategies are peer support groups, hotlines, and education or awareness programs. An implication of these strategies is how to provide direct services to LBT persons and who will provide these services. Another implication is the need to train and sensitize counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and other health professionals on LBT issues. An interesting example of an issue-specific strategy is the 'LGBT Prom Night' to provide a space for LGBT youth socialization. Another issue-specific strategy is conducting research on samesex intimate violence.

Work: A key strategy to address discrimination in the workplace is lobbying for anti-discrimination policies that cover gender identity and expression and sexual identity and orientation. These anti-discrimination policies can be at the national level in the form of laws, at the local level through city or municipal ordinances, and at the organizational level such as company policies. The above has major implications on policy advocacy specific to the workplace.

Law/legal system: A general strategy to demand for legal recognition of LBT persons is to lobby for anti-discrimination laws. An example of a strategy specific to lesbians is lobbying for inclusion of lesbian women in laws on women such as the Violence Against Women and Children, or VAWC law, (which succeeded) and the Magna Carta on Women. An example of a law specific to the needs of transgender persons is the lobbying for laws that will recognize name and sex change.

Health services: A general strategy for social inclusion of LBT persons in health services is to lobby the appropriate health agencies and health professionals for LBT-inclusive health services. A specific strategy to address lesbian needs is asking women's health groups to provide health services to lesbian women, such as giving papsmears and breast exams to tomboys. Another specific strategy is to conduct research on lesbian health concerns. Specific to transgender issues is a campaign to 'Stop Trans Pathologization!' Also specific to transgender persons are adopting international standards for transgender health care and conducting research on transgender health concerns. An implication of these strategies is the need to train and sensitize medical doctors, nurses, and other health professionals on LBT concerns.

Public spaces: An example of a strategy directed to the needs of tomboys and transgender persons in public places is to advocate for gender-neutral toilets.

General public: A general strategy to address the general public's lack of understanding of LBT issues is to have massive education, awareness, and information campaigns.

LGBT movements

LBT organizing: Lesbian activists in this study identified a number of issues in lesbian organizing. In the context of a long herstory of lesbian feminist organizing in the Philippines, lesbian leaders raised issues in relation to gender (e.g. butch and femme lesbians), age (young and old lesbians), class (e.g. lesbians and tomboys), and politics (feminist and mainstream or tomboy lesbians). They noted the decline in lesbian political organizing and the lack of a unified lesbian movement or network in the Philippines. The bisexual activist raised the continued invisibility of bisexuals politically and the absence of a bisexual organization. Transgender activists did not identify issues specific to transgender organizing, possibly because of their strong visibility and presence as a transgender organization in recent years.

Bisexual and transgender issues with the LGBT movement: Only the bisexual activist and the transgender activists in this study raised issues with the Philippine LGBT movement. The bisexual activist identified a number of issues with the LGBT movement, namely the invisibility of bisexuals, the non-recognition of the existence of bisexuals and bisexuality, the lack of representation of bisexuals, and the lack of attention to bisexual issues. In her words, "*B is just a letter in LGBT*." The transgender activists likewise noted a number of issues with the LGBT movement, such as the misrepresentation of the transgender identity (e.g. the use of bakla to refer to gay men instead of transgendered women); the insensitivity to transgender persons (e.g. comparing transgendered women in terms of 'who can best pass as a woman'); condescending attitudes toward transgender persons by some lesbian and gay activists; and the marginalization of transgender issues. In the words of a transgender activist, their issues are seen as 'shallow'.

Strategies for LBT organizing: The lesbian leaders in this study identified a number of strategies specific to lesbian organizing, such as reviving or strengthening lesbian political organizing; resolving issues among lesbian feminists or lesbian leaders; and, lesbian organizing within the feminist movement. An interesting recommendation is for lesbian activists to align primarily with the feminist movement instead of the LGBT movement. On the other hand, the bisexual activist advocated for the inclusion of bisexual issues in the LGBT movement beyond symbolic representation. The strategy of transgender activists is to establish their own identity within the LGBT movement, and for transgender individuals themselves to represent transgender issues within the LGBT movement.

Feminist/women's movement

Lesbian issues with the feminist movement: Only the lesbian activists in this study raised issues with the feminist movement and expressed their desire to be included in the women's agenda. Lesbian feminists have a long herstory of struggling for inclusion of lesbian issues in the women's agenda and have experienced exclusion and eventually being left out of the women's agenda in key occasions, such as the recently passed Magna Carta of Women.

Feminist issues in including LBT persons in the women's agenda: The feminists in this study expressed that women's organizations are supportive of and sensitive to LBT persons. The feminists also expressed their desire to respond to the issues of LBT persons,

primarily of lesbians, but acknowledge that they lack knowledge on LBT issues as well as expertise on how to handle LBT issues.

Strategies for the inclusion of LBT Issues in the feminist/women's movement: Strategies for the inclusion of LBT issues in women's organizations in the Philippines were categorized into six major areas. The strategies that feminists and women's organizations can adopt were matched with the strategies that LBT activists and LBT organizations can advocate for, creating a one-to-one correspondence in the set of strategies for feminists and that of LBT activists.

Strategies for feminists and women's organizations: The recommended strategies for feminists and women's organizations are:

1. to formally recognize LBT persons in their VMG (vision, mission, goals);

2. to develop knowledge and expertise on LBT issues;

3. to develop the sensitivity, skills, and organizational processes on how to handle LBT issues;

4. to conduct research and expand gender analyses to include LBT issues;

5. to provide direct services for LBT persons; and,

6. to engage in intermovement dialogue and collaboration with LGBT activists.

Strategies for LBT activists and LBT organizations: The recommended strategies for LBT activists and organizations are:

1. to call for the formal recognition of LBT persons in the VMG of women's organizations;

2. to develop IEC (information, education, and communication) materials on LBT issues and to conduct training on LBT issues;

3. to develop IEC materials on how to handle LBT issues and to conduct training on how to handle LBT issues;

4. to call for and conduct research on LBT issues and share these with feminist groups; and,

5. to advocate for direct services for LBT persons; and, to engage in intermovement dialogue and collaboration with feminists.

Chapter 9

Women-loving-Women: Issues and concerns in Bangladesh perspective

Prepared by:
Hasna Hena
Shawprova, Bangladesh

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The researcher takes all the responsibilities and would humbly accept any deficit that remains in this report.

Abstract

Under the socio-cultural and religious condition of Bangladesh, sexuality in general is not recognized as a subject or an issue to discuss and debate. *Shamoprem*, homosexuality, is a stigma and there is a strong negative attitude towards any sexuality other than heterosexuality. Romantic love, in particular sex, is viewed as that which happens only between men and women. For obvious reasons *shamopremee nari* women-loving women, are not visible in Bangladesh and in general there is a total silence in this respect. Thus, it appears as if same sex love relationship does not exist in Bangladesh.

With the support of the Kartini Asia Network (a network of academics and activists, based in Jakarta, Indonesia) and the Riek Stienstra Fund Research Programme, this research was focused on the women who mentally, physically, spiritually, and in all senses love women and reflects on how social and familial perceptions, norms, values, and attitudes influence them, causing them to be different from their real being with regards to love and sexual relationships. The objectives were to sensitize people to the reality of shamopremee nari and to contribute in breaking the silence of love between women. The participants were members of Shawprova, the first ever women-loving women group in Bangladesh, established in 2007.

An oral history method was followed through the use of in depth individual interviews. Upon the assurance of full confidentiality and agreement of the participants, their individual personal stories as women-loving women depicted by them was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Some anecdotes are presented in this report. Issues and concerns were drawn and described under different headings on the basis of the findings.

One of the common findings was that very few people knew about the sexual orientation of the participants, only Shawprova group members and close friends. One problem faced during the research process was the large amounts of time were required to make the participants feel comfortable and ready to share their life situations.

It was observed and experienced that the invisibility and silence of the shamopremee nari was influenced by socio-economic, cultural, and religious elements of the given society. Therefore, the challenges need to be addressed through a holistic approach by all stake holders, those who believe in basic human rights including the right to love irrespective of sexual identity. To sustain in the long run, the strength and struggle must grow within its own context. Becoming united and establishing this common goal and building strength from the inside remains a challenge by itself.

This was the first research work focusing on the shamopremee nari in Bangladesh. An untouched world that appears to not exist, held back in silence thus far, unfolded and the reality of life for these women was spoken, addressed with courage and pride. The condition of their living situation in general and in regards to their love relationships in particular deserves attention and care from the family and others.

In a hetero-normative society like that of Bangladesh, a total transformation in the deep rooted value system is needed for the shamopremee people to live a respected life. This will not happen involuntarily, but by the efforts and raised voices of the people who believe in the human rights and dignity of all to make a change. The unity and togetherness of these people is the first step in this effort.

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About Shawprova

Shawprova is the first ever *shamopremee,* same sex loving individuals, women's group in Bangladesh established in July 2007 by searching for individuals. The purpose of establishing this group was to create a space for *shamopremee nari,* women-loving women, and to gradually bring a change in the family and society in respect of norms and practices concerning sexuality. In the organization's initial months, it was only informal gatherings just to see each other's face, talk, and to share the feeling 'I am not only one'. Gradually the group was streamlined with objectives, regular monthly meetings, maintaining meeting minutes, and establishing membership fees. Shawprova has no formal structure, no office, no funding, and has not been registered. So far, Shawprova has been working as a support group through sharing and discussions in monthly meetings, counselling, participation in relevant workshops, conferences, and meetings at home and abroad, participation in research activities, and rainbow festivals in collaboration with others, amongst other activities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

In Bangladesh, most of the people are Muslim and Islam has been declared as the state religion. The constitution of Bangladesh grants equal rights to women and men in all spheres of public life. However, women remain in a position of lower status in the private spheres of, for example, marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance due to discriminatory civil laws. The reasons behind this seem to be socio-cultural with religious influence, lack of education, paucity of information, and poverty, resulting in widespread inequity between men and women.

A reasonable policy for women was declared by care taker government, the non-elected, non-political short-term interim government headed by the Chief Justice, in March 2008 but the leaders of the Islamic parties sensed the policy was against religion. On their protest and demonstration, the government knelt down and submitted the policy to them for their review and recommendations. Although the current elected government has been in power since January 2009, the policy issue has not yet been addressed. On the ground of Islamic law, Bangladesh has not yet fully ratified the UN-Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Thus, the constitutional provision of equity is not upheld in practice.

Under these socio-religious and cultural conditions of Bangladesh, sexuality in general is not recognized as a subject or an issue to discuss and debate. It is considered secret, something shameful to talk about. Romantic love and sex in particular are viewed as that which happens only between men and women. What happens to a girl in her teenage years? In most cases, her need for education is disregarded and she is married off by the family before she becomes mature enough to decide whom to love and live with. She is forced to become pregnant, bear children one after another, and live a life that she may not deserve or desire.

On the surface it appears as if same sex love relationships do not exist in Bangladesh. However, men who have sex with men (MSM) and 'male to male relationships' are known to some extent to a small proportion of society in connection to HIV/AIDS.

But what about the women who love women mentally physically, spiritually and in all senses? What kind of lives are they living? What are the attitudes of others towards same sex love and partnership? For obvious reasons as indicated before, s*hamopremee nari,* women-loving women, are not visible in Bangladesh and there is a total silence in this regard.

With this background, the research was undertaken specifically in the following context:

- Most of the population in Bangladesh are Muslim and Islam has been the state religion as dictated by the constitution.
- Homosexuality is illegal and a criminal offence under Article 377 of the Penal Code.
- Romantic love and sexual relationship between same sex people is a stigma not openly discussed, with strong negative attitudes towards sexualities other than heterosexuality.
- There is invisibility and silence regarding homosexuality and bi-sexuality.

1.2 Rationale

In Bangladesh, the existence of shamopremee nari and their living situation have been ignored. So far, this has been a hidden chapter and there has been no study or research focusing on this subject. Not only for an academic interest but also on the point of human rights, the lives and living of a particular section of the population need to be brought into light. It is a high time to address the matter of same sex love while marriage and recognition of same sex union exist in 26 countries (30 entities) in the world .[46] Here, it is worth noting that, in the neighbouring countries, the Supreme Court of Nepal and Delhi High Court gave judgement in favour of legalizing same sex love relationships in 2007 and 2009 respectively. This verdict stands for equity and dignity of every human being. This also indicates that society needs to learn to be more humane and to accept the reality of diversity.

Regarding women's same sex love relationships, the overall socio-religious-cultural influence has made the situation in Bangladesh complex. It is important to give a close look at the subject so that issues and concerns can be claimed in the context of blurred complexity. This is important to bridge the hypothesis and the mere reality towards a positive change. More knowledge should be obtained about how the social and familial perceptions, norms, values, and attitudes influence women to live differently than their real being in terms of love and sexual relationships. As this research focuses on interlinks between sexuality and the conditions of a given society, it will help in gaining more insights from individual *somopremee nari* themselves. This will also give more confidence to the individuals to come out, to share, and to encourage them to take steps toward changing negativity in society.

1.3 Objectives

- To sensitize people in Bangladesh society on the fact that sexuality beyond heteronormativity exists.
- To contribute in breaking the silence in regards to love between two women and to encourage closeted shamopremee nari to come out.

[46] International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association (ILGA) World Map 2010

2. Methodology

2.1. Process

The methodology of this research was based on a particularly influential notion of 'strong objectivity', a concept first developed by Harding (1986 and 1991). Strongly influenced by post-positivist critiques on the 'objectivity' of quantitative data produced by the all-knowing gaze of the supposedly disinterested researcher, Harding, Hartsock (1998) and others argued that, knowledge produced from the standpoint of the marginalized, by researchers constantly engages in a process of critical self-reflection. In fact, knowledge is produced on the basis of a more transparent process; engaged researchers interested in the outcome would indeed be more 'strongly objective' in the sense that the researchers would be strongly motivated to search for the bases of the power structures by which they are subordinated. The aim of this research is both to reveal the relations of power that are hidden in traditional knowledge production processes and in producing knowledge for the dismantling of those power relations. Strong objectivity is built on the premise that the production of power is a political process and that greater attention paid to the context and social location of knowledge producers will contribute to more ethical and transparent results. In fact, Harding (1991) argues that an approach to knowledge production that does not acknowledge the locatedness and interests of the researcher is always biased as it hides the assumptions on which it is built (Wieringa 2010).

To a certain extent, a rapport was already built up between the participants and the researcher. However, an extra effort was made to have their wholehearted and full participation. At the beginning of the research a thorough briefing on the background, justification, objectives, and methodology of the research was given to each study participant through more than one meeting. They were also briefed on the in-depth interview and informed on the process of recording**.** Informed consent was taken from each participant regarding interview and recording before it took place. They were also individually communicated to and talked with on research related issues and questions for their further clarification and understanding. They were given assurance of full confidentiality of their individual identity and personal stories. Talking to them in both groups and individually, it became apparent that another step in the interviewing process for smooth and maximized results was necessary.

Therefore, to introduce and bring the issues relating to shamopremee nari in the thought process of the interviewees, a check list (see Appendix 1) was prepared in an effort to gather written views of one's own life along the line of the points identified. The interviewing process started after having participants write their initial impressions. As the environment of the researcher's house was found to be most conducive for conducting the interviews, all the interviews were taken at her residence. An oral history method was used through in depth individual interviews and applied towards qualitative research. The interview was focused on one's own story, told in a free flowing manner with some unstructured questions when it was

felt necessary. Their account as a shamopremee nari was recorded and subsequently transcribed for further processing and analysis. Full confidentiality was maintained throughout the process. Synonyms have been used in the research report for each and every participant. Along with the in-depth interview informal discussion (in person and over the phone) and personal observation was applied. As a very important source of information and knowledge, the participants were asked if they would share their personal records and documents such as diaries, personal notes, and letters. To this response, some participants contributed. In the research process, a flexible approach was taken to adjust with the situation as it came.

It may be noted that, for the purpose of research report, issues and concerns were drawn from the input of the participants and were reflected under different headings in the section of findings. The individual story will be documented in the local language (Bengali) separately and will hopefully be published as a book in the future.

2.2. Research participants

For obvious reasons very few Bangladeshi women were known to the researcher as shamopremee. They were gradually introduced through the growing process of Shawprova. Understandably, there were not many women, coupled with limitations in reaching each of them. Therefore, the research proposal proposed that five to 10 women would be studied and their individual life story as shamopremee nari would be documented. In the research process, however, it was a great surprise that more women than expected showed interest in taking part in the research. In the end, two more women than the initial limit thought of participated, totalling 12.

All of the participants were of middle class background. Their age and educational status ranged from 22 to 58 and Higher Secondary to Masters respectively. Some women were employed at the time, and others were students at the graduate level. One woman was married, two divorced, and the rest unmarried. Out of 12 participants, seven had partners, four were broken up and one was not in a relationship. Three had very long distant relationships, their partners in another country and two of the participants were partners. The participants were from three different religious backgrounds and born and brought up in both rural and urban backgrounds.

The researcher herself was one of the research participants.

3. Some anecdotes

Hira

In my childhood at the age of 6/7, I had an attraction for one of my sister-in-laws and used to say – 'I will marry her when I have been grown up' ... the family members, neighbours were amused hearing this funny idea ... I was different from other girls, I used to ride on trees, boating, fishing and doing things that usually girls did not do. My father with much indulgence used to introduce me as his younger boy and I enjoyed that ... At class six, I met Radhika, only for once and never again ... Still I could see her wet hair on the back and smell the fragrance coming from ... In class IX, big mess happened when a letter from Kiron was disclosed, as usually it's a male name ... then her photograph with full name attested by a first class gazetted officer was compelled to produce, but the question about why Kiron being a girl had written all those to another girl could not be avoided ... at one point of time I came to know that Kiron was married off ... My heart was totally shattered ... At college, Sawoli came to my life with hopes and dreams ... A 'dream home' was built over years together ... necessary household items were bought and kept in hiding with secret joy ... In reality, those articles did not see the face of light and the moment to enter into our 'dream home' never came ... Saoli started loving a man, her house tutor ... said she loves both of us equally with no difference ... She was torn apart ... could not fight against the family and social standard ... She got married and left for USA with him ...

Shoma

I used to think that at one day I would become a man, since a woman cannot love another woman ... I had no idea about Woman Loving Woman or same sex love ... For a long time, I had been with the idea that I would have been abnormal ... I did not like that I have a female body ... Felt myself as a man but physically I was not ... suffered with this contradiction for long ... Hatred was grown to my body ... Many times thought of committing suicide but in fact I had no courage ... My dream was to go out of the country, change my sex, become a man and then marry a woman ... behind this, the only reason was that a woman cannot love a woman ... My mother took me to a doctor. The gynaecologist checked my vagina and referred to a psychiatrist to whom I was never taken. Perhaps my mother contemplated referring me to psychiatrist, that meant, I was insane and if it had been publicly exposed, the family reputation would have been spoiled. So in this regard my mother remained silent till today ... Then I left the country, got involved in different workshops, seminars, went through coming out process etc and could identify myself as a gay/woman loving woman. Understood, I was wrong to think that a woman could not love and dream another woman ...

Camelia

While in class viii at school, I realized that my liking is different. I liked not a boy but a girl name Mala, our next door neighbour who was older than me ... But baro apa [elder sister]*, who was already married tried to convince me that a normal person could not do this. But I did not think myself abnormal. Perhaps she could realize what turn it might take. She asked me what kind of love I had for Mala. I said it's same as she had for her husband. Then she started making me understand ... and said many things. She told me, 'soon Mala will get married, then you wont be able to continue whoever you go for. Thought it might be true. I was not able to fight against the wind. So it ended there ... Then while at the University level Panna came in my life ... our future plan was to go to a country where same sex marriage was legal ... Being a Woman-loving Woman it's not easy to live here ... since then, my room mates did not talk to me ... I felt much pain whenever I entered into the room. Wish if we the like minded people could have a house of our own ... However, I am not able to manage anything still now. My study has not been finished yet and I am not independent ... the problem is to manage the family and the society and for this reason, I feel need to go out of the country. ...*

Shuvra

.... 'Why do I talk to her over phone for hours? Why do I go to her home to stay on? Why do I ask her to stay at my house?' These were the questioned that I had to hear all the times from my family after a relationship with a woman. May be my family guessed something. They kept insisting – 'you have to leave all these, be afraid of God, otherwise you will be burnt away, you will have no place neither in the world nor in the hell even. Whoever you love, will never be with you, they will definitely make families' ... Though I expressed inner my feeling, my family constantly tried to make me understand that it's never possible in Bangladesh They questioned "who will take care of you in future? You have no brother, the sisters will get married , how will you live alone? You have to change your mind". I said, "my difference in this aspect is ingrained, how can I change myself?" ... My family took me to a doctor ... I said, since my early childhood I have regarded myself as a boy. I have a girl friend. I love her, had sexual relationship with her and won't be able to live without her. On the second day doctor said, medical treatment will not work ... My parents were extremely hurt as they had the belief that doctor could have resolved the 'problem'. Then they started persuading me to marry, saying there was no other way ... They said, 'if you get married and live with a man you will get well'. My parent's physical condition went worse. At that point I said to them 'okay, I will get married' ... But I feel so inconceivable to spend nights with a man ... what will I do then? When this sort of thoughts comes in my mind, the world becomes dark. Don't feel like keep this life ...

