



## The Polish LGBT Movement: Symbolic Conflict and Stigma



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Cover photo: Katka Reszke

Dedicated to The A-Crew.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Stigma is not just an individual experience; it creates collective action. As such, destigmatization is an experience found through group activity. To gain acceptance, the stigmatized must attempt to change society, for the individual and society are ultimately bound: “Outside us, it is opinion that judges us; but further, since society is also represented inside us, it sets itself against these revolutionary impulses from within.” (Durkheim 2001:19). Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT) persons in Poland are heavily stigmatised. As a result, they have become fiercely political in the past ten years. They have held Pride marches, garnered international attention, been subjected to violence and discrimination, and have become embroiled in a battle over basic human rights. The activists at the forefront of this movement are brave yet hostile; they believe in their own values and way of life to a point where they dislike 'normal' society.

Symbols are key to this struggle. All political action has an inherent symbolic quality; LGBT movements are no different. They organise and act in the political sphere much like any other minority group. The use of symbols such as flags, parades and sex increase the prestige and recognition of the LGBT movement. In turn, this prestige can be 'cashed-in' for concessions such as economic aid or security. Closely linked to this are value systems; the gay community self-aggrandizes its own system of values (liberalness, sexuality) while devaluing that of mainstream society (traditional, out-dated). In doing so, it is 'symbolically competing' against the majority.

This conflict may be described as a symbolic conflict, in that symbols are used but also that the conflict itself is symbolic of other social processes occurring in Poland. In this sense, the conflict works on two levels: the LGBT movement uses symbols to increase its own position, yet these symbols themselves signify meanings not readily apparent. Sex is an example: the activists in Poland deployed their liberal sexuality as a political symbol, yet sex was also intrinsically linked to modernity and issues surrounding post-communist identity. The study of symbolic conflict is about the study of meaning and significance: it is to look at a conflict and interpret what is going on underneath.

This thesis examines the political activities of the LGBT movement in Poland as it seeks to increase its position on the socio-political landscape. Using ethnographic data collection at a non-governmental organisation in Warsaw, it discusses the use of symbols and the accumulation of what Bourdieu called symbolic capital. It draws heavily on the theory of Harrison's symbolic conflict and

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<sup>1</sup> Transgender is defined as those who vary from cultural gender roles, such as transvestites and transsexuals.

Schwimmer's notions of symbolic and direct competition, while bringing in Goffman's model of stigma to explain some of the behaviour of the activists themselves.

This chapter details how I reached the topic of this thesis, my problem statement and research questions. I then outline context in Chapter 2: the situation of LGBT persons in Poland, the causes of homophobia and definitions of a homosexual. In Chapter 3 I detail my methodology, my fieldwork and analyse the experience. Chapter 4 explains my major theory, although it should be noted that theory is discussed throughout the narrative. In Chapter 5 I present my analysis, and finally in Chapter 6 I discuss my conclusions and suggest further research.

## 1.2 Finding my thesis

I was originally interested in studying the LGBT movement in Poland for two reasons: firstly, due to my Polish ethnicity I thought it a suitable location to study. I am both an insider and outsider, a good position from which to make observations. Secondly, I found Poland's previous treatment of homosexuality concerning. Identifying myself as Polish, I wanted to understand why a country that I have a personal connection to would have such a poor record with a minority.

I justified my decision on the basis that sexual minorities are just that: a minority. Conceptualising them this way positions my thesis in the discourse of peace and conflict well; the political struggle of LGBT persons is relevant to understanding majority/minority problems as well as masculinity, nationality and deviance.

I originally intended to study the concept of stigma, and how this affects the behaviour and identity of activists. I found the surrounding theory and discourse somewhat limiting and self-explanatory, however. It did little to explain how LGBT movements better their position or the wider processes involved in combating homophobia.