Rikta

Since childhood, I have realized that I have a special feeling for girls. In school, one of the love letters was revealed to a teacher. Chitra used to write bad things in her letter. So there was worse impression on her than me. As a result transfer certificate was issued to her and she had to leave the school. Chitra, in her letter mentioned me as husband and also mention the word 'kiss'. We say 'shamopremi' [loving same sex] *but the teachers used to hate 'shamokamita'* [homosexuality] *... The society has the view of the same sex love as nasty and obscene, so we cannot raise our voice ... I know two women who were informally disowned by their families after their relationship was publicly disclosed ... If my family knows the truth, they must get a negative impression about me and them. Perhaps they will kick me out or will try medical treatment for me. But after being in Shawprova and knowing you all, I feel a strength and courage within myself. A different state within myself is being felt, feeling that a 'war' has started in me. Now, I am able to say, no, not men, I love women. ...*

Labonya

Since 5th class at the primary school I started liking girls more. There was a girl who used to go to her school turning aside my home. I used to wait on the way to see her. Enjoyed thinking about her but never expressed ... At class VIII fell in love with my class mate, she is also a neighbor, Bristi ... I found myself always wanting to be with her. Once, suddenly I kissed on her lips. She did not say anything. Since then the relationship went ahead ... At class IX we were caught red handed by Bristi's mother while I was kissing her. There was lot of troubles around it ... Seeing each other and spending time together were forced to be stopped. When Bristi was pressurized for marriage, she told her family that she would not marry anyone else other than Labonya. At one time she asked me whether I can keep her if she comes to me leaving everything behind. She asked me to talk to my brother about our relationship. I said, 'are you mad? If he hear this my study will be stopped, even I may have to be kicked off from the house. Then shall we two be on the street?' After this she became quiet ... Before one week of her marriage Bristi returned the ring that I gave her. ...

Dolon

I did not know what it was ... When my best friend Mary fell in love with a man. How painful it was for me! It took full one month to recover. I could not work, eat or sleep. It was entirely a different kind of pain, very difficult to understand ... We can't express ourselves due to an undefined fear, due to the social elements we are surrounded by ... Some people say, you are so beautiful, why didn't you get married? As if the beauty was only for a man! ... .I myself could not realize before meeting one woman loving woman of Shawprova that there could be a relationship between two women ... It's so

difficult specially in rural areas to go beyond orthodox social ideas ... My second sister, a housewife with children....She is not happy with her life ... When I was in a relationship with Mary and later another woman she was happy with me ... but now she understand I am alone and feels pain ... She had no opportunity and exposure at all, if she had had, I think, she would have been much more responsive than me ... If love for another woman is not exposed in the society then it's not a problem at all. I am alone and I am fine ... we can live together quietly ... perhaps no one will take the risk to be exposed. The women known to me, none of them does ... So far the women I know, most of them are confused about their desire, whether that is normal or abnormal. ...

4. Findings

4.1 The captive souls

The self image of the research participants was experienced to be developed by the socio-economic, cultural and religious norms, values, and attitude of the society that she was born and brought up in. One participant Dolon recalls her old days: "*I used to think, I am abnormal and my love for women is immoral. I felt ashamed to myself*. " The question is why one would think and feel that way; was it something spontaneous and one's own thought without any relation to any elements of the society that she was born and brought up in? Or was it what she was taught, these feels of shame and abnormality induced by societal norms? Moumita responded, saying "*I could not help loving woman, at the same time felt helpless, thinking how she will manage and run a family?"* This was a very good example of induction; a young girl brought up with the idea that the man is the head of the household and must manage and run the family. In her subconscious mind, Moumita perceived her lover Shuvra as having the leading role in their relationship, the role that she used to know as the man's role. Moumita herself was not confident enough to manage or run the household. Yet, because Shuvra is not a man, she felt insecure about their future family.

In an assigned socio-cultural framework a young girl's mind is shaped for a heterosexual marriage. Her inner feelings on love and relationship are hidden until an option becomes available. As Moumita shared,

> *It did not occur in my mind that both of us are women. The only thing was in my mind that I love her, love her so much. At that time when I was fully 'mad' for her; Baker, the man I liked proposed to marry me. I liked him, liked him so much. He was so handsome, so beautiful. Mainly he was a gentleman to a great extent. But I conveyed my decision not to marry. That time if Shuvra had not been in my life, I would have got married to him.*

Moumita was not in love with Baker but liked him a lot in a socially standard way, as a bridegroom. However, she was in love with Shuvra and dreamt of their future as a family. She could decide to say no to Baker and be with Shuvra.

In a hostile society, it is difficult for a same sex loving person to accept her or him the way s/he is. It often results in terrible suffering due to a lack of self respect and fear. In Shoma's words,

> *I never accepted myself as a woman but a man. I used to dream that my body will be transformed into a man to marry her. While realized neither my body will change nor my love for her, I was deeply frustrated … when someone told me that I am a homosexual, I could not accept myself and hated to extreme as this is the dirtiest thing in the society and sin in the religion.*

Rikta brought her past back saying, *"My first love had to be given up as I was driven by fear of doing something wrong and unacceptable."*

All of the participants brought up childhoods full of socially prescribed dress codes and role models for girls which contributed to low self esteem and difficulties in associating with others. Nishi stated her experience: *"As a girl I was not comfortable to mix with boys as the boys did not know that I am a girl. On the other hand, the girls were not mixing with me as they assumed me to be a boy."* When a girl is growing up, she is married off in most cases before reaching adulthood. [47]

Before a young girl becomes mature enough to realize she has the ability to choose who to love, marry, and live with, her family, relatives, and other people decide for her. Camelia put her situation as: *"I am protecting myself from the pressure of marriage showing the cause of study but worried what happens when I would complete my study; though my inner feeling is that as if I was already married to a woman."*

The lives of these women are not lived in their own ways but suppressed and disguised in fear and in silence. Yet, there is a craving to allow their lives to bloom into their full potential, to flow through their own course. This is how Jeny put her condition: "*We love each other but are forced to be in silence. We are married and living in different places with different people. We are devastated with love for each other but neither can celebrate our joy together nor can cry holding each other while in pain."* Dolon's feeling was, "*It is extremely painful that I can not express my real self. I am to keep my love and lover secret and invisible."*

Usually, family is considered to come first as a place to share pain and seek support when a member of the family is in need. However, under the present social situation, is a family really a place for same sex loving people to share and receive support in living a life of their own? Koli's realization was. *"It's so painful that I am not able to express my love to my own family and cannot live a life like anyone else."* Shuvra is apprehensive: "*In future, living together might be a life and death question if people come to know what we are."*

Moumita desired her lover to become equally as important as her brother-in-law had, but in reality, *"I feel so hurt and angry while my lover does not receive sufficient care and respect by my family as my brother in-law gets, rather she is criticized for her dress up and hair-cut."*

The unwritten and socially prescribed dress code for men and women that is strictly maintained after a certain age was a cause of pain for Shuvra. At the same time she was worried about being identified as shamopremee nari. In her words, "*It's so sad and painful that I am not able to move around wearing dresses I feel comfortable. If people come to know about me, may be I will be killed alive."*

The fear of being identified and known as somopremee nari was observed to be a severe metal stress. Moumita said, "*I have no problem as no one knows about my love, at the same time*

[47] Prothom Alo a leading National Daily of 14 August 2009, referring to the National Institute of Population Research & Training (NIPORT) reported that 66% of the girls were victim of early marriage. They were pushed to marriage before age 18 and this trend has been continuing for last 20 years.

worried what happens if someone knows. I will be in serious trouble socially and religiously."

The women who were employed were more concerned about their work place. As for Papiya "*I am worried and in fear thinking what will happen if my work place comes to know what I am. To save my honuor I may need to resign."*

The fear drives these women-loving women into non-existence. In Labonyo's word "*I keep my sexual orientation secret fearing to be treated mentally sick and be forced to treatment."*

4.2 The treatments received

The participants, as women-loving women, experienced different kinds of emotional and also physical abuse mostly due to their dress, haircut, and opposition to marriage. It is to be noted that the women's love for women and their sexual orientation has remained undisclosed and secret. In most cases this has not been the cause of violence and abuse, but the conflict arises from these external elements of appearance and expressions of annoyance toward marriage when seen or exposed to others. The preference of some women to have short hair and wear pant shirt conflicts with the socio-cultural norms and the usual practices regarding conventional dress for men and women. Time to time, these conflicts turned into violence. Labonya shared: *"I was violated by my family both mentally and physically because of my dress up and short hair."* Family is the first and foremost opponent as the conflicts start there, the family is more comfortable to follow societal set traditions and practices. For a family, it is easier to enforce societal norms on their daughters than face society. However, it was not only the family that caused conflicts. Hira said "*interference and criticisms were also made by the relatives and neighbours."* Nishi recalled the days past:

> *In school, I was obliged to sit with boys as the girls were not comfortable to sit with me because of my male type get-up. My friends asked me to take off my pant to see if I was male or a female. Family and friends tried to make me understand that I was a female and should come back to my own world.*

It should be noticed that the issues do not arise and end in the family itself. How a young girl grows up, her attire, hair style, behaviour pattern, marriage - all become social issues for others, especially neighbours and relatives, to intervene. Koli revisited her old days, noting *"I was pressurized for marriage, sometimes it was more from the relatives and colleagues than the family."* The family and the society walk together side by side and hand in hand. Jeny shook in pain: *"My family forced me to marriage to get me recovered from sickness and abnormality of loving a woman."*

The participants of the research were violated by different sections of society and relations in different ways. Dolon's friends treated her as a "*sick and ridiculous person*." While in public, most of them faced unpleasant remarks like- 'Is that a man or woman?' Papiya said, "*Due to my sexual orientation, I was beaten up by my family. My friends often asked me- how do you*

do that?" Shoma said "*With male pattern dress up and haircut, I was always in fear to be identified as a woman in street as I used to get nasty comments from men. This had been a mental torture for me."*

4.3 Money matters

Financial security was considered by the participants as one of the important elements regulating their lives. However, they have looked at this aspect from their own individual point of view. The women who were not employed and financially dependent emphasized financial security more often with regards to the sustainability of their relationship. As Rikta viewed, "*I think my partner has left me as I was not financially capable of maintaining her. I found myself so vulnerable*." Shuvra's thinking was *"My partner gifted me so many things while I could not buy anything good for her. I feel so worthless. May be she will leave me on this ground and will get married. I find the relationship valueless when the question of money comes.*" Camelia's understanding was "*I am looking for a job. One can love while dependent on family but to live with lover one needs to be independent. I am married to her but how can I keep her lifelong if I am not independent."*

It is to be noted here that, these young women who were still students, hold the traditional and stereotypical belief in placing one above another as it is perceived and practiced in a heterosexual marriage in a society where men are seen to be the providers.

4.4 Religion: "God has created me"

Regarding religion, it was observed and experienced that almost no participants knew what exactly has been written about same sex love in the Koran, Christian Bible, or in any other religious texts, but they knew from others that homosexuality was a sin in religion. Rikta said, *"I don't know exactly what is written in Koran about same sex love. But people say it is a great sin in Islam."*

The participants were found to be divided within themselves concerning their own sexual orientation, conflicted between a hypothetical fear transmitted through religion and their personal feelings generated from their souls. It was amazing to hear their perceptions. As Moumita said:

> *In the beginning I was afraid and felt bad about myself. Now not as afraid as before but whenever there is a problem in our love relationship and I suffer in pain, it strikes me that may be it's because of the unapproved relationship we are in. At the same time I think love can't be a sin or something bad.*

In Shuvra's words, "*Homosexuality is totally forbidden in religion and there is no forgiving for this sin. I wonder if it is a sin why God has created me and it is not harming anyone, why*

it is forbidden." Jeny was confident in saying "*Without harming others, any relationship with mutual consent is legal for me.*" Hira's views were that *"God has created me, my love is just like anyone else, this can not be a sin. If it is sin in religion then it is written by people, has not come from God.*" For some participants, their ideas and beliefs have changed. Nishi said "*As it is viewed in religion, I also used to think that homosexuality is the most disgusting thing but my idea has changed now."*

4.5 Silence and invisibility

Why do women who love women mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally and in any other sense, remain silent about their love? As they do not express their feelings, desires, and wishes, they remain invisible as well. There is no way to identify a woman as loving men or women unless she expresses her inner feeling in one way or other. Her silence results in public silence. Why is she silent? Is it due to socio-cultural and religious factors and negative attitude of society towards same sex love? In this regard, participants' own views and feelings were looked into.

Identity came up as an issue. During the process of growing up when a young woman feels herself to be different from others with a binary vision of love and relationship, she is confused, shaky, and shy about herself, finding no help for a gaining a clear understanding of her feelings. Hira states "*Due to identity crisis, there is no space and way to know her, to grow with self-respect and confidence."* These women already realize how they will be treated in a conservative and non-understanding society like Bangladesh and that women are not in a position to fight for and win many battles. As Rikta says, "*If women who love women make themselves visible and heard they will be discriminated and looked down which they are not able to face."* Most of the participants perceived the reasons of silence and invisibility as women's social and economic dependency on men. They also said that it is because of religion and male dominated society. Apart from this, there were specific reasons at the individual level; as Koli categorically mentioned, *"Women are afraid to come out as there are fears of physical and mental violence, withdrawal of financial supports, pressure for marriage, forcing to doctors for treatment, life threat etc."*

The individual silence and invisibility not only makes the public silence wider and deeper, but results in loss and pain on a personal level. Shuvra expressed her grievances as follows:

> *Bani has got married, Kushum and Chumki have also got married, the remaining one was Moumita, and she will also get married. Everyone goes away. In fact they don't stay. I think, this is only because of the society. The society we live in, there is no security for women. They are so helpless.*

The domination and discrimination against women for ages have made them so vulnerable that is transferred from generation to generation resulting in complete powerlessness of the young women. They are still not prepared to be independent. So, they do not make decisions

for their own lives, but instead their families. Shuvra loves Moumita, but fears that Moumita will leave her as soon as she is to get married.

4.6 A space of one's own

To have the privacy of a space of one's own is one of the most desired elements in a love relationship. Yet, this was found commonly absent in the lives of the participants. For economic reasons, not all women can afford to have a separate room of her own. However, even for those who can afford it, it seems to make little difference as, in most cases, the concept of privacy is not cultured adequately in the family and society of Bangladesh. Unwanted curiosity and interference is wide spread and usual. Labonyo put her grievances as *"No private room and privacy to write about the love relationship."* In Rikta's words, "*All the time in fear while writing or talking over phone if someone sees or comes to know about it."* When others saw what they deemed as unacceptable behaviour, there were often dire consequences. Papiya described her own experience as *"My lover was mentally abused when her mother saw us kissing. Restriction was put on her and we had to be more alert to maintain secrecy."* The family sees marriage as the ultimate and prepares a girl for it. They would accept only slight if they were sure that their daughter would ultimately follow the path they prescribed. In Shuvra's words, *"I have promised to my family that I will get married so now they are relaxed and no more worried about our love relationship."*

4.7 Love and sex

In a romantic relationship love and sex go hand in hand as a natural bridge between two people. It is difficult to draw a line between what is an expression of love and what is counted as sex during physical contact.. Love is often talked about, but rarely sex. Due to socio-cultural inhibitions the sexual part of relationships are not usually shared or discussed despite its incredible importance in life. Most of the research participants were found to be rigid in sharing freely in this regard, although they said that they were not shy and enjoyed sex. Some, like Moumita, expressed as it was.

> *I used to get mad without seeing her. Then our physical relationship was much more. I can't express that much to you. What a terrible situation it was! I used to become crazy without her touch! There was always a tendency to stick with each other's body ... When she spent night at my house, we could not sleep, the whole night we used to be awake and talk.*

Shuvra expressed that she *"could feel the full satisfaction of sex. It feels strange, unexplainable. After kissing and caressing when met deeply, when down and calm, I asked her whether things are fine, she said, fine; meaning done."*

Physical attraction and erotic feeling start at various ages. For Papiya,

I felt a strong attraction to my English class teacher when I was only nine years old and studying at class three. Simultaneously, I was also attracted to one of my class mate. The maddening attraction to the teacher was diverted to the classmate. It was both mental and physical. I had erotic dreams of her. Imagined like we are together and I am lying beside her … We do discuss about orgasm and we feel that bodily.

Rikta shared what she heard from her male friend and what she experienced by herself. She was particular in stating her acts and feelings:

One of my male friend told that relationship between two women will not sustain as they don't get satisfaction in sexual relation … But there was full satisfaction with Kabita … I could sense that by her expressions and through our bodies at those moments. I have used my hands and mouth on her all parts. She became exited and at one point got calm. Felt she was satisfied. After this how it is possible for her to get attracted to a man? The conception that a man is needed for sexual satisfaction is not true. More over sexual matter is not the main one, love is the real thing. Mental things are greater than anything else.

For Labonya it was different. She said that was satisfied by caressing and having sex with her partner, but did not realize the satisfaction part from her partner's side. Furthermore, Labonya did not feel the need of her own orgasm. No further clarification was obtained on this.

4.8 Dreams, pains, and pleasures

What are the dreams of these shamopremee nari? The most common response was "T*o live with my lover.*" The desire of every human being is to love, to be loved, and lo live together. The dream was also for a healthy and humane society, "*Without fear to be able to say, I love woman*." This reflects the cries in their hearts for the ability to express their love and for it to be recognized with dignity. There were also dreams "*to adopt a child*", one of the most beautiful and refreshing elements in life.

As women-loving women, what are the pains experienced? "*Total secrecy and invisibility of the love relationship*", said Jeny. In Camelia's words "*While I had to see that my lover's family is busy to fix a marriage for her but I could not say that she is already my wife."*

Some mentioned their pains as "*Not being able to live together*" and "*Not having enough money to live together.*" Papiya mentioned her deeper pain as, "*At the hostel, while we had to deny our relationship when some people came to know about us."*

The happiest memories were, for Shoma, "*The day I could identify myself as a woman loving woman and accepted myself.*" Before that day she could not identify and accept herself. Camelia had a longing to live with her partner, and made her dreams comes true in reality. Her happiest moments include her and her partner organizing a marriage ceremony in their own way. Everything was real except legal recognition of their union and the acceptance of

society. Lacking these did not make any difference in Camelia's happiness. She mentioned her happiest memories as "*While signing the marriage registry paper*", "*receiving first love letter from her … first deep kiss … The period that we could live together."*

4.9 Most common findings

Almost all the participants said that they first felt attracted to women in their lives, such as class and schoolmates, teachers, and neighbours, and fell in love while they were studying in school. In all cases, only few people know about the sexual orientation of the participants and they are Shawprova group members and close friends. Families know the participant's lover only as a 'close friend'. Almost everyone said that, if the family comes to know the real relationship, reactions will be severe and everything could potentially end there. In regards to physical contact and sexual relationship with their partners the participants said that they were not shy or at unease rather enjoyed mutual openness. It was amazing to learn that all the socio-cultural barriers and hindrances could not negatively influence or freeze their bodily satisfaction in private as the desires were generated from their souls. However, the point remains clear that reaching a place of personal dignity is a political process and a long journey.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Problems faced and lessons learnt

During the research process some unexpected problems were faced. First of all, most of the research participants were found to be not clear enough in expressing the way they were, their feelings, thoughts, and lives in general. As this was the first time in their lives they have been given the opportunity to respond to issues relating to sexuality, they seemed to be lost, finding it difficult to put themselves and their feelings forward. Extra time and effort was needed to strategize and get them through. It took a long time to get the initial written reflections from the participants. Some participants found that they were unable to reflect on them and provided an almost blank page. Repeated sittings and consultations were necessary to get them to a place of understanding and ease. A long time also had to be spent on the interviews. Some interviewees could sit for the interview and keep silent and often postponed the interview date.

Two participants had provided their initial written input and contributed to the research by providing diaries and letters; unfortunately, before the interview process started, their families came to know about their affiliation with Shawprova and the researcher. This resulted in strict restriction on their movement. They had been escorted to and from their college. They were not allowed to go anywhere without company of family members. It was more than a month after completion of the others interviews that one woman was able to come for an interview. After another month, the remaining participant also managed to come and sit for her interview.

In most cases during the interviews, more intervention was felt to be necessary, but the researcher abstained in order to keep the interviewee at ease and the flow going. However, the gaps in information and knowledge were minimized by talking over phone at a later date.

Initially, a hired person was thought of to do the transcription from voice records, but for the sake of the confidentiality of the participants, the idea had to be dropped and the researcher had done it by her self.

Though the participants were given full assurance of anonymity and confidentiality it appeared that, in the cases of providing their personal documents such as diaries, notes, and letters, a few women were not comfortable and abstained from sharing.

Maintaining the confidentiality in the research process was really a stress. Photocopies had to be made in public places where people were unexpectedly curious, attempting to peep in other's personal things. All research related documents had to be organized and ready to go into hiding before family; friends, or neighbours came to visit. All through, the researcher had been asked often what she was busy with, but could not really say what it was.

As Shawprova is an informal group without any organizational structure, office, or funds, there was an absence of built-in facilities and logistic supports and necessary equipment. A printer, mobile phone, and other stationeries had to be purchased.

5.2. Challenges ahead

The challenges for shamopremee nari in Bangladesh are reflected in the words of the research participants. The prevailing picture of Bangladesh society in regards to same sex love relationships were observed as:

- Invisibility of shamopremee nari
- Fear and low self-esteem in them
- Total silence in regards to same sex love relationship
- Homophobia and adverse negative attitudes towards sexualities other than heterosexuality

These seem to be symptoms, the causes behind were experienced and observed as:

- Socio-cultural and Religious influence
- Discrimination between male and female
- Poverty, lack of education information and exposure etc.
- Criminalization of homosexuality

The reasons behind this undesirable situation are the challenges that need to be given close attention to be recovered from the symptoms of invisibility, fear, silence, and homophobia. The challenges and reasons are interlinked with and are reinforced by one another continuously. Therefore, when considering sexuality in general and woman-loving woman in particular, it is difficult to separate challenges and address them one by one or one after another.

Decriminalization of same sex love or homosexuality cannot be achieved without facing socio-religious barriers. Even if it gets through the legal system, the ultimate goal of living a dignified life publicly without any discrimination cannot be obtained without social support. Again, social support relates to the condition of a given society that includes, among other things, education, economic situation, and the status of women. Therefore, the challenges should be addressed through a holistic approach by all stake holders - whoever believes in basic human rights, including right to love, irrespective of sexual identity. To remain sustainable in the long run, the strength and struggle must grow from and within its own

context. To be united for a common goal and building strength from within remains a challenge by itself.

5.3. Advocacy and documentation in Bengali

Most people in Bangladesh generally think that *shamoprem*, same sex love, does not exist in society. It is seen as a western phenomenon that some deviant people have 'imported' from the west. Such a perception and baseless idea should be challenged. The participants of this research, in their every day life, prove that the *shamopremee nari* exist everywhere in the world irrespective of country or culture. The research findings and report need to be published for wider circulation so that the knowledge and information will be disseminated and a greater foundation of solidarity on the common cause is built up. For an unavoidable reason the research report had to be written in English. As most of the people in Bangladesh do not read or understand English, it remains incredibly necessary to depict the accounts *of shamopremee nari* in the local language, Bengali.

The main objective of making the research available in Bengali will be to register the existence of shamopremee nari in the local mass people's conscience and knock on the door of sensitization. In absence of this, non-recognition of the existence of shamoprem thought to be western will continue to prevail.

5.4. Conclusion

This was the first independent study focusing on the shamopremee nari, woman-loving woman, of Bangladesh. The research process had not been easy and smooth, but in all, was an enriching and unique experience for the researcher.

In the context of Bangladesh, the study on *shamopremee nari* concludes towards an opening of the door to recognizing both their existence and their suppressed lives lived in secrecy and silence. The condition of their living situation with regards to love relationships deserves attention and care from family, friends, community, and the state. While the family is thought to be the most secure place in respect to love and care, the reality is that, due to the potential of abuse, none of the research participants dared to share their inner feeling and thoughts about their sexuality with their own family members.

A total transformation of the deep rooted value system of hetero-normative society like that of Bangladesh is needed for the sake of dignified lives for shamopremee people. This will happen only by the efforts of the people who believe in human rights and dignity. Through unity, all can raise their voices together as one and make a change.

Appendix 1: Checklist/guideline used

- At what age/in which class attraction/love to woman was felt for first time?
- What did you think/feel about yourself, is there any change in your thoughts, what kind of change?
- Were you criticized or troubled due to your dress up and hair cut, of what kind?
- Were you discriminated or maltreated due to your sexual orientation or for being different than others, of what kind?
- Was there any pressure for marriage, how it was faced?
- If economically dependent on the family, how it was affecting the shamopremee (loving same sex) life?
- Whether anyone out of the group knows about shamopremee identity, who are they, how they are treating?
- As a shamopremee person what kind of hindrances and problems faced?
- In regards to shamoprem (love for same sex) what aspects in the society caused you most aggrieved and hurt?
- How shamoprem is viewed by religions, what is your own opinion?
- What are the reasons behind the silence and invisibility of shamopremee nari (women loving women).
- Were you in a love relationship before, with one or more than one, in case of break up what were the reasons?
- Are you in a love relationship now, what do you think about the future of the relationship?
- What kind of problems you think to be faced to live together?
- Was there problems in maintaining personal privacy (talking over phone, writing letter/diary, physical closeness etc.), of what type?
- If free and frank in regards to having sex and sexual satisfaction?
- If the lover is known to the family, if they come to know the real nature of the relationship how they would react?
- Was it possible to communicate, see, or spent time with lover as and when desired? If not, what were the reasons behind?
- The dreams and wishes as a shamopremee?
- Happiest and saddest memories as a shamopremee.

Appendix 2: Acronyms

Somoprem: love between same sex

Somopremee: person who loves another person of same sex

Somopremee Nari: Women loving women

Somokamita: Homosexuality

Somokami: Homosexual

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Chapter 10

"Lesbian Lives Unlimited" The psycho-social-sexual experiences of lesbian women in Tshwana (Pretoria): A qualitative analysis

Prepared by:

Delene van Dyk

OUT, Pretoria

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Background of OUT-LGBT Well-being

OUT LGBT Well-being is a registered nonprofit organization looking after the well-being of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities since 1994. OUT is a professional organization and external accountability is ensured by a Board. OUT have a total of 12 full time staff members and is one of the oldest and biggest LGBT organizations in South Africa, especially in terms of service delivery to LGBT people. OUT is celebrating 15 years of service delivery to the LGBT community in 2010.

OUT's programmes include: providing direct health and wellbeing (mental and sexual) services to LGBT people through counseling, groups, social activities, workshops, voluntary HIV testing and other clinic services club interventions, and safer sex drives. OUT has also conducted extensive quantitative research on the experiences facing LGBT people and is currently involved in various large scale research endeavours. OUT is furthermore involved in mainstreaming and advocacy work to realize LGBT rights. OUT's Training and development team has sensitized hundreds of health service providers to the challenges experienced by LGBT South Africans. One of OUT's advocacy successes is ensuring same sex marriage through the Civil Union Act. Considerable advocacy effort is currently put into ensuring proper Hate Crime legislation.

1. Introduction

The aim of the research was to understand the lived lives of lesbian identified woman in Tshwane (Pretoria). The idea was to investigate their psychosocial and sexual histories through in depth qualitative interviews. Most funded research projects exclude lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women since the focus is mainly on men who have sex with men (MSM). This translates into a lack of appropriate service provision to lesbian identified woman. The health, specifically sexual health, issues of lesbian women is often completely ignored, especially when it comes to HIV issues.

This research affords OUT learning opportunities in addressing lesbian health and wellbeing issues. It gives a 'voice' to lesbian women; to share their lives and its impact with others, the LGBT sector, the research communities and service providers. This report will provide the opportunity to present this valuable research to the international and South African research community and have an impact on specific programmatic interventions for lesbian women. Through using the results of the study in sensitization trainings (advocacy and mainstreaming efforts), health care and other service providers would be supported to be sensitive to the health needs of lesbian women. They would be able utilize the scientific evidence to develop and provide health services specifically designed for lesbian women. It will add to the growing LGBT research activities and body of knowledge, locally and internationally.

But before the methodology and results of the study are discussed, an overview of South Africa in terms of politics, culture and religion is given. This will give the reader a better idea of the socio political context in which this study was conducted.

2. Overview of South Africa

2.1.South African demographics

Due to South Africa's rich cultural diversity, the title 'rainbow nation', given by Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu, suits it very well. The population of South Africa is one of the most complex and diverse in the world.

According to Statistics South Africa's mid-2009 estimates, the country's population stands at 49,320,500 people.

Africans are in the majority at 39,136,200, making up 79.3% of the total population. The white population is estimated at 4,472,100 (9.1%), the coloured population at 4,433,100 (9%) and the Indian/Asian population at 1,279,100 (2.6%).

Females make up 52% of the population, and males 48%.

The Black population is divided into four major ethnic groups, namely Nguni, Sotho, Shangaan-Tsonga and Venda. There are numerous subgroups of which the Zulu and Xhosa (two subgroups of the Nguni) are the largest. The majority of the White population is of Afrikaans descent (60%), with many of the remaining 40% being of British descent. Most of the Coloured population lives in the Northern and Western Cape provinces, whilst most of the Indian population lives in KwaZulu Natal. The Afrikaner population is concentrated in the Gauteng and Free State provinces and the English population in the Western and Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal.

South Africa has nine provinces with three capital cities; Pretoria (administrative), Cape Town (legislative) and Bloemfontein (judicial).

There are eleven official languages in South Africa, including English, Afrikaans, Ndebele, Sepedi, Xhosa, Venda, Tswana, Southern Sotho, Zulu, Swazi and Tsonga.

According to the 2001 census, the overwhelming majority of South Africans, or 79.8%, are Christian. Roughly 15% of the population has no religion, and 1.4% are undetermined about their faith. Islam is the religion of 1.5% of South Africans, Hinduism that of 1.2%, African traditional belief 0.3%, Judaism 0.2% and other beliefs 0.6%.

2.2. Political history

Only a couple of months after F.W. de Klerk was elected as president of South Africa (SA) in February 1990, he made his historic speech in Parliament declaring his support to a democratic SA and ended the Apartheid era of white minority rule. The African National Party (ANC) was unbanned and some days later, Nelson Mandela, the President of the ANC, was released from prison. He spent most of his 27 years in prison on Robben Island. SA's remarkable ability to put centuries of racial hatred behind it in favour of reconciliation was widely considered a social miracle, inspiring similar peace efforts in Northern Ireland,

Rwanda and elsewhere. There were very few incidents of violence fuelled by hatred and resentment. Ironically, the violence that occurred was between the Xhosa dominated ANC and the Zulu-led Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP) due to power struggles. There were various violent outbreaks in the townships at that time.

After a couple of turbulent years in SA politics, a new constitution was drafted. The first democratic election took place in 1994. The ANC gained an overwhelming majority and Nelson Mandela was inaugurated on 10 May 1994 as the first black African President of the New South Africa. Thabo Mbeki was the first Vice-President. The ANC had gained 20 per cent of the votes, and F.W. de Klerk became the second Vice-President of the Interim SA Government. Both Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993.

Mandela retired in 1999 and was followed up by Thabo Mbeki. Unfortunately, his style of government and leadership was progressively seen as autocratic. He was largely critiqued for his disastrous stand on two of the most critical problems of the country, HIV/AIDS and the neighbouring Zimbabwe's regime.

Although he suspended his vice president Jacob Zuma after he stood trial for rape and corruption, resistance against him, especially from Zuma followers, grew tremendously.

At the ANC convention in Polokwane on 16 December 2007, the populist Zuma was elected new party president, thereby automatically positioned as candidate for the presidency of the country. Some months later Mbeki was pressured into resigning from the office of State President.

Zuma is not an intellectual as Mbeki used to be. He ingratiated himself with with the left wing of the party and leads a traditional polygamous life with a big collection of wives. Before his election as State President, he used to bully minorities, especially sexual minorities.

The highest law of the land is the new Constitution, considered to be one of the most progressive in the world. The Constitution's Bill of Rights protects equality, freedom of expression and association, property, housing, healthcare, education, access to information, and access to courts. Protecting those rights is the country's independent judiciary, subject only to the Constitution and the law. Section 9 prohibits all discrimination "on one or more grounds", and specifically lists the following grounds: "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation*, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." [emphasis added]

2.3. The legal system and LGBT rights

Legal protection for LGBT people in SA since 1994:

- Homosexuality legal since 1994
- Anti-discrimination Laws in Employment since 1998

- Recognition of same-sex couples as de facto couples since 1999
- Anti-discrimination laws in the provision of goods and services since 2000
- Both joint and step adoption by same-sex couples since 2002
- Anti-discrimination laws in all other areas (incl. indirect discrimination, hate speech) since 2004
- Same-sex marriage(s) since 2006
- Recognition of same-sex couples as civil partnerships since 2006
- Age of consent equalized at 16, regardless of sexual orientation, since 2008
- Gay men and lesbian women allowed serving openly in the military
- Right to change legal gender
- Equal access to IVF and surrogacy for all couples and individuals
- However, MSM (men having sex with men) are not allowed to donate blood

While SA proves to have this progressive Constitution and all the legal protection for LGBT people as stated above, it is still a very deep seated socially conservative nation, marinated in patriarchy, homophobia, heterosexism and homo-prejudice. Gender Based Violence is thriving in general and many lesbian women are exposed to possible corrective rape, which happens not only in the black townships, but also in the so called white dominated suburbs. Homophobic fundamentalist religious individuals and groups often fuel hatred because they are in position of power in their communities.

Empirical evidence confirms the above. In the Human Sciences Research Council's 2008 South African Social Attitudes Survey (Reddy & Roberts), using a national representative sample of respondents aged 16 and older found that, between 2003 and 2007, over 80% of the population across various age groups "consistently felt that sex between two men or two women was always wrong." Further, it found that "gays and lesbians were characterized as 'un-African' and that intolerance towards homosexuality was prevalent." One of the authors, Prof Vasu Reddy, accurately described these dominant views as, "an attempt to tell African gays and lesbians to 'go back into the closet' because you're a 'disgrace' to African culture," an attitude he said represented a view of homosexuality as "something that colonizers brought with them to contaminate African culture."

3. Methodology

This study's aim fitted within the field of phenomenology, which has its roots in the field of philosophy and psychology. The overall question on "What is the essence of this phenomenon as experienced by these people?" was asked and answered. The purpose was to investigate the subjective phenomena, because essential truths about how people experience their own reality are grounded in their lived experience. With this phenomenological enquiry, the data was sourced through in-depth conversations or interviews where both the researcher and the informant participated in the process. Through the in-depth interviews, the researcher made use of active participation, observation and introspective reflection, which added more meaning to the experience. The research data was collected during recorded, guided interviews that were transcribed afterwards. The guided interview was facilitated by an interview list (see Appendix 2), which prompted the required information from participants. The interview list has been approved by two experts in the field of lesbian health and wellbeing, Dr Vicci Tallis and Dr Carien Lubbe.

The sampling technique used was probability sampling, where the researcher determined in advance each segment of the population that would be represented in the sample. The method of probability sampling was purposive sampling, where individuals were chosen to represent people who are representative of diverse perspectives of the group.

Possible participants were invited to take part in the study through four main points of advertisement. The first was through an ad in a local newspaper. Only two people responded to this advertisement. Secondly, through a huge LGBT concert, the Pink Jacaranda, that was hosted by OUT. Flyers were distributed to all the women that attended. A total of about 3000 people attended. Then an advertisement was put on the OUT website. Lastly, flyers were available at the OUT office's front desk. All of the OUT staff was informed of the study and the need to find participants. At the end of the day, most of the participants were referred by OUT staff. I requested them to ask permission of their clients, and then I would follow up with a phone call introducing the study and what it entails and, if they desired, book an interview time with each. The initial target was to interview 12 women.

A total of eight diverse women were interviewed, who ranged in age, ethnicity and occupation. Of those interviewed – two were 25 - 30, three were 30 - 35 and three were 35 - 45. Three were white, three black, one coloured and one Indian. Five spoke English and three were interviewed in Afrikaans. All of the eight interviews were conducted by one researcher, averaging 90 minutes.

All participants signed informed consent (see Appendix 1) and were reminded that their information was to be treated as confidential. Each participant received a special engraved journal and pen to thank them for their valuable participation and contribution. All transcripts are locked away, both those on disc as well as paper copies. Only the researcher has access to them. None of the data will be used in the future without the consent of each participant.

Manual analysis was conducted with emerging themes and issues that informed the discussion. Delene recruited the assistance of a specialist in the research and sexual and reproductive rights field, Marion Stevens, who complemented the analysis by also reviewing the eight transcripts. An interactive process was facilitated noting linkages, patterns, contradictions, differences, and similarities. Marion drafted the analysis and this was reviewed and finalized by Delene.

Of note is the finding that the there is a wide continuum of behaviour and experiences and that few generalizations can be made. The study adds to a body of knowledge which richly informs understandings of the experience of being a lesbian woman and in particular expressions of sexuality within South Africa.

4. Challenges experienced and lessons learned

I found it very difficult to get participants for the study. Although the study was advertised widely, people just did not call to find out more. It felt that at times I was more desperate than I should have been. I tried sampling participants from all four racial groups, black, white, coloured and Indian. I succeeded with the first two groups, but really struggled to get hold of coloured and Indian participants. At the end, I only interviewed one of each. This is also evident in the clients that make use of OUT's services. Almost 95% of the female clients are made up of black and white woman. None of the eight participants knew each other.

Except for a very few comments by participants, most of the content elicited was not new information to me. I suppose it is because I have worked in depth and on a therapeutic level with lesbian identified women over the past five years. In a way, the research confirmed what I always knew – you just cannot assume anything about a lesbian woman's life - not about her identity, not about her relationships, and definitely not about her sexual relations. This confirmation is the one thing that I am really ecstatic about.

So, although the content of the stories was not new to me, the experience of interviewing women on a subject that was difficult for all people to talk about, their sexual experiences, was very enriching. During the first couple of interviews, it was a challenge for me to talk freely and ask freely. Although I believe that I did it with necessary grace and compassion, it really became easier towards the end. I reminded myself constantly that, for most participants, it was the first time they were expected to share such intimate details with a stranger. I have realized that, for most people, talking about sex in general is not as difficult as talking about one's own sexual preferences and actual practices. That proved to be far more challenging.

On a more personal level, I was confronted with the participant's intimate stories, and how it was a reflection of my own life, or not. If it turned out to be in line with my experiences, I remember that I felt a certain amount of comfort, feeling part of "others like me". On the other hand, when most of participant's experiences were an indication of the complete opposite of my own, I do remember that I felt a bit like an alien. I reminded myself that not all lesbian women's experiences were necessarily reflected in the eight interviews conducted.

5. Research Findings

5.1. Diverse experiences

The table below illustrates the wide continuum of experiences within these eight women's experiences of being a lesbian. It also shows that not all lesbians have experienced sexual violence. Yet, at the same time, the data also dismisses the myth that lesbians are not vulnerable to HIV infection. These issues are explored in greater depth in subsequent sections.

Age	**Ethnicity**	**Relationship status**	**Age of first sexual encounter**	**Monthly Income**	**Experience of abuse**	**Perpetrator of abuse**	**HIV / STI experience**
45	White	Divorced from husband Monogamous7 years co-habiting, **No of children** 1 self 2 partner	7 sexual abuse 19 to be husband 27 female	R18000 entrepreneur	Raped age 7 Severe verbally and physically abusive father Verbal abusive female partner past	Not sure	Ambivalent
25	White	Monogamous1 8 months co-habiting **No of children** None	17 boyfriend 19 girlfriend	R12000	None	None	Feels vulnerable
39	Black	Divorced from husband, 2 years with a married, 'straight' woman, not co-habiting **No of children** Boy 17, girl, 10	13 girlfriend 22 to be husband	R7000	None	None	Very aware
33	Coloured	4 years, monogamous, co-habiting **No of children** Son, 18 years, partner girl, 13	14 boyfriend 19 girlfriend	R2200	Emotional abuse mother Verbal and physical abuse past girlfriends	Very jealous, tendency towards verbal abuse	Not sure

34	White	Single **No of children** None	21 boyfriend 26 girlfriend	R35000	Sexual abuse by family member	None	Ambivalent History of Chlamydia
38	Black	Monogamous, 6 years, co-habiting **No of children** Partner, girl, 6	17 girlfriend	R1010, disability grant, unemployed	Experienced abuse	Has been abusive towards partner, but has stopped	HIV positive no sex with a man ever
32	Indian	Monogamous, 15 months, co-habiting **No of children** None	18 girlfriend	Unemployed	None	None	Never considered it
26	Black	Monogamous, 10 months, co-habiting **No of children** None	15 girlfriend	R3000	None	Has been abusive towards partner, but has stopped	Feels vulnerable, unsure of her status, might be positive? Too scared to test

Table 1: Respondent Demographics

5.2. Knowing I am a lesbian – different

Most respondents knew at a young age that they were attracted to girls and for all those who took part in the study, it was mostly during teenage years. One respondent noted, *"boys were my friends, playing soccer with the, but dating no"* and *"I could not understand why"* (S7). One described it as *"feeling completely and utterly right"* after her first kiss with a woman (S1). One said, *"I only like when I see a nice girl, I like had very strong feelings. Ja"* (S8). Another noted that, from about Grade 7, she spoke to an older friend about her different feelings and not feeling attracted to boys. She remembered teachers complimenting her on her hard work at school instead of concentrating on boys (S6). One participant said that at the age of 13 she would spend most of her time with her Grandmother who was a *sangoma* (traditional healer), as there were so many people around, boys would sleep in one house and girls in another. It was during that time that she always chose to sleep with one girl and she described, "*we would cuddle and touch each other innocently"* (S3).