While conducting fieldwork in Warsaw, I became interested instead in how the gay community increased its position on the socio-political landscape and how this ultimately relates to stigma. I became interested in the use of symbols: the Pride march, flags, sex – these symbolic artefacts, concepts and rituals were used to better the position of gay rights groups. My interest deepened when I began to notice similarities between this minority and the previous or ongoing struggle of other minorities, such as that of indigenous groups. The symbolic conflict of LGBT persons is similar in that both deploy political symbols and offer a different set of values – another way of 'ranking things'. These values can directly oppose the majority to provide an *alternative* value

system. This in turn provides another way of looking society at large:

“Alternatively, the opposition ideology may pronounce the dominant value system to be wrong and pernicious; or mean and second rate. In that case it asserts the superiority of the minority, although by worldly standards it may be categorized as an oppressed and exploited minority. We may then speak of symbolic competition...” (Schwimmer 1972:123).

### 1.3 Problem statement

As nation-states democratize, minorities try to establish themselves in the social space. Taylor notes that “we can flourish only to the extent that we are recognized. Each consciousness seeks recognition in another...” (1994:50). Taking the now commonly held assumption that homosexuality has biological causes and exists throughout the natural world, the treatment of homosexuals in society is an issue that all nations will need to address or are currently doing so. The economic and cultural prominence of more liberal countries (some EU states, USA) has set a precedent that the treatment of homosexuals should be positive. However, as other countries grow in wealth and prominence, a conflict of values erupts. Poland serves as a more than suitable example of this: rapid development and westernisation have resulted in the emancipation of sexual minorities<sup>2</sup>. This conflicts with a pre-existing conservative mindset that seeks to deny homosexuals this experience. “The appeal to “cultural sovereignty” and “traditional values” as a justification for denying sexual orientation (alongside other sexual-rights) claims, has become all the more prevalent in response to the processes of economic globalization.” (Saiz 2004:60).

Despite the inevitable appearance of sexual minorities on the social and political landscape of countries, the plight of sexual minorities remains relatively ignored in public discourse world-over. It is not a problem that many wish to speak of.

The right to sexual preference is not a fundamental human right, nor should it be considered so. Rather, violence, persecution and discrimination are attacks on human rights. The violence faced by sexual minorities can be brutal and dehumanising and yet: “Sexuality remains one of the arenas where the universality of human rights has come under the most sustained attack and around which governments most often seek to erect protective barriers of cultural and national sovereignty to evade their internationally recognized rights obligations.” (Ibid:60). Furthermore, as institutional

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<sup>2</sup> Another example would be South Korea, which faces a similar conflict of an emancipating LGBT community amidst rapid socio-economic development.

powers such as the EU attempt to better the situation of LGBT persons<sup>3</sup>, they will risk conflict with more conservative societies. The EU has already issued a warning to Poland for its treatment of homosexuals in 2005<sup>4</sup>.

Within the discourse of peace and conflict, sexual minorities may be regarded as a minority based on the following four criteria:

“First, gay people comprise a subordinate segment within a larger complex state society. Second, they manifest characteristics that are held in low self-esteem by the dominant segments of society. Third, they are self-consciously bound together as a community by virtue of these characteristics. Finally, they receive differential treatment based upon these characteristics, ranging from discrimination to assault and victimization.” (Herek 1991:63).

Therefore, the legal and social issues between the LGBT community and other minorities are the same: lack of recognition, discrimination, stereotyping and ridicule. Their human rights are frequently violated and this deserves attention in itself, regardless of whether one thinks homosexuality moral or immoral. The study of sexual minorities is also of interest in that it provides an example of political self-determination. Often LGBT movements act similarly to an oppressed nation seeking recognition from a governing state: they hold rallies, fly flags, emphasise their distinct and rich culture, and face opposition from those who also subscribe to racism, primordialism and intolerance. “Studies of highly homophobic people show that their homophobia is associated with high scores of racism and sexism.” (Adam 1998:400). It is no coincidence that in Poland for some the 'gay man' has replaced the 'Jew' as the object of ridicule and loathing. Graffiti in Warsaw reads: “It's not a myth, it's very true – you see a gay you see a Jew.” (Graff 2006:445).

Tied into these notions is the concept of stigma. To be gay is to feel some level of shame; this is true of everywhere in the world, although it varies in intensity depending on location. The fight for LGBT rights is also a fight to reduce stigma, to be accepted by society as 'normal' or at least to achieve recognition of difference.