A few described themselves as tom boys, playing boys' games and preferring to wear trousers over dresses. Some were able to wear trousers to school, although one, described later on in this report, was not able to and was expelled from school. Even within this small sample, one respondent articulated her sense of alienation suggesting, "*I know I am a very different candidate that your other candidates"* and went on to explain that she believed that this was

so as she was not at all comfortable with her body. However, she acknowledged that this was something that she was working on (S6).

One described a gay colleague at work, challenging her and telling her to come out of the closet. Through socializing, she was introduced to other lesbian women (S2).

The fluidity of identity is evident in respondents reporting that they do not necessarily identify as lesbian women, especially among the Afrikaans speaking women who prefer to be called "a gay woman". Herdt (1996) explains fluidity in Cabasj and Stein as "fluidity denotes that capable of flowing or being easily changed and not fixed and solid". It is clear that the terms 'gay women', 'women who have sex with women (WSW)', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' have different meanings for different people. Some lesbian women blatantly refuse to be labeled. Morgan and Wieringa (2005) note that some of the women interviewed in their research identified as lesbian, while indeed there were others that preferred not to be labeled. There was even one woman in a lesbian relationship that identified as being 'straight. Nichols (2004) confirms that the reality of identity versus behavior of lesbian women in terms of fluidity is much more complicated. For example, it seems that, when it comes to visual erotica, lesbian women show arousal to both heterosexual and lesbian erotica. Further, according to the Institute for Personal Growth (IPG) internet study, Nichols acknowledged that the 75% of the 231 self-identified lesbians had one or more male sexual partner/s. This result adds even more to the complex nature of this phenomenon and will be discussed in more detail later in the report.

5.3. Acceptance: Family, self, and work

The participants' experiences, across race and class, showed diverse reactions from families and friends in terms of accepting them as lesbian women. In some instances, black women spoke of acceptance by members of families and friends, and in other instances, white women spoke of not being able to come out and families ignoring their sexual identities. One participant living in Mamelodi said,

> *At home I think they have always known... By the time I started dating this girl, my sister knew, my aunt knew, they all knew. It wasn't like a surprise for them. They just saw it coming, I think... My family was supportive, they've always been supportive.* (S7)

For others, acceptance has been less than forthcoming. Some called it a phase: *"... a couple who were close to me did not speak to me…it was extremely difficult, I've lost friends and half my support structure"* (S1). This impacted relationships where partners would not go to family gatherings: "*At that point I respected my partner too much to subject her to that' and, ' I was worried about how others perceived me, and … not having a chance to explain myself*." This is an indication of both homophobia and internalized homophobia experienced. Another said "*Ja, I was always okay, even at home. They were fine with me*" (S8).

One respondent noted that she came out to her mother, but her mother pretended that *"it's not there"* (S6). Another spoke clearly about her inability to speak about her feelings and that there is limited acceptance in her family and that this is just not a subject of conversation. (S5)

Another noted how she had experienced lesbians as not homogeneous and replicating possible misogynistic or chauvinistic behaviour where, "*they would want to take my girlfriend away from me so it brings hatred amongst us. So sometimes you do hurt each other for girls"* (S8).

On the road toward self acceptance, some had sought counseling and have benefited from anti-depressants or anxiety medication. Others in the interviews expressed challenges and difficulties and were referred to OUTs clinical resources. Others revealed anxieties and difficulties that they had overcome when younger. One noted how her greatest anxiety as a young teenager in Grade 8 was being expelled from school for wearing trousers in 1999 (S8). This delayed her accessing and completing her education by a number of years.

One respondent noted her affirming workplace where her director said to her, "*So what if you are gay, you're gay. I hired you because of what you can do, not who you are intimate with and who your partner is.*" Simultaneously, however, she experienced a colleague rejecting another colleague who was gay who said that it was not right and she then feared victimization. As a result, she has chosen not to be out in the workplace (S6). Another respondent explained how, in the workplace, she refused exclusive gifts from male clients and publicly shared gifts of chocolates, and how a colleague 'outed' her by calling her a *moffie.* Her colleague then proceeded to suggest that she might get sick with HIV and that she must not do things behind closed doors (S3). These experiences demonstrate low intensity homophobia and discrimination to LGBT people in general, and how it could have been internalized by the individual. She noted that, given her work position, it would be difficult for her to be seen on a Pride march. She was nervous that she would lose legal clients, although the same respondent ordered her sex toys over the internet and had them delivered to her office comfortably (S3).

Some expressed enormous confidence; "*I always accepted the way I am. So I wouldn't want to hide myself. Because if I hide myself, how will the next person accept me? They wouldn't even understand"* (S8). One respondent explained, *"I do not see myself as a woman, I am mostly against things that are happening to women"*, explaining how she did not wear makeup but clipped her nails, washing, ironing and cleaning but did not cook. She suggested, "*when you come to my place, there's no feeling that there's a woman in this house….I can describe myself as a woman, I will be a woman, an incomplete woman. I am me*" (S3). This latter respondent demonstrates remarkable tenacity in terms of her identity in accepting herself, yet noting that she does not conform.

5.4. Living in a heteronormative world

In general, South African society can be described as heterosexist and homophobic (Reddy & Roberts, 2008). In this light, lesbian women in general are pathologized, viewed as unnatural, immoral, deviant, and inferior (Davies & Neal, 1996). Given these prevailing attitudes, many lesbian women have experienced some form of rejection or another by society, family and friends because of who they are. Many lesbian women have internalized and generalized this rejection and associated shame and guilt to some degree, often at an unconscious level (Davies & Neal, 1996). Thus, they may feel inadequate, insecure and ashamed, exhibit low self esteem, became fatalistic and self destructive (Davies & Neal, 1996).

As lesbians living in a heteronormative world, the respondents live and engage in a range of ways. At times blending in, at times having to protect themselves and at other times changing previous ways of doing things, always aware of how to fit into society 'properly'.

One respondent said, "*I have always kept straight friends – most of the time I am around straight people, we have mutual respect"* (S7). Another respondent spoke about not being out but assumed that many people know (S5). This respondent feared for her reputation and did not feel confident to be able to live fully as she feared people's opinions, thus internalizing the shame and rejection of homophobic society.

With reference to her relationship with her children, one respondent explained how her children say, "*we don't need a father, we have our mother. Who is like a father, who can fight lions outside"* (S3). She describes their relationship as good, easy going, and that they are well aware of her sexual orientation.

Public affection was varied; most felt comfortable to hold hands in public but would not "*kiss around children."* Some felt that public displays of affection were generally problematic (S1, 5). One felt that, at a party, *"if couples get all touchy and feely, they should get a room." (S6)* Another revealed quite comfortably*, "I kiss and hold hands in public – and I have always thought I look good"* (S7). Similarly, another said, *"No I don't have a problem because I always did that. In the streets, walking around, holding hands with my girlfriend, kissing... doing you know that stuff"* (S8). One said that she was only comfortable to display affection if they were alone and it was dark (S5).

Some noted how non-conforming behaviour was difficult: *"The boys would hate us and call us names and they said to us we are taking away their girl friends"* (S8). One said "*I am at peace with men. I have nothing against them. I feel men are here for a purpose"* (S7). With regard to gender presentation, one respondent noted her challenges:

> *I am not the typically girly type which… I am not going to wear a skirt, and I do not have long hair, and I am not one of these perfect effeminate people and because of that, you'd be shocked as to how you don't get rewards you are supposed to in life, and it becomes very difficult, so people don't notice you because you don't meet their norm*. (S6)

One respondent noted that she could not come out earlier because of her cultural background. She said that the adults could see that she did not interact with boys, only with girls. She explained that she was taken for virginity testing at the age of 16, without knowing what was being done to her. After this, it was expected that she "*go with boys and have a child to prove my womanhood ...they don't know, they cannot ask you why you are not with boys, you are always with girls, what is wrong with you?*" In exploring her experience of initiation further, she noted that, during that period, she was taught that "*you must behave like a woman, the sit, you can't sit like 'this', you must walk like this, you must play like this. But those things did not impact me*"(S3).

With regard to her safety, one respondent noted:

> *I have long learnt that because I am different to other people, I should take measures to protect myself. So I limited myself…so I don't go out at night, without any reliable transport, I don't take risks with my life. I have always accepted that I am a woman and men will always be thinking things about women, they don't care if you are gay or what. So I mustn't walk along late at night on the streets* (S7).

A respondent claimed that she was very proud of being a grandmother and being a lesbian (S2).

Another respondent spoke of perceptions that she felt people had about gay people whom she found difficult to challenge and felt people would think this of her if she came out, also a notion of internalized homophobia. She thought people think gays sleep around, are promiscuous, have lots of parties and do crazy things that are considered sinful (S5).

It is clear from the above respondents that lesbian women experience internalized homophobia to various degrees. Internalized homophobia's impact on the lives of lesbian women is often not recognized. Falco in Cabaj & Stein (1996) noted that lesbian women might view heterosexuality as superior to their own sexual orientation. The fact that they do not acknowledge their love for other women to themselves or others causes great psychological distress. Often, women want to know the reasons for their sexual orientation, as if something had gone wrong in their lives, buying into the notion that lesbianism is a sickness or distortion of some sorts. Falco further explains that some lesbian women even present with feelings of being superior to their hetero counterparts. Added to this, other beliefs include not feeling comfortable between other lesbians, that lesbians are not different from other women, having issues with raising a child in a same sex environment, experiencing very short relationships, and getting involved with women who are not available. Less obvious indications of internalized homophobia could be depression, somatic symptoms, low self esteem, loneliness or distrust. Wells and Polders (2004) mirror some of Falco's sentiments in the OUT Levels of Empowerment Study. The respondents had their own internal challenges of accepting themselves and other lesbian women. A large percentage indicated their uneasiness with being outed or associated with being lesbian by heterosexual people.

Balsem et al (2005) found that internalized homophobia had a negative impact on relationships and could be positively linked to domestic violence within the relationship. Domestic violence among lesbian couples will be discussed later in this report.

5.5. Religion and culture

Those interviewed had a variety of religious orientations. One noted, "*I have always been religious – like believing in God and stuff – but I have never been bound to a church. I have always made peace with God and who I am"*, showing a great level of self acceptance in a religious context (S7).

Another referred to herself as having a Catholic background while noting that the Portuguese community and its culture from which she was from had more of an influence, being more discriminatory (S1).

Another identified as Hindu (S6).

One of the participants had participated in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and was attracted to one of her congregants. She spoke to the woman and shared her feelings. The woman rejected her and asked her if she was sick and that she was going to tell the pastor. She stopped going to that Church, at times thinking of starting her own house church and noting, "*I do believe in God in my own ways"* (S3).

5.6. Relationships: Types

The women in this study had a wide range of relationship experiences from being single, engaged or married to men, to not having been with men at all. Another was engaged to be married to her partner as a civil union. Some have been in long term relationships, one had never been in a long term same sex relationship, and another mostly had sexual encounters with straight women.

Three of the respondent never had sex with a man.

Some started lesbian relationships later on in life, others, when still a teenager. These findings transcend race and class.

One respondent described her relationship as a 'so-so' relationship, saying that it was not permanent and that her current partner was straight (S3). This respondent told of how she married a man at the age of 26, a marriage that was arranged for her. She said that it was hard as she did not love her husband. Further difficulties included her mother in law, who had explained to her son that, "*you are dealing with a bull*" and was essentially critical of her being in control. She noted that, as there was so much rejection from her side, it caused too much stress in the house to the point that her husband decided to leave: *"he didn't say bye bye, he did not pack. He just left"* (S3) .

One respondent said that she had never been in a relationship and had always just engaged in casual sex. She had had a casual 'fuck buddy' for 2-3 years (S5).

Another respondent revealed that her first relationship was when she was 17. Some years later she was in a committed relationship with a partner with a child for six years (S7).

Another spoke about not being in a relationship but having two children (S3). One respondent said, *"I had boyfriends all the way through high school and was engaged in my first year out of school but then we broke up"*. One respondent admitted, *"my mother still asks me, don't you want to get married to other people, and I say, no man, I am still waiting for the right wife"* (S3).

One of the initial quests for the researcher was to see if the findings would present with lesbian women '*merging*'. Through the researchers' experience from face to face counseling sessions in the past, certain anecdotal data presented itself to confirm notions of merging. As stated by Alexander (1996), merging is a very strong emotional bond between two women, to the point where their ego boundaries collapse. Gray & Isensee state in Alexander (1996) that "lesbians have a tendency to bond emotionally with other women to a much greater extent than gay men bond to each other". This cultural legacy is important enough to be taken seriously. This psychological issue is one of the most prominent issues that lesbian

relationships encounter. It is not just lesbian women that have the ability to merge. Merging, or fusion, is part of the natural psychological dynamic of being a woman. The pathological value of merging is that the emotional connection between two women is so strong that even their ego boundaries fuse. Thus, decisions are made as a unit, not individuals. Gray and Isensee indicate that the way women learn to socialize encourages them to prioritize their relationships. On the one hand women have this wonderful ability to emotionally engage with others, but on the other, experience tremendous difficulty in disengaging from emotional relationships, especially when this relationship has elements of abuse. But is 'merging' pathological? As Nichols says "One person's fusion can be seen as another's intimacy, and judgments about what is 'too much' or 'not enough' closeness are fraught with personal bias". However, the *meet, mate, merge* concept, ironic or not, is an important area of lesbian relationships.

None of the participants, however, presented with a clear history merging, but very intimate relationships on various levels were described.

With regard to cross racial relationships, one respondent noted that she would prefer to have a partner of the same ethnicity and religion, which was not a mainstream heteronormative couple and as such she felt alienated as she did not find many fellow lesbians (S6).

5.7. Breaking up, moving on

Respondents also reflected on how previous relationship had provided learning and how they had been able to improve ways of communicating, understanding abuse patterns, and not perpetrating further abuse

One respondent spoke of her first relationship: "*We broke up because she was not gay – she started to date boys. It was not a problem because I was meeting people who are more like me"* (S7).

Various participants described past relationships, where the partner passed away, "*She was my first love, her name was Lerato. Unfortunately she passed on. I don't know what happened*" (S3).

5.8. Abuse: Experience and perpetration

Some women had experienced violence, some had perpetuated violence and others had no experience of abuse. Some experienced physical abuse, while others only experienced emotional abuse. None of the abuse appeared to be directly linked to their sexual identity.

One respondent found it difficult to define her experience of abuse at the age of 12 and struggled to talk about it. She had not been able to speak to anybody about it until this interview (S5).

Another respondent spoke about being raped at the age of seven by one of her father's employees; her father was aware of this and silenced her (S2). As a teenager, her father would physically assault her.

One respondent described her mother's emotional abuse, her partners' physical abuse and that her son had also experienced abuse and was now abusive towards girls at his schools (S4). She illustrated the role of alcohol abuse in creating conditions for abuse. She could identify the patterns and ensured that her son receives counseling.

A few described their experience of perpetuating abuse.

> *I used to be abusive in my first relationships. I used to be very abusive. I couldn't take straight girls going out with lesbian girls. I felt in competition to a man. I could not control my temper. So I have hit a few girls in my life. Physically to the extent that there were court case, where she opened a case and I was arrested, but later she dropped the charges. I try not to be abusive, because growing up, I think I know better, that no one has the right to ever lay a hand on anyone – no matter what the reason is.* (S7)

Another noted:

> *Yes, by then I used to beat them up. But now, I told myself I am now old enough, if we can't sort things out by sitting down and talk*[ing] *then I don't see the use for hitting a girl. Because it don't solve anything. Its better if you sit down and talk. And if she does not understand, then she can go.* (S8)

Asked what one would tell another lesbian woman beating her partner, a reformed perpetrator of abuse noted, *"you beat a woman, you solve nothing….And she's going to make you a fool. Because you'd be beating her, then she won't listen to you"* (S8).

One noted how her relationships did include fighting but that she feared physical fights as s all her partners were much smaller than her and so *"I would always have this image that I would smack them and they would fly from here to London without an air ticket"* (S6).

While some noted the role of alcohol in facilitating abusive situations, another noted that she was "sober as a judge" when hitting her partner (S8).

Domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) is often a much silenced experience of many lesbian women. Hassenoueh and Glass (2008) state that female same-sex intimate partner violence (FSSIPV) has a very serious effect on the health and wellbeing of lesbian women. Their findings suggests that "gender role stereotyping shapes women's experiences of FSSIPV by influencing individual, familial, community, and societal perceptions and responses to this phenomenon."

8.2% of the white female respondents in the OUT Levels of Empowerment Study indicated that they experienced domestic violence over the past 24 months. It is also the lowest reported type of victimization in the study, except for verbal abuse (Wells & Polders, 2004).

It is clear that the perpetrators of abuse in this study realized the psychological impact of the abuse, not only on their partners, but also on themselves.

5.9. Addictive behaviours

A few respondents noted how alcohol increased "*expression and emotion*" (S1) to physical abuse. Some did not use alcohol at all but then noted occasional social drinking, limited to once a month. Some had used drugs (tablets, dagga) but most did not currently use.

One described behaviour that could be considered binge drinking where, over the weekend, she would consume a large amount of various alcoholic drinks and then not use for three weeks. She described herself as a *"happy drunkard*" (S5).

Another clearly described the role alcohol played in her families' addictive behaviours and patterns of abuse. This participant smoked cigarettes and needed a smoke break during the interview (S4).

One respondent noted,

> *My previous partner – she used to be emotionally abusive because she would drink a lot. She was an alcoholic. We stayed together for five years. But every time she is drunk, obviously we'd shout at each other. She passed away. I do not drink.* (S7)

Various studies argue that both alcohol consumption and mis/use of drugs are associated with higher risk behaviours (Hughes et al, 2001) and elevated risk experiences for sexually transmitted infections (STI) and HIV infection among lesbian women. (Hefferman, 1998; Leigh and Stall, 1993; Perry, 1995; Stevens, 1994a; Young et al., 2000) Locally, the OUT Lesbian Sexual Health Survey (Wells et al, 2007) reported that more than 35% of the respondents claimed that they sometimes have sex after using alcohol / drugs. 50,5% reported that they never practice safe sex after using alcohol or drugs. In support of the studies, Van Dyk & Livingston (2008) argue that the results of the needs assessment indicate that the majority mostly consume alcohol frequently. More specifically, increased alcohol use took place during the time leading up to the casual sexual encounter.

5.10. My body and how I view myself: Gender expression

There was a wide variety in how respondents viewed their bodies. One said *"I have butch and I have fem days."* The discussion explored whether butch was a look or an attitude and noted that there was a wide experience over time. This same person noted that, in her current relationship, roles shifted over time depending on what was going on with each other – whether clingy, or needing to be protective, or dependant (S1), a good example of how fluid a lesbian relationship could be.

Another respondent explained how she does not have a particular kind of dress, but noted that she was not comfortable in dresses and skirts. At the same time, however, she would not wear suits and ties (S3).

Other respondents described their identities as being butch. *"I see myself as butch – we have more difficulties. I look strong so they can't hurt me physically. I keep away from fights*" (S7). This relates to being more visibly non-conforming and being at risk of being violated, especially in terms of the challenges of corrective rape that black lesbian woman experience in SA townships.

Another noted 'butchness' in relation to sexual practices saying, *"You know what, because I feel like I am more of a man than a woman. And then when I am with my partner, I have to do most of the job.*" She later described how she got pleasure by climbing on top and having contact, but would not allow herself to be penetrated (S8).

This explanation is an indication of how the participant internalized the apparent heteronormative expectation that a man should be 'on top' or in charge of the sexual situation and not allowed to be vulnerable or penetrated.

Being shy and not feeling comfortable taking off her clothes was articulated by one respondent. She noted, *"Even coming out of the bathroom. I change in the bathroom before coming out. I wouldn't come out with just my underwear on."* She noted that she was very shy and that all her girlfriends had initiated sex (S6).

Another spoke of being tactile intolerant and not liking massage, possibly following her rape experience at the age of 7. She later married, but hated the sex with her husband (S2).

Another respondent spoke of her body and looking like a boy:

> *I looked like a boy, my hair was always cut, I was very thin and I did not have breasts, I only developed breasts, after my son was born, a little bit, but if you check my breasts are different from breastfeeding breasts – mine don't show.* (S3)

One respondent spoke intensely about her not feeling 'fully fledged' and her apparent lack of self acceptance. She was directed towards OUT activities by a psychologist to enable a wider support network (S6).

5.11. Media and language: How I speak about myself

Most women were comfortable with using the term *'*lesbian*'*. One suggested that the word 'gay' was less offensive and thought that some people find the word lesbian crude, preffering to be called gay (S1). Similarly, one participant said that she chose to identify as a gay woman (S5). Another said that she preferred the word gay and seemed very negative towards the term 'lesbian': *"lesbian no, that is a terrible word, and the worst word that anybody could have thought of"* (S2).

Another respondent said, "*I am a lesbian, I am very comfortable with saying that I am a lesbian*" (S7). Yet another participant said that, while she used the word lesbian, in her family, and particularly with her son, "*we use the gay word, that is what we normally use"* (S3).

One respondent noted that she was still in the closet. Yet, in concluding her interview, she said she would like to say to other lesbians to do away with fear and come out, "*because if you hesitate, and look back every time, you end up being in a world that does not belong to you"* (S3). She indirectly communicated her loss in not being able to live the life she would have liked to live with her sexual orientation.

In noting her earlier sexual practices and experimentation with a man, one respondent clearly articulated her discomfort generally with accepting her sexuality referring to *"sex as a sin"* (S5).

Another respondent, reflecting back, noted the lack of any role models, let alone positive, in the township, but especially on television: *"At that time not much was shown on TV (about lesbians) and in the location there have not been many people around that I could associate with"* (S7).

5.12. HIV

Many of the women interviewed saw themselves at risk of HIV but did not engage in protective sex. Some of the women who had slept with men did not practice protective sex. One described that she did not feel at risk, but that her partner had cautioned her and that she was now aware, although not certain of how to protect herself besides being monogamous (S6).

Some had tested for HIV and others had not. Two had had partners that had died and they suspected it of being AIDS. One noted that,

> *We had a history of fighting and alcohol abuse. My partner was positive, a friend told me, that this may be the reason for our fighting. Eventually I confronted her, but she denied it and even got legal. But then she got sick, I was denied visiting her by her family, did not get to see her. … Then I had an accident, and got infections. I had an HIV test and I was positive and angry. The doctor could not explain. I have never been with a man in my life, so I don't have an answer to this.* (S7)

Another noted that her partner passed away and that she did not practice protective sex, yet mostly gave her partners oral sex. She assumes that she is positive noting, *"I can't say I am negative. I would rather say that I am positive, until I have tested. And then know my status. I am afraid to test."* At the same time, she concedes that her current sexual practice is risky. She never had sex with a man before and has no history of sexual trauma.

Another respondent revealed her fear, *"that no matter how much I want to practice safe sex, I don't know how to practice safe sex."* She noted that she is aware that oral sex is risky and that she has limited her sexual practice because of this and does not do oral sex. At the time of the interview, she was unsure how to protect her partner, what safe sexual acts are and what not (S7).

Another respondent, who only dated straight women in relationships with men, said that she used condoms on dildos and thought that was protective and was concerned about being at risk. With regard to oral sex, she had never heard of a dental dam. She noted that she was aroused and sexually wanting when she was menstruating and that she thought this was her biggest threat (S3).

An HIV positive respondent noted, *"My current partner tests with me every three months, because when I take my treatment she comes with me. She is still negative"* (S7).

With regard to being positive the respondent noted, "*The actual disease does not frustrate me, how I got it frustrates me."* She continued with regard to myths that health workers have regarding lesbians risk of contracting HIV:

> *Doctors should be giving more information about how and when we should protect ourselves. Because now they have a mindset that lesbians don't get HIV. And it's*

scary they way they think, and let me tell you, It's about 80% who think women can't give women HIV. It's very scary. The way I tell no, they can't tell you know you can be safe, it's scary. (S7)

In providing a message to the lesbian community her wisdom would be, "*Women can give women HIV. Everyone needs to be careful, because it's not for the faint-hearted hey. Not everyone can handle it. It's a reality. It's a fact. Be very cautious*" (S7).

It is not clear what sexual activity could have caused the HIV transmission. She did mention that she had no history of having any sexual encounters with men, did not use any sex toys, and therefore, could not have shared it. She did, however; explain that she and her then partner rubbed their vulvas directly against each other, also called tribadism, frottage or scissor sex.

Van Dyk & Livingstone (2008) argue that certain activities are seen as ambiguous in terms of evaluating risk for transmission of HIV for lesbian women. According to Dolan (2005), risk is seen as unprotected sex in ongoing relationships, being the inserting partner while finger fucking, cunnilingus with ejaculation, cunnilingus without ejaculation, tribadism, sex during menstruation and sharing sex toys.

The above results are supported by a quantitative representative study conducted by OUT in 2004 in Gauteng, where 9% of the black and 5% of the white lesbian women self-reported to be HIV positive. (Wells and Polders, 2004) In that study, 27% did not know their HIV status and only 40% knew their partner's status. 1% reported their partners to be HIV positive.

The details of the first case of women-to-women HIV transmission in South Africa was first reported in February 2003. In this case, a 20-year-old woman with no additional risk factors other than her sexual relationship with a female partner, tested positive for HIV, the infecting strain matching that of her partner. The route of transmission was determined to most likely have come from the use of sex toys (Kwakwa & Ghobrial, 2003). Tallis, in Stevens (2008) adds that there is no accurate statistics on the number of lesbian women who are HIV positive available, but that research in SA and anecdotal evidence proves prevalence. Lesbian women in the South African context are indeed vulnerable and at risk for HIV transmission, even though there is ambiguity about it by both lesbian women themselves and health care providers (Judge 2008; Stevens 2008 & Van Dyk & Livingston 2008). Furthermore, the marginalization and invisibility of the sexuality of lesbian women and their relationships adds to the reinforcement of this ambiguity.

5.13. Accessing heath care

There was a vast difference in respondents' experiences when accessing health care. One spoke of seeing a private gynecologist and noted her partner's experience of a private gynecologist: "*he proceeded to ask the appropriate sexual lesbian questions, which I felt I was impressed with."* However, she noted that her experience was to address presenting cysts and he did not discuss her sexual health (S1).

One respondent said that her family doctor knows that she is a lesbian and that his reaction was 'normal' and that he did not discriminate against her. But, she conceded that she did not

ask for or receive any advice regarding her health or sexuality. At the same time, she noted that there was significant discrimination at public clinics (S8).

Another respondent referred to a time when she was in a public hospital for a long period and how health workers mediated her concurrent relationships:

> *You know all my girlfriends would come and see me there. So I had the best doctors and best nurses ever. You know they would actually, you know there's some tricks with that, because with that other one, and they couldn't see each other and it was very interesting for them, because they were like, all these beautiful women 'faffing' over this women. Something is here…* (S7)

She also noted how, within the public sector, doctors know that she is a lesbian and she feels that she has been treated well being HIV positive However, she feels that they did not know what advice to give since they could not understand her positive status either, especially since she had no history of having sex with men.

Another noted that she did not feel comfortable with nurses and doctors, saying, *"they tend to see you, I don't know what they see in you"* (S3). Yet, this respondent had accessed pap smears and was exploring having a sterilization as she felt she bled too much.

Another respondent, aged 35, spoke of having contracted an STI but had never had a pap smear (S5).

One respondent noted her reluctance to disclose her sexual orientation to health care providers, saying, *"if no one's asking, I'm not disclosing it."* She also noted that she had gained 30 kg in the last year and that she had never gone for a pap smear. Her real fears of health care providers and disclosing appeared to be a barrier in accessing health care; however, she was accessing psychological care (S6).

A respondent also noted how, when she was in a private hospital and her partner visited her and they kissed, the nurses would tell each other but she did not feel discriminated against (S1).

5.14. Sexual practices: Negotiation, intimacy, one-night stands, penetration, how many partners, and men

Those interviewed displayed a wide variation in sexual experiences and practices; some have slept with men, three had not. Some have had many partners; others have had just three partners. One participant recorded that, *"I have had many partners – possibly 35, but about six long term relationships. I did have multiple partners (cheating). We spoke about it and it was agreed that it would be only occasional"* (S7). Some penetrate others and are penetrated reciprocally; others just penetrate and others are recipients of penetration.

One respondent noted, *"At [age] 12, I did not understand what was happening with me, I just could not get comfortable around her, touching her in bed sleeping, and I'll stay awake the whole night",* illustrating early consciousness of desire (S7).

Another revealed the considered and long period of time (six months) between meeting her partner and having intercourse (S1).

One respondent noted that she had had two male partners and 12 women partners and had cheated on the men but not the women (S1).

Another respondent described having about 20 partners with three to four serious ones (S8).

A respondent described her exploration and discoveries with her partner at 13:

> *we'll kiss and then we would touch each's private parts, in a very good way. I don't know who taught us, and that's how we experienced that the touching was giving us pleasure. And then we used to do it so often.* (S3)

She then described how per partners are normally straight and how painful it was when one left to go and have a baby. She also questioned, *"some of the things, I don't know if it is because we are black or we have this reservation of saying I can't do that. It's against my culture, So with my so-so's that was limited sex"* (S3).

Respondents varied in describing how often they had sex. A few noted that they had sex twice to three times a week. One thought that she had too little sex and wanted to have more, but spoke about getting old and tired and also of having children in the house. (S2) Holidays were mentioned as times when sex lives picked up.

Some noted how long they had gone without having sex, for some it was three years for another it was two weeks (S7).

One respondent noted that she would not always have an orgasm during a sexual encounter but noted that her partner always had an orgasm (S6).

Some noted how experiences of depression had decreased their libido.

One respondent described having a threesome with her past and present partners and that it happened as they both happened to sleep over. She noted, *"I enjoyed it most, because it excited me, seeing two women I love getting it on. I felt like the king of the castle"* (S7). Another, when asked about a threesome, said "*never that would be the weirdest fantasy ever*" (S3). Another responded that she never had one, but that it was not something that she was totally against.

One described her intuitive first sexual experience at 15, saying, *"I could not understand what I was doing, but I had to go with the flow, So I didn't ask the girl how she felt about it."* She noted how her experience had grown from penetration with a finger and then oral sex. Yet, she did not receive penetration or oral sex and only provided it for her partner (S8).

Another noted that she only penetrated partners and gave oral sex to steady partners, not one night stands (S7).

Another noted very clearly that she would not be penetrated, but would be happy to penetrate her partner with fingers or toys (S6).

Another respondent noted how her first sexual experience at age 18 was lead by her partner of 16 as she was very shy. She described how,

> *we started kissing and I of course would not move my hand in any direction to do anything, but she sort of led the way. It was a great feeling, though. From touching*

her breasts to going below the belt and touching her private parts, she led my hand all the way. (S6)

Some described one night stands. *"I have only had sex once with a woman and not known her name"* (S7).

Another described willing herself to experience a one night stand after not having had sex for 18 months after being peer pressured, but afterwards felt uncomfortable as she did not feel the emotional connection (S6). Clubs were the place of encounters and activity of one participant who initially posed as straight and admitted that she finds the closet easy to hide in (S5).

Another said that she and a friend had a competition at a 'straight' bar to see how many encounters they could have in an evening; her score was four one night stands. She noted that she was very drunk to be able to do this. She also noted that she played in Mixit and pretended to be younger, seducing straight girls (S4).

One respondent noted how her first sexual experience was with a man and how she did like it and would continue to enjoy having sex with a man, but would not have long term fulfillment, noting that the emotional connection makes it love and it is more than sex (S1).

Another described how her partner was straight and in a relationship with a man. She said to her partner, *"I want to watch her being screwed. I would like to watch and it really excited me. I just watched"* (S7).

Another respondent said, after having sex with a man years ago, *"I do not have a single nerve that says I am attracted to this man... there was no spark at all*" (S3).

This respondent only saw her current female partner occasionally as she was in another relationship and described the few times that she came to her house. She explained that she was comfortable with public affection, but then in reference to her own children, *"they don't know what is happening behind closed doors"* (S3).

Another spoke of how she had different kinds of sex with different women, some more intimate than others. For her, oral sex was a practice that she could only do if *"she was on fire."* She referred to her current partner as *"boring"* (S4) but also conceded that her current partner was closeted (S4).

5.15. How I have sex: oral, anal, rubbing, fantasy

The 'mechanics' of lesbian sex articulated by respondents showed a wide continuum of expression. Restful, fabulous and soft was the description of one participants' first sexual experience with a woman at the age of 27 (S2).

One respondent noted her recurring dream is to give a man a blow job, but notes that she has never done this in her life but that she and her partner like being penetrated and both use dildos and strap-ons. Both practice oral sex on each other and have also experimented with anal rimming and penetration. She noted that sex for her and her partner was different; for her it was to be penetrated, yet for her partner, it was oral sex which the respondent herself considered foreplay. This also demonstrates fluidity, variation and acceptance of difference within a relationship. Within the sexual relationship she also noted taking responsibility for

communicating her sexual needs: *"if I want what I want, then I am going to need to say it and what I need, else it's not going to happen and she can't read my mind"* (S1).

Sex sessions varied from most suggesting that 10-15 minutes would satisfy them, yet another noted that she could take about 45 minutes to come (S8).

Some describe masturbating regularly (S7) another described having masturbated twice (S6). One described masturbating in the bath, and also when she needed to relieve stress after working late. She explained that, when masturbating, she had fantasies of *"a tall, dark black pretty woman, possibly from Kenya"* (S3).

A few described how they were not interested in anal sex. One respondent did not know what anal sex was.

One described her partner and her not engaging in oral sex at all (S2).

Some described using sex toys, while others did not use them. One said, *"I wouldn't want to use a toy. I have myself to use. I have so many skills that I can use, so why would I want to use a vibrator"* (S8).

One described how her only fantasy was her partner.

Another described how she would only buy and use sex toys on her partner (S7).

One respondent explained how her straight partners wanted her to use dildos on them (S3).

One respondent noted how her breasts where the best part of her body and how she loved to have them touched, and how she enjoyed exploring her partner's breasts. At the same time, she expressed her desire for women who were not skinny but had meat and flesh on them (S7).

Some described watching pornography; some referred to enjoying 'straight porn' or heterosexual porn, while others referred to only watching lesbian porn. One respondent was uncomfortable with porn saying that she did not watch it, but then recorded that she had watched with her gay brother and admitted finding it stimulating (S5).

One noted that she was concerned about being turned on by heterosexual porn (S6). Another respondent spoke of her fantasy of penetration with a man (S5).

It is clear that the respondent's sexual fantasies do not necessarily reflect their sexual identities.

One described 'wild sex' or a form of bondage, discipline or sadomasochism (BDSM) noting,

> *"I was recently seeing this woman who ...she's a naughty girl, so she was very kinky. She used to buy like leather underwear. She would scream, and ...she would buy fluffy cuffs. She liked it wild. I think it excited me."* (S7)

One respondent found it really difficult to talk about her sexuality and fantasies, suggesting that she could not remember and then, when the conversation got specific, said *"oh hell"* (S5).

Other respondents appeared extremely comfortable with their sexuality, "*Till today, I just do what feels right, I don't know the specific names, I do what feels good to me*" (S7). Another respondent, when discussing oral sex, spoke of her need for hygiene and said that she shaved a lot but was not able to ask her partners to do that. Not sure of herself, she said that she did not like pubic hair and thought of it as unhygienic (S3).

Often, in the past when working with lesbian women therapeutically and when enquiring about their sex life, the words 'cold' or 'dead' or 'non-existing' emerged. This could correlate to the myth of the *lesbian bed death*. Only 16% of the 56 white female respondents in the OUT Levels of Empowerment study indicated that they were sexually active (Wells & Polders, 2004). According to Nichols (2005), since the early 1990's, this term has caused various debates, as well as being joked about, similar to the concept of merging or fusing. There is a possibility that these often joked about apparent myths, or stereotypes of the lesbian woman as the sensual-but-not-sexual-woman, adds to the notion of lesbian sexual health not been taken seriously, thus negatively impacting the health of lesbian women. Nichols argues that some sexologists have moved away from phallocentric orgasm centered sexual theories to include sensual physical contact which does not necessarily end in orgasm. There are even those that contend that sex is not necessary for a healthy relationship.

Initially, I wanted to find out about the so called 'lesbian bed death' in this study. Although it seems not to have been a challenge experienced by these study participants, taking into consideration that it is not easy to acknowledge one's lack of sexual pleasure and practices, it could still be a challenge for other lesbian couples.

5.16. Summary

- Diverse practices and experiences indicating that one cannot generalize around race or class.
- Some respondents have no issues with identity, while others have a range of identity issues. Some issues related to sexual orientation, others just struggling in life in general.
- Some lesbians have sex with men, some do not.
- There are no single defining lesbian sexual practices, but rather a range of sexual preferences and behaviours that involve a woman having sex with a woman.
- Some drink alcohol, many do not.
- Some have experienced abuse; some are or were perpetrators of abuse.
- Some had experienced the death of partners, one disclosed her HIV status, and some had experienced STIs. Few had had pap smears.
- Many feared contracting HIV but did not know how to protect themselves.

Experiences with health services and health care providers varied; some had positive non-discriminatory experiences but felt that the health care providers did not always know what information to give with regard to women to women safe sexual practices.

6. Conclusion

This report illustrates that, to really understand the lives of lesbian women, you should change the way you look at them and throw your heteronormative stereotyped lenses away, with no limiting beliefs. Not two women in this study presented with the exact same life experiences (like women in general), although there might be areas that resemble each other.

This report highlights the need to find out more about lesbian women's lives, not only to understand their lives and experiences better, but because it gives a *voice* to a very marginalized group of women. It gives a voice to both the women who are comfortably out and proud and then to those that, due to unfortunate circumstances, cannot be out and be who they really are and love who they really want, too afraid of the consequences, the discrimination, and rejection.

The next phase of this project, depending on funding, will include the following:

- Produce a brochure targeting service providers
- Three year advocacy plan including 48 Sensitization Trainings to service providers in Gauteng, South Africa
- Presenting the findings or part thereof at two international and two or more national conferences

Being part of an international research group, I have learned that experiences of lesbian women in other parts of the world, such as Bangladesh and India, resembles the experiences of black lesbian women in SA townships in that the forms of violence they experience also include corrective rape. On the other hand, we also internationally share positive experiences of being lesbian women.

I believe that this report will assist OUT LGBT Well-being, activists, policy makers and health care providers to debunk the stereotypes and myths around lesbian women, their lives, health, and wellbeing.

Appendix 1: Informed Consent – Lesbian Research Study

By signing this document, I give consent to be interviewed by Delene van Dyk, an employee of OUT LGBT Well-being, a non-profit Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender organization based in Pretoria. I understand that I will be part of a research study that will focus on the experiences (psychological, social and sexual) of lesbian women in Pretoria. This study, supported by a grant from Kartini Asia and the Riek Sienstra Fund, will provide some guidance in understanding the needs of lesbian women and to assist health professionals to optimize their services to lesbian women.

I understand that I will be interviewed at a time and place convenient to me. I will be asked some questions about my experiences as a lesbian woman, including my psychological, social and sexual experiences. The interview will take about 1½ to 2 hours to complete. I also understand that the researcher may contact me for information in the future.

I have been informed that the interview is entirely voluntary, and that even after the interview begins I can refuse to answer to questions or decide to terminate the interview at any point. I have been told that my answers to the questions will not be given to anyone else and no reports of this study will ever identify me in any way. I have also been informed that my participation or nonparticipation or my refusal to answer questions will have no effect on services that I or any member of my family may receive from OUT LGBT Well-being.

This study will help develop a better understanding of the life experiences of lesbian women in Pretoria and the services that will be most helpful to them. However, I will receive no direct benefit as a result of participation.

I understand that the results of this research will be given to me if I ask for them and that Delene van Dyk is the person to contact if I have any questions about this study or about my rights as a study participant. Delene can be reached on 083 253 5122.

_____ _____

Date Respondent's Signature

_____

Interviewer's Signature

Appendix 2: Interview List/Guidelines– Lesbian Research Study

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Address:
4. Relationship status:
5. Ethnicity:
6. Level of resource:

PSYCHOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES

- **Coming out**
- **Identity**
- **Internalized homophobia**

  Morally wrong? Ashamed? Thankful for sexual orientation? People talk – nervous? Lesbians holding hands, any public display of affection? Hide it from anyone? Straight acting? Embarrassed talking about own relationship? The constant need to prove the self?

- **Intimate partner violence (FSSIPV) / Domestic violence / abuse screening**
- **Psychiatric history**

SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

- **Homophobia**
- **Coming in**

SEXUAL EXPERIENCES

- **Age of "sexarche" (the onset of sexual activity)**
- **Types of sexual practice (oral, anal, and vaginal)**

- **Sexual partner assessment:**

  The number of lifetime partners, number of partners within the preceding six months, the nature of the relationship (serial monogamy versus one-time events)

- **STD/HIV history & prevention practices**

- **Problems related to sexual intercourse (lesbian bed death)**

- **History of sexual abuse**

  "Have you ever felt that you were forced to have unwanted sex?"

- **Sexual pleasure / desire / fantasy**

- **Experiences with health care providers**

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Chapter 11

From the horse's mouth: Township perceptions on the Black Butch Lesbian identity

Prepared by:

Noman Pakade,

Behind The Mask

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1. Introduction

> *The meanings we give to sexuality in general, and homosexuality, in particular, are socially organized, but contradictory, sustained by a variety of languages, which seek to tell us what is sex, what it ought to be, and what it could be. Existing languages of sex... set the limits of the possible. We in our various ways, try to make sense of what we are offered.* (Weeks 1989, p. 208)

The lesbian identity has been documented in different parts of the world and across different times. The butch identity also made its appearance as a lesbian subculture within butch-femme relations. However, this particular lesbian identity appears in different parts of the world and this project aims to understand similarities and/or differences of the butch identity within the South African context.

This project seeks to capture the lived experiences and struggles of self acclaimed butch lesbian women in townships. Initially the project focused on the social construction of the Black butch lesbian identity. Engaging more with the literature revealed that the social constructionist approach in itself implies a certain theoretical framework. The notion of acknowledging the construction of this identity by emphasizing perceptions purposefully centralizes the subjectivity that accompanies descriptions of owned up identities without much emphasis on the theoretical framework. The goal is to understand how butch lesbians from the townships construct their sexual identity, how the overt butch lesbian identity maintains itself through what seems like a constant confrontation of the lesbian identity.