As sexual minorities appear on the political landscape then, they strengthen their position through

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the European Court of Justice has been brought into conflicts in Poland regarding LGBT people and discrimination.

<sup>4</sup> In October 2005, the European Commission issued a formal warning to Poland, threatening to take away its European Union voting rights if then President Lech Kaczyński continued to oppose LGBT rights. (Amnesty International 2006:1).



the accumulation of capital, both economic and symbolic. To do this, LGBT movements use powerful political symbols. “Competition for power, wealth, prestige, legitimacy or other political resources seems always to be accompanied by conflict over important symbols, by struggles to control or manipulate such symbols in a vital way. I shall call behaviour of this sort symbolic conflict.” (Harrison 1995:289). As an LGBT movement gains more capital, it achieves greater recognition and visibility to become a 'normal' part of the socio-political landscape. In the end, this leads to the reduction of felt stigma.

#### 1.4 Research questions

Against this context, my research questions are:

- What symbols are used by the Polish LGBT movement, and how does their deployment increase the position of the movement on the socio-political landscape?
- How does the value system of the LGBT community differ from that of the majority? How is this set of values used symbolically?
- What is the role of stigma in these processes?

## Chapter 2: Context

This chapter describes the situation of LGBT persons in Poland, and other important notions surrounding homosexuality. The purpose is to provide a better understanding of the issues that I chose to study and to place my research in the wider picture. As noted in the following methodology chapter, context and circumstantiality are paramount to ethnography and anthropological analysis. By outlining the circumstance in detail, I hope to further the validity of my own research. I discuss the situation in Poland, the causes of homophobia (using Poland as an example), and finally what it means to be a homosexual.

### 2.1 The situation of LGBT persons in Poland

In the space of one decade, homosexuality has gone from an invisible entity in Polish society to centre stage in public discourse. Within these ten years, political homophobia, hate speech, violence against sexual minorities and other human rights abuses have erupted in a society that is in parts deeply conservative, religious and seeking identity post-Communism.

The issue has been at the forefront of discourse in recent years: homophobic panic climaxed in the middle of the decade, when sexual minorities were denied the right to assemble on various occasions. Ignoring the bans on rallies made by political figures, demonstrators were met by violent attackers and an apathetic police force. Slogans ran: “We'll do to you what Hitler did with the Jews.” (All Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska<sup>5</sup>) 2005).

Coupled with this was the increasing incident of homophobic statements by leading public officials. “If a person tries to infect others with their homosexuality, then the state must intervene in this violation of freedom” (Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz, then Prime Minister, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2005) and “If deviants begin to demonstrate, they should be hit with batons.” (Wojciech Wierzejski, Polish National Assembly, 11 May 2006).

Sexual minorities have also been subject to discrimination by the Ministry of Education. Curricula regarding human rights and the mention of sexualities have been contested, and certain pro-homosexuality individuals (or at least acknowledging of it) have been dismissed. Towards the latter half of the decade, the debate no longer centred on sexual minorities but rather the violation of basic democratic principles.

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<sup>5</sup> Młodzież Wszechpolska is a Polish nationalist group, formally affiliated to the League of Polish Families (Liga Polskich Rodzin). Importantly, the League has won seats in elections before, most prominently in 2004.

As such, following the late Lech Kaczyński's election as President in October 2005, who was a deeply homophobic politician, the European Commission issued a formal warning to Poland on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2006, stating that if it did not improve its treatment of sexual minorities it could lose its voting right for a period of time. (Amnesty International 2006:7)<sup>6</sup>.