Amongst other things, the opening quote by Weeks captures the struggle of accepting the name calling in creating identities, in that names may be prescriptive and limiting, but the meaning we attach to them weighs heavily. It is this negotiation that some lesbian women in townships who choose to identify as 'butch' lesbians experience, despite other terms and against criticism amongst lesbians and the broader homophobic society. And this brings me to my broader research question which is what does it mean to be a butch lesbian in South African township?

1.1. Specific aims

In addressing the research question, this study has used a case study method. This study sought to describe the social networks of Black lesbians living in townships around Johannesburg, and to identify structural and social factors that may influence how they perceive themselves.

The second aim was to explore ways in which the butch identity is often associated with dominance and the dominance is perceived to be those acts that are socially associated with the male gender, be it the dress or behavioral patterns, sex appeal, the way they communicate (*tsotsi taal* or phrases?) Furthermore, this "…does not imply oppression of the other and may not be present in all relations of the couple" (Wieringa, 1989,p. 218). If the butch identity is influenced by the male gender, then to what extent?

The research also aimed to explore and identify the possible relations between the butch identity and activism:

- To what extent does the overt butch identity become translated into a political identity (given the alarming violence against Black lesbians)?

- Gender is not only a product of society but in itself is associated with power differentials in relation to role-playing, where representation of 'manliness' amongst butch individuals may be linked to societal benefits i.e. privilege and status that may be seductive. How do butch women reconcile the gender transgressive butch as an expression and as an identity that functions in a heteronormative society?

2. Overview of South Africa

2.1. The South African context

South African history has been characterized by oppression in more ways than one. Since the arrival of the British in 1652, South Africa achieved independence from the British Colonial rule on 31 May 1910 (Bonner & Segal 1998).The apartheid regime was a legal system enforced by the National Party government between 1948 and 1994. Its core policies were racially defined with the White race deemed politically, legally, institutionally, and socially superior and privileged (Alexander 2001). Some would argue that the racial segregation started in colonial times, but was more extensive and intensified as an official policy post the 1948 general elections that were limited to the White minority. This regime was so intense in its segregation laws that even residential areas were separated, and in some incidences, lead to forced removals (Bonner and Segal 1998). Towns, or rather townships, were established solely to keep the Black man out of the city yet close to the city so he could provide the expected labour necessary to maintain the regime. The paranoia of keeping the Black man at a distance while controlling him persisted to the extent that tribally self-governing homelands, or Bantustans, were established by the state. These homelands were designated 'ethnic groups' which sought to further fragment Black societies though maintaining the concept of ethnically homogenous territories. This is similar to colonial trends in Africa that have used the 'divide and rule' strategy so as to limit people from mobilizing and thereby maintaining the status quo.

The superiority of White was reinforced in all aspects of society. The government segregated education, health care facilities, and other public services maintaining that Blacks, Indians, and Coloured, as racially defined by the regime, were inferior (Klugman 2008).The notion of 'othering' even with regards to sexually was also racialized. For instance, mixed raced couples or sexual interaction was illegal under the apartheid laws. The gay and lesbian society was not an exception to this. As such, Black homosexuals, some would argue, faced double oppression because of their sexuality and race, and the black lesbian women were by far much more marginalized. Thus, it becomes difficult to discuss any phenomena historically in South Africa without racializing the narrative; as such, discussing sexuality will simultaneously map how race and context shape the expression of sexual and/or gender identity.

In 1994 South Africa had its first democratic elections that ushered the African National congress (ANC) Black led government, an era of human rights, and an atmosphere of freedom and hope. However, what freedom means post 1994 depends on who responds as the Black lesbians in township continue to experience violence and discrimination against the constitutionally recognized rights that are meant to protect the sexual minorities. Nonetheless, it can be argued that post 1994 South Africa opened spaces and the will to claim those spaces. The section below will briefly map out advances made with regards to sexuality, gender and human rights issues under the democratic regime.

2.2. Sexuality in South African context

One of the more recently discussed topics around sexual rights is that of sex work. In South Africa sex work is a statutory offence that is criminalized under the sexual offences Act 23 of 1957 and, more recently, the government through the South African Law Reform Committee (SALRC) 2006 paper on trafficking equates trafficking with sex work (Gerntholtz 2009).

Furthermore, the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act (Act 92 of 1996) legalized abortion in 1997 even though some may argue that the Act was limited. It did, however, replace the 1975 Abortion and Sterilization Act that required health care professionals and magistrates' approval for the abortion procedure. During this era contraceptives were encouraged amongst Black women driven by the belief that Black and Coloured populations were growing too quickly. On the other hand, government tax incentives were used to promote White women's desire to have more children based on the need for the White population to grow so as to maintain supremacy (Guttmacher et al. 2008).

Since 2008 the age of consent has been set as16 years regardless of sexual orientation or gender as compared to the previous laws which stipulated 19 for same-sex relations as the age of consent (Constitutional Court 2008). In addition, same -sex marriages have been legally recognized since 1996 under the Civil Union Act, which was preceded by the non-discrimination clause in 1998 which suspended discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc. While in the 1960s to the 1980s the South African Defense Force (SANDF) was committed in its mandate to 'cure' White gay and lesbian soldiers through medical procedures such as chemical castration, amongst other methods.

On the other hand, in 2002 and 2003 both joint and step adoption same-sex rights and the Alteration of Sex description and sex status Act, were passed respectively (Government Gazzette 2004). These briefly mentioned changes with regards to the state and the sexuality/sexual/gender/reproductive rights of its citizens serve as a reminder that South Africa, as a developing young democracy, has shown commitment in embracing diversity. However, some of the changes have also been contradictory, such as discussions regarding the decriminalization of sex work.

3. Methodology

The study insisted on qualitative enquiry given that it sought to capture the subjective perceptions and experiences of Black lesbian women in townships. A case study design was employed. Case studies involve an in-depth examination of a single instance of an event. Furthermore, it is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary instance or event within its real-life context, although boundaries between instance, event or example and context are not clearly evident (Gravetter & Forrzano 2006).

Some conversations that formed part of the participant observation were not audio-recorded as means of gaining trust but also to validate the already gathered information while attempting to go beyond it. According to Gravetter and Forzano (2006) participant observation entails observing and recording participant behaviour while interacting with the participants. The researcher took field notes which also form part of the data collected.

3.1. Participants and recruitment

Using the 'community partner organization' approach as defined by Liamputtong (2007) through which organizations, in this case lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) and/or human rights oriented organizations, were approached to assist in identifying respondents whom they might have worked with. The Lesbian and Gay Equality Project (LGEP) under the leadership of Phumi Mtetwa have been working closely with lesbians and gays from KwaThema and the LGEP was very helpful in recruiting participants.

In the course of the study six in-depth interviews were conducted with self acclaimed butch lesbians from KwaThema. During the fieldwork, it emerged that butch lesbians from Soweto had a different approach on the butch lesbian identity, which may be influenced by their context and experiences. Initially the same number of participants was to be recruited from Soweto, however, it proved difficult for people to give more than one interview given that I worked for Behind The Mask (an online news magazine) and the assumption was that one interview will be sufficient for a publication. One of the challenges was that people would agree but cancel at the last minute or after the first interview. Eventually I managed to recruit two respondents from Soweto.

There were several community meetings that took place prior the first annual Ekurhuleni Pride March in 2009 which I frequently attended as the LGEP created a space for me. There has been the emergence of township marches apart from the Johannesburg Annual Pride March which is a space for embracing and celebrating predominantly gay and lesbian sexuality. After each meeting I approached individuals who were widely identified as butch, and most of them confirmed this. Most of the participants verbally agreed to be participants, but when the time came for interviews, they were often busy, some job-hunting, in-between jobs (something I later realized as I learned that most lesbians in this township are unemployed or on casualized labour). It took another two months before I could find a willing informant who sympathized with this project given that she worked with LGEP as their advocacy portfolio intern for a year. My informant was very helpful in recruiting five more participants for the project. For the first three weeks of the fieldwork only three participants were available for interviews, while the rest of the interviews followed much later. In total, I

have found six self-acclaimed butch lesbians who were not only willing to partake in this project, but who were also available most of the time. Unfortunately, Soweto as a site was not pursued further given that only one of the six the respondents partook in this research.

3.2. Interpreting interviews

> *Interviews are complex social interactions to which researchers bring themselves and their ideas and when we interpret interviews we bring ideas and concepts to the interviews.* (Holland et. al 1999, p. 459)

Initially I had to familiarize myself with the raw data by reading the transcripts and field notes repeatedly. I conducted all the interviews.

Through repeatedly reading the data, the information contained was scrutinized in search of the support or absence of the initial assumptions that as a researcher I carried to the field, while also acknowledging new concepts that came out in the process.

The analytical procedure typically involves two levels of analysis. The first levels consisted of a review, identification, and coding of recurrent themes within data for each participant. Secondly, using similar steps, common themes and areas of differences were identified across participants. Finally, it entails bringing identified themes back together into meaningful relation with each other; developing, as it were, a narrative or structural synthesis of the core elements of the experience. (Fossey et al. 2002)

> *Thematic analysis typically involves a constant comparative method meaning a progressive process of classifying, comparing, grouping and refining groupings of text segments to create and then clarify the definition of categories, or themes, within the data.* (Fossey et al. 2002, p. 28)

In this sense, thematic analytic procedures focus on developing categories, derived inductively from the data itself, rather than from a priori theory, to enable systematic description.

Given the fact that the study focused on few butch women from KwaThema and from Soweto, we cannot claim to generalize these results and their interpretation to the whole of butch lesbians from KwaThema and Soweto, even less so to Black butch lesbians from the townships.[48]

3.3. Identifying the context

In its inception the research project sought to work with respondents from townships around Johannesburg. Several townships i.e Alexander and Vosloorus could not be included in this project, largely because the project relied on the 'community partner organization' approach .As a consequence of working with two organizations, only two townships

[48] Participants were given an option to use pseudo names or be referred as respondents/participant X. Seven of the participants were comfortable with the use of their names in this report. Out of this seven only one insisted on using her name but never her surname.

surrounding Johannesburg became the context for the research, namely KwaThema and Soweto.[49]

In 1951 African families from Payneville were displaced and moved to KwaThema, a walking distance from Springs, due to the native housing project proposed by Chatsworth. [50]This township is said to have had active civic organizations in the 1980s which resulted in the 1985 violent unrest and many homes.

Since 2007 there have been several reported cases of violent assault, rape, threat to harm and in severe cases, murder of lesbian women, more often in townships. Some of the widely documented cases occurred in Soweto. In 2007 the 070707 Campaign was launched in attempt to seek justice for the murders of Sizakele and Salome, both from Soweto. While in 2008 a lesbian soccer star, Eudy Simelane was also brutally murdered and soon, another lesbian Sigelane Nkosi, was also murdered in 2009 in KwaThema. It is therefore interesting to work in both townships in uncovering the meaning(s) of the butch identity, in what may seem as a hostile environment for an overt butch.

3.4. Limitations

Initially the research sought to compare two townships that have been reportedly hostile towards butch lesbians, but because of the lack of forthcoming of butch lesbians in Soweto, the comparative analyss was not achieved. A comparative analysis between two townships would have shown a richer blend of how the context shapes the expression of sexual and gender identity as compared to a singular focus on one specific township.

As mentioned earlier five out of six respondents were unemployed at the beginning of the fieldwork and at times the interview appointments clashed with job-hunting and contract work. Thus, the meetings were constantly rescheduled. These time constraints limited the ability of the researcher to probe further on certain issues that were raised in previous meetings.

One of the challenges of this project is the 'burden of being a researcher'. What I mean is participants at times will share their narratives for different reasons, but amongst these is the inherent hope for change in their disempowered or underprivileged position. Thus, the researcher becomes the perceived vehicle for change in return for the collected experiences; upon meeting after the research project and in absence of these expected changes, participants carry a 'lingering look' towards the researcher, almost like a reminder of the hope for the desired change.

Participants were offered lunch money for every meeting, and this later became problematic. The LGBT community is very small in Johannesburg - wherever I would meet with one of the participants, she would ask for money for a taxi fare, something to drink or a cigarette. I would argue that our established relations through the research project opened some expectations for some of the participants.

[49] As earlier mentioned Soweto was part of the initial research but due to the circumstances that have been mentioned, it will not be the central area of research. Soweto is the most famous and widely documented township in South Africa. Soweto, which was originally known as the Southern Western townships, dates as far back as 1902; this is the biggest township in South Africa with over a million people. The inception of townships was based on the notion of racial segregation, and was geographical spaces, which were perceived to be necessary for location of natives (Bonner & Segal 1998).

[50] See www.saweb.co.za, accessed 14 January 2010).

4. Literature review

> *...we know that homosexuality is a fact and that it exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: that is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants.* (Newton 2003, p. 158)

From an Euro-American perspective, Vicinus (1989) insists that the lesbian historiography has primarily focused on mapping the past of lesbian women and their communities, capturing the dominant forms of lesbian behaviour, the lesbian friendships and the butch/femme roles, and unpacking the climate that enabled the emergence of the modern lesbian identity. Most of these three areas within the context of research rapidly unfolded during the 1960s when political discourses were opening up on gender and sexuality issues. However, narratives of the mannish women who lived their lives as men and fulfilled most of the man's role in relationships have long existed as early as the 1800s.

The butch identity seems to have made its consequent fame when the women's movement critiqued it for mimicking heterosexual relations. In Paris and Berlin in the 1920s and 1930s, the feminist movement did not concern itself with female sexuality as such the butch/femme culture could thrive. On the other hand, in Holland the butch/femmes were stigmatized by the feminist movement (Wieringa 1989). In the 1950s again, the Daughters of Bilitis, a feminist group in North America that wrote about women's struggles including issues concerning their sexuality on *The Ladder,* were also criticized for opposing the butch/femme roles (Vicinus 1989).

What these three areas of research Vicinus highlighted were telling of the need to (re)write women's sexual behaviours in history if there were any. Some of what narratives have told mutually excludes either experiences of women of colour, working class women or the butch identity. South Africa (SA) is not an exception to this.

Homosexuality was illegal in Apartheid South Africa, particularly between men under the Roman Dutch Common law. Sexual acts between two women were not criminalized until 1988 when 'immoral or indecent' acts were extended to women and girls under the age of 19 years, as it were the case for man and boys under the age of 19 years (Cameron 1995, p. 91). The laws can be argued to have contributed to the lack of documenting lesbian lives, especially the Black lesbian identity.

There are several social movements that claimed spaces in the late 1970s during the height of political revolt. Amongst these were LGBT organizations such as Gay and Lesbians Of Witwatersrand (GLOW) and Gay and Lesbian Association of South Africa (GASA). Some of these organizations attempted to include female members for a lesbian profile but were too male dominated (Gevisser 1995). Even the name structure of these organizations, mainly started with the word 'gay' instead of lesbian which was telling of the power differentials within these organizations.

In the 1960s around Johannesburg there were butch women who organized around professions and sports clubs (Gevisser 1995). While in Durban, in the early 1980s, the Sunday Women's group oriented itself around feminist and lesbian writings published a monthly newsletter. Both these groups were not actively involved with the anti-apartheid movement and its membership was not inclusive of Black and Indian women.

Post -apartheid South Africa offered freedom and equality amongst its values enshrined in the Constitution. The Constitution protects against discrimination even on the grounds of sexual orientation. Similarly, the Civil Union Act lawfully recognizes same-sex marriage. For the LGBTI society the new democratic South Africa seemingly means a continuous struggle for acceptance and respect in the socio-political sphere. Most research related to lesbian lives has often focused on the issues that affect lesbians, but very limited research focuses on their perceptions about their lives, such as the work of Cheryl-Ann Pogieter (1997) who documented the lives of Black lesbians. Yet, there are still few articles capturing lesbian identities, even less, extensively focusing on the Black lesbian subcultures. This research project seeks to capture the Black butch lesbian identity.

Since Potgieter noted in 1997 that "In South Africa there is not even a single academic study which specifically addresses issues related to Black lesbians" (1997, p. ii), a handful has been written on Black if not butch lesbians. Over the years in South Africa, more research about sexual identity focused on homosexuality in racial categories, like the comparison Graziano (2004) drew on Black and White lesbians, while others focused on lesbian motherhood (see Steyn 1998). Nonetheless, the butch identity has been captured in passing in some articles if not explained through the butch-femme relations system. The Black lesbian identity has been documented, as if it were a homogenous group and without much reference to its subcultures.

One of the most popular articles that explicitly focuses on the butch identity is that of Gevisser (1995) in *Defiant Desire* , where he mentions lesbian subcultures in the 1950s and 1960s and categorizes these lesbians as 'sporting women'. At that time sport in the forms of cricket, hockey, and soccer created a space for lesbian women. Others forged friendships organized by profession. Furthermore, the butch identity "was far more entrenched than it is now and gender rituals were de rigueur...the butch wore slacks, kept their hair short, and were expected to get drunk; the femmes wore dresses, bobbed their hair and were in great demand" (Gevisser 1995, p. 21). What about the Black butch lesbian's narrative?

Recently, the dominant circulating knowledge focuses on 'corrective' rape that affects Black lesbians the most: "many report their attacks tell of men accusing them of being less of a woman because of what some may perceive to be women who masquerade as men" (Reddy, Potgieter & Mkhize 2006, p. 3). These incidences of violence seem to primarily affect the so called 'visible' and manly lesbians. Visibility may also be applicable to gay men who may also be assaulted, but not in the same scope as these women. These violent attacks may be telling of the intersection of sexuality, race, class, and space.

Nonetheless, there has been research that captures the Black butch identity. Wieringa and Kheswa (2005) explored the butch identity, but located their analysis largely within the butch-femme framework without engaging further in the broader socio-political issues that may influence such gender expressions. There is a need for research that focuses on how Black butch lesbians perceive their homosexual identity in an all encompassing manner, from an individual space of expression to socio-structural influences such as LGBTI organizations, the broader socio-political climate, and to an extent, the cultural or religious forces. This research seeks to capture the perceptions of the butch identity amongst Black lesbians who take up this sexual identity.

Kheswa and Wieringa's (2005) respondents relate to the butch-femme culture in different ways. In their study, the lesbian women mention the tomboy childhood, special friendships from a younger age, and a manly attitude, amongst others. One of their respondents, Thembi, maintains that "when one finds out she's lesbian somehow in her mind she thinks she has to

behave like a boy" (2005, p. 213).Within butch relationships, the dress codes are generally strictly upheld and there are usually some expectations about financial responsibility. In relation to sex positions, the butch is portrayed as the one on top, the doer or penetrator; however, there is an admission that this is not always the case.

The sexual positions, dress codes and masculine behavior are similar to that documented as berdache in Europe (Vicinus 1989). Similarly, Morgan and Wieringa (2005) identified lesbian men in some parts of Africa including Nigeria and Namibia. One of their participants Hans' (Namibia) construction of herself as a male lesbian who takes care of her girlfriend stated that "because as her superior, as her boss, I have to take care of her so she must look good" (2005:161). This seemingly reinforces societal perceptions of the lesbian butch-femme role playing. But does it? In Namibia and some parts of East Africa, a lesbian man is used to describe what may appear or sound like a butch. Similarly, in Jarkata, Indonesia, a lesbian that possesses similar behaviour and other attributes to butch lesbians call themselves lesbian *laki-laki* (meaning lesbian man) (Wieringa 1989). This overlap of behaviours that are named differently in different contexts at different points in time, points to a need for unpacking how the context shapes certain identities and understanding what these terms amongst those who own up to them or defy them.

In a more recent article, Smit (2009) focuses her master's degree dissertation on Black and White lesbian women around Johannesburg. She articulates that:

> *Mandie's story is different to the other respondents, she firmly characterizes herself as a butch lesbian and it seems that she takes a sense of pride in that. Also, she is attracted to women who are 'butch. Her girlfriend also sports a short hairdo and is muscular like a man. She never wanted to associate with other girls growing up, but now she has a big group of woman friends who mainly consists of other lesbians. Her lesbian friends have similar interests to her own and they are all attracted to other women.* (2009, p. 15)

Smit goes as far as mentioning that one of her Black participants shies away from labeling herself as butch while another participant uses the term without interrogating what factors would contribute to owning up and avoiding this lesbian identity.

One of the limitations of this paper is that Smit uses the word butch without much effort in unpacking what it may mean for the participants, using the masculine look or pointing toward similarities to men as indicative of the butch identity. This is the same limitation Swarr and Nagar (2004) face in capturing the township lesbian identity who emphasized links between masculine traits, playing soccer, smoking dagga with a newspaper and lesbian identity, without necessarily capturing the perceptions of the butch lesbians, and certain behaviors that they may consciously engage in as an affirmation of their butch identity.

How the butch lesbian identity is constructed and understood by Black women from the townships seemingly manifests itself in layers within the self, family, and society like most identities. Most of these above cited articles employ the terms 'lesbian' and 'butch' without much interrogation, or considers them as foreign terms both with regards to language and politics that come with the terms. Considering that Smut (2009), like others, fell into the assumption that being 'lesbian' is a given without investigating how this foreign term becomes owned up.

The need for understanding what the butch identity entails in townships also speaks to whether these lesbian women take up this identity as a means of sexual and/or political expression. The role of LGBT organizations, coupled with the rife violent attacks that may steer these women towards activism, may also be interesting to unfold through unpacking the butch identity within a township.

5. Discussion and findings

5.1 Understanding 'lesbian' and 'butch'

The tomboy childhood seems to be the key experience while growing up that most participants acknowledged, ranging from the type of toys one preferred to games such as role playing during *izindlu* (house). Similarly, Wieringa (1999) also discovered that butch lesbians in Jakarta, Indonesia had narratives from a young age about their gender transgressive mannerisms

> *I used to play i-poppyhuis and I used to be the father because I had all the toys. The other kids would come play at my house because I had the nicest toys. I would chase them out of my house when they refused to allow me to be a dad when playing. Ngangibaxosha. It's my house, my toys my rules. This happened around the age of 5/6/7 I grew up really fast.* (Tebogo)

While Anonymous experienced herself differently from others, the concrete understanding of the 'difference' came through knowing what 'lesbian' meant.

> *I got to know the name 'lesbian' through a teacher at primary school, who said I must look it up in the dictionary...I was happy to find out that a dictionary has a name that describes us.* (Anonymous)

DM also emphasized the centrality of the dress code and 'manly' mannerisms in understanding her butch identity.

> *Being butch for me is largely about the way you dress and how you carry yourself in a masculine way. I know I'm a woman I go to my periods yet I am the way I am… In a relationship I try to be the protective partner to my girlfriend and make means to take care of her.* (DM)

Finding or seeing others that were similar to them seems to also have contributed in understanding their sexuality. The process of understanding the term butch came after acknowledging the difference with others while embracing similarities with some.

> *I learnt the word butch from numerous workshops hosted by LGBTI organizations where I met other butch identifying women.* (DM)

The participants mentioned that amongst them, the term *isitabane* was acknowledged as synonymous to homosexual and is inclusive of both lesbians and gays. The term is used in most townships and some consider it a slang word and doubt that it is embedded in any specific native language, unlike Kheswa and Wieringa's (2005) study where they argue that their participants considered isitabane a derogatory term. In this research, it appears to hold a neutral stance and is commonly used to identify homosexuals in townships.

Furthermore, Anonymous pointed out that the one word she is uncomfortable with is rooted in Zulu as *ungqingili* which refers to homosexuals. Another commonly used Zulu word is *Nkonkoni*, said to refer to male buffalos and their homosexual tendencies, which is understood as *a "wild animal that does not understand itself*", according to Anonymous.

It appears that the term is a partial explanation within the process of understanding self as a sexual being, while for others, meeting people similar to them clarified a lot. What defines lesbians or what even constitutes butch has over the years been inconclusive (Muthien 2001). As such, the research allows participants to set the framework of what a butch lesbian is. Smuts (2009) in her study, being lesbian seems like a given term, since she does not explore the issue of language, or to be more specific, the process of how foreign terms such as 'butch', 'lesbian' are owned up by Black in defining and/or expressing their sexuality.

Again, Blackwood (1985) acknowledges that LGBTI filters through global networks of organizations and information sharing to societies in different parts of the world. Nonetheless, in as much as these terms exist globally, they have specific meaning in localities. For instance, in Indonesia a Lesbian-laki laki may be defined differently from a South African butch, while each group is likely to identify the other with its own term, which is underpinned by a number of similarities.

One participant, Evans, noted that some self-acclaimed butch lesbians she knows sleep with men and maintains that they are lesbians but the sexual matter is of survival hood. Even for some lesbians from KwaThema, defining a lesbian has its own limitations. On the other hand, Tebogo from Soweto prides herself in being a 34 year old *virgin* who has never slept with a man.

The terms divide the sexual minority group into 'us' and 'them' categories with a tone of prejudice. For instance, Evans refers to heterosexuals as 'straights':

> *Straight people don't understand gay people. Siyabadina kahle, kahle* [we actually annoy them]. *One day the straight friend will show you who they are and remind you who you are.* (Evans)

This is not limited to heterosexuals:

> *After a while she would miss a guy and this became a pattern that we often fought about... The issue is I ended up with so many enemies because I used to fight the guys she used to sleep or flirt with. She created more enemies for me.* (Evans)

> *The thing is straight women are scientists they like to experiment and why not, this is life. I know that a lot of lesbians have this mentality that straight women often use them to explore. Its life man, do it and get out.* (Tebogo)

Bisexual women are also perceived as the 'others' and the catalysts, if not the entry point, of violence imposed on butch lesbians by their male peers.

5.2. Relations with the bodies

Puberty and adolescence is that developmental stage in which we go through psychological and physiological changes and begin to understand ourselves as sexual beings. For Anonymous, puberty raised internal conflicts as she felt she was a boy and breasts started to grow.

Menstruation was another nightmare.

> *Menstruation was a huge blow in such a way that I could not have sex and it meant telling my girlfriend made me feel like I was a woman just like her.* (Pretty)

Karati and Tebogo reported being mistaken to be men.

> *I'm structured like a boy as it is now. Even where I grew, when the older women greet me bathi kunjani baba* [how are you father]*? They saw me growing up but akufiki ukuthi ngiyintombozane* [it doesn't strike them that I am a women]. (Tebogo)

This above mentioned argument by Tebogo is similar to Kheswa and Wieringa's (2005) findings that some of their participants also admitted that they are often mistakenly identified as men. Karati believes that, at times, this serves as a protective function.

The dress code is also another significant indicator of the butch identity. As one woman in Gevisser (2005) points out, butch wore men's clothes. As part of the dress code Beffon (1995) and Cock (2005), include men's underwear. Most of my participants also prefer male underwear and they call them boxer shorts or 'i-jockey', which are not necessarily the brand, but also how it should fit the body.

> *When my grandmother passed away, one of my aunts confronted me, telling me that I should show respect and wear a dress since people from church were coming. My response was will my grandmother wake up if I do? After that they never bothered me with how I dress.* (Evans)

> *I would never wear a skirt, it's been decades since I've worn one. I think if I were to wear one I would invite trouble, where the guys would say we've always known that she's a proper woman.* (Anonymous)

Part of the dress code seldom mentioned is the bra, which may be indicative of the relationship of butch and their female bodies. Three of the participants do not wear bras, firstly for what they deem as an obvious reason given their small breasts. Secondly because they think their small breasts compliment their masculine body which makes it easier for them not to wear a bra.

5.3. Relations with the lover

The butch women in Kheswa and Wieringa (2005) are portrayed as the ones on top and as penetrators. Nevertheless, these authors confess that this is not always the case.

Wieringa (1988) also points out that the butch/femme as an urban bar culture made visible a certain pattern of lesbian eroticism in the 1960s in North America and Europe where change of roles became flexible in a more playful manner in relationships.

Only two of the respondents insist on being the 'active givers' during sex:

> *I'm not comfortable being touched. I prefer doing than being done in bed. When I started having sex I've always led the way and it has been like that for years. I'm not prepared for any changes, ngi-grant.* (Evans)

Others are open to change in role-playing and insist on being 'tickled, too'.

> *There's something I don't understand about butch women, they don't want to be touched. How do they get an orgasm? Listen if someone was to walk in here, they would think you're interviewing a man. But once I get into my bedroom and close my door, I want to be a bitch. It's about getting the satisfaction and I become a different person in the bedroom... That's how flexible I am but I think that depends on how comfortable you are with yourself and sexuality.* (Tebogo)

> *Overall I don't mind being done, whatever she's feeling I ought to feel it too, after all we're both women.* (DM)

Butch women are most likely to date femme women. Hence, often enough the butch identity is explained through the butch/femme subculture.

Some of the participants expressed their masculinity in what may seem unconventional as they adopted a more fluid expression of their sexuality through the sharing of chores and mix matching gender roles.

> *I know the chores that I should keep to and my brother was raised to carry out the very chores. Same applies in a relationship, I do everything for myself. I don't expect much from my girlfriend. I can also serve my partner even though I'm butch.* (Dani)

5.4. HIV/AIDS

Most of the participants know their HIV/AIDS status. Some of the participants voiced difficulty or reluctance toward testing with their partners. The butch dilemma of initiating safe-sex practices and/or suggesting HIV testing comes with the risk of indirectly being suspected of being untrustworthy or being suspicious of their partner.

> *I know my HIV status, and I often check every six months. Sometimes it's difficult negotiating the visits with your partner, some of them don't understand why we should test together without being suspicious of being cheated on.* (DM)

> *In HIV/AIDS workshops we were given some dental dams and glove, I tried then, but I don't use them as often.* (Dani)

5.5. Violence

For Tebogo, violence is something she hears about from other lesbians, if not through the news. As such, she believes that lesbians should explain to people the type of life they live so that others can understand:

> *Men are very understanding people, some of them are open-minded. I've been in places where the guys are like 'I would never allow a chick to take my chick, I would rape them both.' And I'm sitted there I would ask. 'Ah nja*

> *serious?' then I usually tell them I'm lesbian but they often don't believe me... Once you sit them down, men are like little dogs that you train. You tell them that listen life is like this. The guys that I hang around with respect me, because I'm open about my sexuality.* (Tebogo)

Tebogo's perceptions of violence can be argued to be largely shaped by her context as she works and visits specific areas with limited friends as compared to some butch lesbian women who are unemployed and drink in their nearest pub without controlling much of what is happening around them. Nonetheless, there is a danger in simplistic arguments such as these that too quickly intertwine poverty and violence, but then again, most of these attacks are reported from townships and occur in insecure situations for Black lesbians.

On the other hand, Evans largely blames the heterosexual or bisexual girlfriends for the violence she inflicts on them and the violence that homophobic men unleash on Black lesbians.

> *After a while she would miss a guy and this became a pattern that we often fought about. I felt I could even kill someone over this. This used to make me very angry and I was violent then. I would beat her up like a truck has just rolled over her. This really disgusted me, it definitely disgusted me. I eventually decided to leave her. The issue is I ended up with so many enemies because I used to fight the guys she used to sleep or flirt with. She created more enemies for me.* (Evans)

Nonetheless, some butch lesbians do not condone intimate-partner violence.

> *I don't like living on regrets, I don't agree with my friends who cheat and beat up their girlfriends. I don't understand how you can do that to someone you love.* (Dani)

There also seems to be a lot of blaming on some butch lesbians with regards to the homophobic attacks that are escalating in townships.

> *The butch lesbians from ekasi* [township] *go over bored, men get irritable when they get to a place greeting guys as if they are one of them. I don't do that. Why do you have to have a bounce.* (Tebogo)

5.6. Coming Out

One of the participants, while chatting with me during a walk to the spaza (neighbourhood shop) to buy some cool drinks, jokingly said "*coming out is not a Black thing*". Her argument was based on the notion that some Black families are not so open about sex (regardless of sexual orientation). As such, sex related questions are only posed in a non-directional manner through metaphors around marriage so as to cipher if one is dating.

> *At home, they never had a problem. One of the things that does not make it a problem is that no-one has ever asked me about my sexuality. We never talked about it, so there is no problem kuyazehlela nje akunankinga. Even my mother or brothers never touch that topic.* (Evans)

Similarly, D'Emilio (2007) in a Latin American study of gay men, indicated that the participants introduced their partners to families as *Amigos.* As such, coming out was not an important phenomena given that their families accepted their 'friends' without interrogating or being too involved in their relations. One of the participants felt that the notion of Amigo was more empowering as it did not create a space for critique without making themselves vulnerable.

> *I used to have a backroom at my mother's place, and that's where I entertained my girlfriends. I believe that at home they should know who I'm with, in case they find her at my place or they need to know about my whereabouts*. (Anonymous)

In most townships, the house usually has outside rooms that in suburban areas would be called a cottage. These rooms are likely to be built for male children, while females are expected to have rooms inside the house. All but one participant has a room outside the house or stays alone or with a girlfriend. These are the set-ups that some participants felt were evident of their sexuality and the fact that they were the hosts also indicated their ability to 'take care' of their partners.

For some participants 'coming-out' was not an option but it was brought about because of some external event.

> *My family found out that I'm lesbian through a newspaper picture which was taken during one of the marches against violence towards the LGBTI people. My parents asked about the article and I apologized to them prior telling them that I am attracted to women, given that they too had their own dreams for me. They asked how? My response was, perhaps we could all kneel down and ask the Lord. I have two sisters, and I'm the middle child. From an early age my father used to shave my head and I still do.* (DM)

5.7. Being a Lesbian in a township

> *The journey was very difficult. Firstly being gay is stressful in itself, especially when in your environment there aren't many people who are like you. You are always reserved, like someone without an identity or direction. You wake-up, live, sleep until may be you find someone to talk to or someone who can introduce you others like yourself. Knowing others like you makes life less stressful, like you are not alone. You also get to share your life experiences. On your own it's very difficult.* (Evans)

Evans is one of the older lesbians and for her, it was initially difficult to find other lesbians as she grew up during the transition from apartheid to democracy and homosexuality was still taboo. One of the participants complained of about the time a curfew was on, commenting that she received threats about her sexuality from some guys from the neighborhood. As such, she makes sure that she is in her yard before sunset to avoid them.

> *Given that I'm the youngest lesbian amongst the few lesbians that I know from KwaThema, what I have learnt from them is that I should love myself first so that others can respect. For instance, if you go all macho on people going on 'yeah man', guys will hold you roughly and expect you to be the man you carry yourself as. At the end you're women even though butch.* (DM)

This statement shows how lesbians negotiate their way around the township by not 'being too macho' so as to avoid any disputes or attacks.

> *In my area, people are used to me. I have spent half my life where I stay; I even went to school in this neighbourhood. I'm not stressed about my neighbours at all… I don't often associate with my neighbours or people in my neighbourhood, especially straight people. I don't have straight male friends that I hang out with or smoke with. Straight men, I believe have this mentality that they ought to prove something to gay people, regardless of how close you are in your friendship.* (Anonymous)

In its contradiction, this statement is also telling of the uneasiness and fear of being attacked. As such, keeping a distance and maintaining only few friends is one of the survival strategies.

5.8. Relationship trends

> *I had several affairs but I don't do most of the stuffs that I used to do. I've never had a serious boyfriend that was even known to my family like usibali My family might have some suspicions about guys but they could never pin it to a boyfriend. I had many girlfriends, your mixed masala. I also had a serious girlfriend and we dated for about ten years.* (Evans)

Most of the participants had similar experiences as Evans as they had more girlfriends when they started dating and soon moved towards more stable and longer lasting relationships. This can be perceived as an indicator of the process of self-acceptance as a gradual process, lived through experience and learning more about oneself as a lover through others.

5.9. Political activism

Some participants referred to themselves as activists. At the center of their activism is their participation through marches, attending court cases, pride marches, community meetings, and any other gathering that affects or has to do with lesbian issues. Two of the participants are also known in their circles for leading marches, organizing transport for these marches, and singing on the front-lines.

When asked about being an activist or political activism, some of their responses were:

> *Marching with other lesbians is comforting since you speak the same language with similar concerns. I like being involved in such initiatives because you speak out and share experiences, straight people can be irritating. Straight cheeks are not issue but the guys are the problem. For instance, guys who are bachelors are likely to have a negative attitude with lesbians, especially if you date a beautiful woman as a lesbian*. (Evans)

> *Hate crime has inspired me to be active and attend the workshops and marches. Just yesterday some guy from my neighbourhood has threatened that he is going to get me soon. Even though families may understand but neighbours or society may not. It's unlikely that everyone will be accepting of lesbians. Being active for me, means*

paving path for those who will come after us because at the moment society is very hostile towards us. (DM)

In one of the meetings I had with most of the participants, we did some role-playing as part of the discussions. There were two teams, the donors and organization representatives, and the roles rotated such that each participant was able to play both donor and organizational representative. The dominant theme that came out was the need to feel involved with organizations. One group advocated for a satellite office of one of the organizations based in Johannesburg to be in KwaThema, with just one or two computers that would also allow them to practice computer skills and check the internet for information and job-hunting given that most of them are unemployed. There were also concerns about the safety of such equipment, but there was consensus that it would be a great opportunity to mobilize through such 'offices' or spaces .It would throw in different perspectives other than the prevailing notion that most Black butch lesbians are unemployed and spend most of their time with whatever little money they have on alcohol.

Perceptions around the need for such a space for lesbians were also fueled by the concern of younger lesbians and ways to mentor them.

5.10. Employment concerns

I did my matric in 2005. I worked for a while but I'm currently unemployed. I quit my job this year. I used to be a cutter in a linen factory. My boss once said to me that 'I hope you are not that thing'. There was one gay guy at work and she used to shout at him and she said she hoped that I was not lesbian because at her place she does not tolerate such. So I left the job. (DM)

I did some law bridging course and I realized it's not me. I did some IT diploma, worked there and there. My filed is sales and marketing but I'm currently an admin person here at soulcity. (Tebogo)

I'm currently unemployed. I worked on contracts. For the whole year I'm not doing anything, luckily I don't have to maintain my siblings but I have tenants in my yard who pay rent. This can be very stressful in a relationship, that you're even tempted to chase the partner out especially when she asks money from me when she knows that I'm not working. I live on piece jobs. (Evans)

According to the Mail and Guardian online 4 May report (2010) the unemployment rate increased since the last quarter of 2009 to the first quarter of 2010 by 25.2 percent with youth and women mostly affected. Construction jobs were amongst those that were counted as the biggest job losses. This rollercoaster of job opportunities and drought in the construction sector was largely driven by the World Cup event and the government's free housing project. Two participants last year managed to work, even though it was less than three months, as contract workers and built some houses.

The above quotes also indicate that sexuality should not be viewed in isolation as it is shaped by other socio-economic conditions, in this instance, the need for jobs.

6. Conclusion

Space, race, and class are important in understanding sexual identities. Masculinity is not only limited to mannerisms or playing soccer, but is relative as some participants share household chores and do not mind being 'tickled too'. This research has shown that the butch/femme dichotomy limits the understanding of the Black butch identity, as the masculine traits of the butch identity were unpacked as unstable and complex relations within self, how others perceive them, and how the butch thinks others perceive them; that is, another world outside themselves also shapes their identity. One of dominant themes is the notion of being perceived as the dominant lesbian which also serves a protective function in the township's hostile environment, but simultaneously, this seemingly asserts the butch identity. Coming-out in this research was not a central phenomenon. Language in relation to terms used amongst sexual identities contradicts other researcher's findings who found some of the terms as derogatory.

One of the main elements of the research was that the notion of masculinity alone is not a useful concept to capture the butch identity and this research has highlighted this issue. Comparative research on Black lesbian identities needs to be further explored and investigated in as much as how the butch identity may play itself as gender transgressive identity, but also within the heterosexual framework.

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Chapter 12

Stories to tell:
A queer women's oral history in Sri Lanka

Prepared by:
Kaushalya Perera
Women's Support Group, Sri Lanka

Research Team:
Kaushalya Perera
Jay Kuru-Uthumpala
Lino Kao

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1. Introduction

Oral history projects are not new phenomena in minority communities across the world. Ethnographic interest in the lived realities of a community and the importance of the spoken word as historical text has resulted in generating focus on the narrative. Ethnic groups as well as (eg. African American) groups of people who have lived through historic events (eg. WWII veterans) were some of the first groups to produce oral histories. Queer groups were quick to grasp the value of recording the spoken word of our communities in an environment where written documentation of queer lives were rare.

While lesbian herstory projects and archives are not new phenomena in the first world, they are still exceedingly rare in the rest of the world. When a few of at the Women's Support Group (WSG) first discussed documenting lives of queer women no other oral history project was known to us from Asia. This was surprising since there were many groups across Asia that were made up of and supported queer women. In South Asia itself, queer women's groups had come into existence at least a decade ago, but no record of the way we lived our lives was to be found[51]. It is against this backdrop that the WSG started recording the lives of queer women[52] in Sri Lanka.

1.1. Background

Sri Lanka is a multicultural South Asian country. As is the case with most other countries of this region, the population is multicultural. The Sinhalese are the largest ethnic group with Tamil, Moor, Malay and Burger communities making up the rest[53]. Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are the prominent religions[54]. Sinhala and Tamil are official languages of the state, with English spoken widely in urban areas. The existence of many ethnic and religious groups in such a small geographical space has resulted in rich cultural mix in terms of customs, food and folk practices. European colonization – the Dutch, the Portuguese and the British – within the last 500 years has also influenced both the culture and laws. In terms of legislation, it is a mix of customary laws, Roman-Dutch law and English common law. British colonial impact is apparent mostly in the legal and educational spheres.

1.2. Legal context

Two existing laws of British origin have been the primary focus of lobbying for policy changes by queer groups. The principal problem is the criminalization of same-sex sexual activity under Section 365(a) of the Penal Code in the country. The wording of the Section is similar to that of other Commonwealth countries that have this law, and state that it is sexual relations between two persons "against the order of nature" is prohibited.

[51] By now, however, at least one set of narratives has been published in India; see Ghosh & Bandyopadhyay 2010.

[52] The term 'queer women' as used in this document is inclusive of any woman who likes women. The context of this usage for this project is further explained in the Methodology section.

[53] Sinhala 81.97%, Tamil 9.37%, Muslim 7.91% (includes Moor & Malay), Burgher 0.21%; see Department of Census & Statistics 2010

[54] Buddhist 76.71%, Hindu 7.76%, Christian 7%, Islam 8.48% (ibid)

The change of 'man' (as stated in the original version of the Penal Code) to 'person' in the Sri Lankan Penal Code was an accidental consequence of the attempt to decriminalize this Section in 1999. As clarified by Savithri Goonesekeraat a public event in 2008, when the Parliament decided in 1995 to not decriminalize S 356 (a), it had to make sure that this particular legal section was in accordance with other Constitutional Provisions, such as gender equality; hence, the change of terminology from 'man' to the more neutral 'person'.

In addition to Section 365(a), the Vagrancy Ordinance has also been used to harass queer persons in public spots. There has been so far only anecdotal evidence of the use of this law, as well as that of Section 365, since there has been no research or study of the effects of this law. Queer groups, however, have frequently stated that some of their members have been harassed – blackmailed, threatened with exposition or arrest, etc - by the Police and others citing these legal provisions.

1.3. Status of (queer) women and the womens' rights movement

Queer rights organizations have come up in Sri Lanka in an atmosphere where these legal provisions have existed alongside the existence of a long drawn out civil war. While the civil war is over at present, it has left in its wake many restrictions on civil life. The country still operates under Emergency Rule which gives the right to the Police to keep in custody any person without observing the routine regulations. There are stringent restrictions on movement and gatherings. National political ideology in the last three years has become increasingly conservative, limiting women's autonomy in social settings. There is much stress at present on the importance of the family and the role of the wife and mother within the family. Women's behaviour is monitored increasingly, with arbitrary regulations imposed on dress and conduct. Some examples of such regulations are the regulations that mothers visiting their children in school must be dressed in a sari and the recently reintroduced old regulation prohibiting women from buying alcohol[55].

This kind of backsliding in attitudes towards women is frustrating in a country with a strong tradition of women's rights. These changes must be taken as happening in a context where women have enjoyed a more liberal space in the past years, with high levels of literacy and representation in higher education, equal property rights, equal pay, and so forth. Resources and educational opportunities are at a comparatively higher standard in comparison to other South Asian countries, but cultural beliefs and attitudes towards women obviously remain extremely conservative.

When the first gay group – Companions on a Journey (COJ) - started organizing itself in 1995, it is difficult to say that it had the backing of the women's rights movement. Nevertheless, it had the support of leading figures and organizations within the women's movement. The COJ handled their landmark events in the first few years of their history with the support of these women's rights activists and civil rights organizations: a press complaint against a homophobic letter to the editor in a national weekly newspaper and the above mentioned attempt to decriminalize S 365(a).

This link with the women's movement made it easier for the WSG to organize and build networks with other women's groups. The handful of queer women associating informally

[55] The regulation against women buying alcohol is generally ignored in urban and tourist areas but observed more in areas outside the capital.

with the COJ, started off as a support group for lesbian and bisexual women in 1999, spurred on by a newspaper article which reported an incident of suicide committed by a lesbian couple. At the time, there were no organizations that worked exclusively with LBT women. This situation remains unchanged and the WSG is still the only organization that works to support and lobby for the rights of queer women. Even though its initial focus was on support (peer, financial, mental health and legal assistance), at present, the WSG is also involved in lobbying for policy and legal changes in Sri Lanka.

From the beginning, the WSG has worked on strengthening its initial informal but strong connections with the women's rights groups. By 2002, it had set up house independently making it possible to work more in tandem with women's groups and issues. In addition to being a visible symbol of queerness among the women's groups, much of the last decade's efforts have been on pushing boundaries within these groups by raising issues on sexuality and queer issues. The path of the WSG within the women's movement has not been that different to other queer women's groups outside Sri Lanka. It has started off at the margins of the women's movement, but persistent attendance at events and constant dialogue has resulted in the group becoming a visible and constant presence within the movement. The focus on sexual rights in the international rights arena has been important in contributing to this end locally as well, making it difficult for the women's movement to ignore sexual rights.

Whether there exists a sexual rights movement or even an LGBT rights movement in Sri Lanka is debatable. From 1995, the founding of the COJ, to the present time, there are three organizations working on LGBT rights (COJ, WSG and Equal Ground) and at least two other informal groups[56]. However, much of the gay men's issues have (in common to other countries) been tied up with the HIV/AIDS campaigns of which queer women have not been a major part. There is as yet no independent social organizing on sexual rights or LGBT rights happening outside the queer groups and there is certainly no social mobilizing happening at ground level that can be read as the rise of a social movement. However, the existence of LGBT organizations, sporadic public discussions (even if negative) on issues of sexuality and the inclusion of sexual rights in the agenda of various institutions and organizations signal the nascent stage of a movement.

1.4. Objectives of research project

The primary objective of this project was to collect a set of oral histories of queer women which would be transcribed, translated and set up as an online database to be accessible for anyone who needed information on queer women's lives, from other queer women to students or researchers. It was also intended to serve as a database for use by researchers on issues related to queer women. This objective has not changed in its intention, though it became apparent that the objectives in their entirety were too ambitious for a one year research project. As such, the objectives had to be narrowed down to include the following: interviews of 20 queer women, transcription, translation of Sinhala interviews to English, and the setting up of a local database at the WSG library.

At present, there is no record of the lives of queer women in Sri Lanka. This is not only a gap in research but also a gap in the collective memory of women in same-sex relationships in Sri Lanka. This project aimed to record the experiences of such women and to use the interviews of this project to build an oral history archive to be housed at the WSG. Building an archive will provide a database for researchers of related issues in the community as well.

[56] Diversity and Solidarity Trust (DAST) and Sakhi Collective are two small (as yet non-funded) groups that have not yet organized as registered organizations. They were formed during the last two years.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research methodology

Stories to tell was not envisioned as a research project and this meant that the process was different to a traditional research project. The initial idea for this project arose out of discussions on the invisibility of lesbians in the country. In our work at the WSG, we had many women from non-urban areas telling us how there were no queer women in their communities. Parallel to this, queer women have many times discussed the isolation of being women who desire women in a highly heteronormative society, at times even believing that they were the only women who were 'different'. This invisibility is not new and it is not limited to South Asia as we can see from the comment on paucity of lesbian historiography by Rebecca Jennings who wrote on the reasons behind the Hall Carpenter Oral History Archive in Britain (430). Across the United States, collections of oral histories have come up to record the lives of queer women, the most well-established is the New York Lesbian Herstory Archives. Another such collection is the Old Lesbian Oral Histories Project which was started in Texas to record experiences of lesbians who were born in the early 1900s.

Such collections are an important method of collecting narratives of a group of people whose experiences are not very accessible. They are also important because they serve – if publicly available in digital or published form – as lesbian historiography. Isolated groups of queer women do not have to start discussing experiences anew, a common phenomenon among small groups. Lesbian histories from your community will already be available. It also makes it possible for us to see the complexities of the diverse lives of invisible communities. Especially in a region like South Asia, where most queer women do not have knowledge of and access to groups, making narratives of our lives are important. As far as we know, this is the first queer women's oral history project to be started in this region.

2.2. Participants

The research project set out to interview 20 Sri Lankan queer women. The term 'queer women' was used as an umbrella term for the participants since the project aimed to include the wide spectrum of experiences of women-loving women. This would include women identifying as lesbian, bisexual, queer, questioning (LBQ) women as well as women who identified as straight or who did not want to self-identify as any of the above but still had sexual, emotional, and/or romantic relations with women.

By the end of the research, we were only able to interview 18 women. One woman who had initially promised an interview opted out later because she was worried about how it would affect her developing relationship with a man. Another participant was difficult to access in terms of time. Out of the 18 completed interviews, we could use only 17 for the analysis[57]. These absences are important factors to consider, as much as the reasons for the other 15 women being accessible for interviews. These instances show how difficult it is to set down one's life history (even if anonymously) in this environment and that it is perceived to be a risky endeavour for queer women in our society.

[57] One participant, who also happened to be a member of the WSG left the group and has not had communications with the researcher so far. Her interview has not been used for analysis.

It must also be noted that the women who participated in the research project were those who were already members of or familiar with the WSG or the research team. This is a result of the method of approaching interviewees that we used – approaching known members of the community first and snowballing. However, this also means that the interviews are of women who have a certain amount of acceptance of their sexual orientation, and therefore, whose subjectivities are different to women who live away from such a community.

2.3. The research tool and process

The interviews were done with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was initially designed by the principal researcher and a resource person of the WSG. Thereafter, the questionnaire was further developed with the aid of two external evaluators (a psychologist familiar with the work of the WSG and a sexuality studies researcher) with the principal researcher to suit oral histories. The questionnaire was designed so that it was divided up into themes leaving scope for the interviewer to elicit experiences from the participant rather than short informative answers.

Three interviewers carried out the interviews in Sinhala and English. The language of the interview was decided by the participant. The participant was also notified that at any point in the process, she could decide to back out of the project and to ask the WSG to refrain from using part or the whole of the interview. Many of the interviewees chose to be interviewed in English, though almost all of them were bilingual in Sinhala and English. Once the interview was conducted, the interview was transcribed and Sinhal interviews were translated into English. This was because there were only five Sinhala interviews and the translation of those would result in a complete set of interviews in at least one language. Once the interview was transcribed, the final copy was made available to the participant for approval. The participant was notified that she could indicate sections, if necessary, of the interview that she did not want us to use.

At the outset, it was decided that the participants would be asked if they would like to state their own name or whether they would like to be identified by a name of their own choice. However, the research team later felt that making such documents public with individual names would be too great a risk for the individuals or the groups they engaged with. Therefore, a uniform coding system was devised which used a combination of the interviewer initials and a serial number. As a further security step and to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, names of persons and identifiable institutions were changed or deleted.

3. Findings

3.1. Respondents' demographics

The women participating in *Stories to tell* were a diverse group. They were from different ethno-religious backgrounds and from various parts of the country. In terms of social demographics as well, they were a diverse group (see Table 1). They came from various educational and professional areas as well as age categories.

	Age	Place of residence	Hometown	Religion	Ethnic Group	Education	Occupation
DK 01	36	Colombo		Christian	Sinhala	Postgraduate	academic, activist
DK 02	43	Colombo		born again Christian	Tamil	Graduate	professional
JK0 1	26	Colombo		Buddhist	Sinhala	secondary school (OL)	professional sportswoman, banking job
JK0 2	31	Suburb	Ja-ela	Catholic	Sinhala	secondary school (OL)	wsg, previously garment industry
JK0 3	36	Suburb		Buddhist	Sinhala	secondary school (AL)	Security forces
JK0 5	38	Suburb	all over	Buddhist philosophy	Sinhala	secondary school (OL)	flight attendant
JK0 6	58	Suburb	Colombo	'Irrelevant'	'Irrelevant'	Postgraduate	Human Rights Defender
JK0 7	35	Suburb		Atheist	Sinhala	Postgraduate	Academic, activist
KP0 1	27	In other country	Negombo	Christian	Tamil	Undergraduate	Student, activist
KP0 2	27	Suburb	Colombo	Hindu, Christian	Indian (raised in SL)	Undergraduate	Businesswoman
KP0 3	34	Colombo	Suburb	Christian	SL Burgher	secondary school (AL)	Businesswoman
KP0 4	30	Suburb	Colombo	Pan-religious	SL Burgher	secondary school (AL)	Freelance writer, performer
LK0 2	39	Colombo		Hindu	Indian (born in SL)	Postgraduate	Activist in international org

LK03	36	Colombo		Christian	Mixed ethnicity	Postgraduate	Lawyer
LK04	30	Suburb	Colombo	Christian	Mixed ethnicity	Postgraduate	Researcher
LK05		Suburb	Galle	Buddhist	Sinhala	secondary school (AL)	
LK06	54	Colombo		Atheist	SL Burgher	secondary school (AL)	Activist

Table 1: Participant demographics

None of the participants interviewed identified as transgendered, transsexual or male. They were all self-identified female. The majority of the women identified as lesbian. Out of the 17 participants, only two women identified themselves as bisexual and one woman identified herself as both queer and bisexual. However, it must be noted that the journey towards self-identification was complex and took many forms.

3.2. Family

This was a very important theme for many women and for almost all the women, a space of conflict. In some instances, there was isolation within family from a young age due to their perceived 'difference'. For others, conflict within the family was a direct result of their sexual orientation.

Seven of the participants had left home and were living independently in Colombo. This independence made it much easier for them to access and be a part of a community of queer women.

The notion of natal family as opposed to chosen family is also brought up by most interviewees. Many participants stressed the importance that friends or the queer women's community has in their lives and the strength of having a queer community as a support net.

3.3. Desiring women

Some participants realized they liked women as young children. In some of the narratives, participants describe 'liking' older women or girls of the same age during their childhood or adolescence.

> Participant*: I didn't say anything to anyone…um- but I - oh!*
> *So what happens is that everybody kind of..it became a joke - in school uh- that I was like the you know - the stud figure in school and stuff. And very soon what happened was that I kind of consciously began kind of courting girls - um…*
> Interviewer: *Openly?*
> Participant: *Well yeah. I mean, in a manner of speaking because under cover of girl's schools you can have powerful, intense kind of friendships um, with women –* (DK01)

Because like you know, normally it's like it's never ending ne, your going back home from school, traffic, traffic, traffic. But when she sits next to me it's like 'Wo…w'. And she wont even say a word to me. [laughing] I'm like nothing to her. I'm like a fly on the wall. She doesn't even know. And I'm like huh… [intake] you know, because she's like sitting here. But erm and then even… she was a prefect. So in school also I remember when she passes I'm like 'Wow' and what ever this and that. Er but she obviously didn't know even know of my existence. (LK04)

I remember a few people, where all that, you know, "oh you look pretty I'd like to sit here and just look at you" turned into "oh wow, I have this sudden urge to actually just reach forward and kiss you, or you know, just touch you". I was about thirteen, I think. I remember this, this, this completely random [laughs[actually this stranger on a bus one day. And that was the first time I think I actually had this urge to, maybe lean forward and kiss her on the cheek. But she was this complete stranger [both laugh], and I was like this thirteen year old freaky kid staring at her. Yeah [laughs]. (KP03)

In others, this is a new experience that happens later in life, after a heterosexual past. Of these participants, those who had liked women from their adolescence reported feelings of isolation, frustration and sadness at the time.

3.4. Self identification

Almost all the women describe their self-identification as a journey. In between desiring women and realizing that they were lesbian or bisexual there is some gap. This is not surprising considering the taboo that same-sex desire has in a culture such as ours. The lack of words to identify one-self, as well as the inability to access spaces where you could find out information about such things, is also described.

Participant: *Yeah yeah… back then we didn't know it was pulp fiction. We knew it was a thing to read. And it was this book called Princess Daisy. You know it? Or yes.*
Iinterviewer: *Yes I know Princess Daisy.*
Participant: *Yes I picked it up and there was this sex scene. Between these two women. In which one initiates the other you know, and I remember reading that, and thinking oh shit, this is really it.* (DK01)

I think I knew, I just wanted… I was in denial. Because, I remember seeing a lesbian scene in a movie once and feeling like sick into my stomach. Um… and that was probably because I realized then that, you know, I was probably in the same boat. And I didn't want to admit it to myself. (LK06)

3.5. Coming out

For most participants, coming out was a traumatic experience.

> Participant: *Yeah they're always anxious about it. They're happy that there's more openness about it but there's no more conversation about, they won't…they're afraid of exposure.*
> Interviewer: *They don't want to go there*
> Participant: *Well they're afraid about other people knowing.*
> Iinterviewer: *That's their concern?*
> Participant: *Yeah yeah, its shameful for them.* (DK01)

It is interesting to note that one way that families and the participants themselves have of coping with knowledge of their sexuality within their family is through silence. While this may be seen as an instance of homophobia, it also enables the participant to maintain contact with her family without disrupting family ties too much. Of about six participants, the family has changed to being more accepting and supportive of the participant.

> *So I actually told him on text. I sent a sms saying 'By the way, I'm gay. And there is this Pride thing coming up.' cause Pride was happening. So apparently I heard later that he had been quite upset that I came out to him on sms rather than telling him because he had been waiting for that… you know, he had prepared himself. Because he also has a very close friend whose gay who had come out to him when they were in school. One of his closest friends. So erm anyway I had come… came out to him but he is very supportive and all that.* (LK04)

3.6. Relationships

Many of the women described their relationships as being the most important part of their lives at present. However, some interviews brought out the problems of sustaining relationships in a heterosexist culture like Sri Lanka where the stigma and discrimination has a negative impact on the relationships as well as the individuals.

> *With a man, you feel so disconnected. I'm speaking on perso, I mean personally. I don't know how everyone else feels. But, you know, for me, relationships with men have just been so, it's, it's emotional and sensitive up to a certain level. But with a woman you feel like it's endless. You know, you can be so emotional and so sensitive and so gentle, but with a man there's only so much you'll go and after that, he won't go anymore, you have to force. Errm, and at the same time, with a woman, it feels more equal.* (KP02)

3.7. Health

The most problematic issues that were brought out by this project were issues related to mental health. At least four participants described instances when they felt suicidal or depressed. Depressed moods, feeling isolated and stigmatized were all part of the narratives of most other participants.

After that I started drinking. It was a problem for the people I was staying with. I am not eating, sleeping the whole day. Then I started drinking Corex (cough syrup)….I told 5 friends I was sick and got them all to bring me piriton and took it. (JK02)

3.8. Violence and discrimination

Along with poor mental health, the participants described many instances of discrimination and harassment. Without exception, all participants reported facing homophobic violence of differing intensities: verbal, psychological, and/or physical. Some of the abusive behaviors experienced were verbal abuse in public spheres, harassment by police and armed forces personnel, and physical violence faced in public places.

I noticed these guys mumbling and saying things at the back- they followed me. Called me names and the same thing-'who do you think you are?' and things like 'Machang, with bitches like this, we wouldn't get any pussy..'…. just, just shit like that. Followed me into the car park, and two guys grabbed me from my shirt, and pushed me against the wall, and this other guy punched me in the stomach. And then from that point onwards, I don't know what happened, but there was this huge fistfight. They punched me, I punched them… er…. I remember hitting one guy till he fell to the floor, he couldn't get up I remember splitting one guy's lip. I was beaten up pretty bad, and..they left me there and when they realized that I wasn't obviously going to give up again I got up and started fighting, they left me there and they ran. (KP03)

3.9. Legal issues

Section 365A on the Penal Code seems to be uppermost in all participants' minds. In addition to this, recourse from harassment and violence of any form; rights of marriage, legal partnership, divorce and rights of adoption were also mentioned as being necessary.

well, I would just like to see in that section, that uh… criminalizes homosexuality, taken off the books. (I : uhm…..) and I would like to see a… specific inclusion of non discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity in our fundamental rights chapter of the constitution. (JK06)

if you ask me, like dream…..? I can dream a lot…..(laughs) (interviewer laughs) I would like to dream that ….you know.. same sex relationships are recognized by the law, my partner can stay here based on me being a Sri Lankan, you can bring up a child here, adoption laws for same sex couples…. Those are all, dreams. They are not gonna happen you know. But now practically, I can see at least decriminisation, you know in our life time at least that can happen. (LK02)

4. Conclusion

4.1. Needs, gaps, obstacles

The most important legal change necessary is decriminalization of Section 365A of the Penal Code which criminalizes same-sex sexual activities. This will make other changes, such as other protection from discrimination and changes in social attitudes, easier to affect. Additionally, legal changes such as equality provisions in the Constitution, adoption of children, interpretation of the Domestic Violence Act in to include same-sex couples, testamentary laws are very necessary.

One of the main concerns, however, is the lack of support for queer women from family and peer groups. In many instances, the family has been the major perpetrator of violence. There have been many instances of violence within the community as well, either in the form of intimate partner violence or by peers in dispute. Discussion and advocacy within the community is necessary to find means of reducing violence within the community as well as to support members deal with conflicts with family.

Documentation of many aspects of queer women's lives is very important. Most of the interviews mention the isolation of early years, i.e. 'not knowing' who they were, imagining themselves to be the only woman who liked women, and trying to find others. Publicly accessible narratives of queer women would be one of the most important means of filling in this gap.

4.2. Challenges

Time was a major challenge since all three interviewers were involved in other projects as well. Due to this, transcription had to be outsourced to confidential resource individuals external to the organization. This entailed a hitherto unseen problem because we had not made arrangements for this at the outset. The situation was complicated since we had to be watchful of two things: interviews to be transcribed could not be given to members of the WSG since they would be able to identify the participant very easily; and, there are very few trustworthy resource persons who could do the transcriptions within the given time period.

4.3. Conclusion

This project was a necessary and important step in the particular Sri Lankan context where there is no material on or by queer women. The project was a learning experience as it highlighted the sharp need for allied resources such as transcribers, translators and typesetters who could work sensitively with this kind of material. It is hoped that, funds permitting, the next phase of the oral history database, which is placing it as an online open source database, will be possible. It can then serve as a database for further research by the community and as a source for other public material such as a web-based oral history archive and books to be published by the WSG.

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