Since these events, little has improved in Poland. Violence against sexual minorities continues on a regular basis and is largely ignored by unsympathetic authorities. (Ibid:17). 20% of gay men experienced physical violence in the 2005/2006 time period. (Abramowicz 2007:15). Poland's politicians still openly oppose efforts by the homosexual community to achieve recognition of their rights and the discrimination they face. Since conducting fieldwork, one of the activists at KPH<sup>7</sup> was subjected to violence by police officers at an antifascist demonstration<sup>8</sup> and another was publicly outed on TV by the Minister of Equality, Elżbieta Radziszewska.<sup>9</sup>

The severe resistance to sexual minorities by certain powerful parts of Polish society is interesting for the study of stigma and symbolic conflict. Since escaping Communism, Poland has modernized rapidly. Its acceptance into the European Union has created precedence that the country should embrace liberalisms similar to those of Western and Northern Europe. This has been met by considerable opposition in Poland, which often emphasizes its traditional values and 'normalcy'. (Mole 2010:8).

Homophobia is, of course, nothing specific to Poland. The life of a homosexual is not easy anywhere; all societies are steeped in heteronormativity – promotion (mostly tacit, but also explicit) of the normalcy of heterosexuality, gender roles, gender identity and gender binary. It can be easily argued however, that the level of homophobia in Poland is considerably higher than in other countries. The cause of this is found in the mind of the public, where ideas of nationality, the family and identity do not sit well with homosexuality. No doubt religion plays a role in homophobic sentiment too; the dominance of the Catholic Church in Poland is well-known. However, religion is not an agent; it exists as an instrument rather than a cause. Other religious countries have a better record of treatment of homosexuals (see below), whereas other aspects of Polish society that should be considered immoral by religious morality have not been subject to the same level of attack.

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<sup>6</sup> This is an example of where symbolic capital has been 'cashed in' for political gains. The verdict of the Commission would, no doubt, contribute to the accumulation of symbolic capital too.

<sup>7</sup> The non-governmental organisation that I worked for, Kampania Przeciw Homofobii. See: Section 3.2.

<sup>8</sup> <http://world.kph.org.pl/index.php?lang=en&doc=news&id=34&title=biedroń-was-brutally-beaten-by-policemen>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily\\_News/2010/09/25/Polish\\_Minister\\_of\\_Equality\\_Accused\\_of\\_Homophobia/](http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily_News/2010/09/25/Polish_Minister_of_Equality_Accused_of_Homophobia/)

The goal of this thesis is not to explain or document homophobic sentiment in Poland. I am interested in the ways in which the LGBT movement opposes the majority, through the symbolic representation of values, concepts and artefacts. Nevertheless, the homophobic context in which the activists do this needs clarification.

## 2.2 The causes of homophobia in Poland

Much has been written on the causes of homophobia. Although the disciplines of social anthropology, psychology, history and 'queer studies'<sup>10</sup> have all contributed to the understanding of this phenomenon, there is no unilaterally accepted theory. By looking at the case of Poland, homophobia and the stigma placed on the attribute of being 'gay' can be better explained.

At its most basic level, Goffman's concepts of *virtual social identity* and *actual social identity* help explain why stigma is placed upon attributes. *Virtual social identity* can be understood as normative expectations: when we meet someone, we expect them to be certain things based on their appearance, characteristics and personality. We categorise them. *Actual social identity* is the composite of provable attributes, that is, what the person really is. Stigma occurs as a special discrepancy between the two. It is a normative expectation gone corrupt. We can discover an attribute that seriously deters someone from their *virtual social identity* “that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind – in the extreme, a person who is quite thoroughly bad, or dangerous, or weak.” (Goffman 1990:12). The discovery of someone's homosexuality is a large discrepancy between expectation and reality, causing a significant stigma to be placed on the attribute. Goffman's theory may, however, render the stigmatized too passive. Bourdieu argues that the dominated (similar to the stigmatized) have just as much a role in their stigmatization as the dominator. Drawing parallels between women and stigmatized (both are 'dominated'), one could argue that they: “...consciously and unconsciously come to embody the conditions of their own domination and dominance.” (Brown 2006:170). Stigmatization of LGBT persons in Poland is so deeply institutionalised that identity is often intimately bound to this social process. For Bourdieu, stigma is a form of symbolic violence, which he defines as:

“A gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition or even feeling. This extraordinary

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<sup>10</sup> Queer studies is the study of issues relating to sexual orientation, gender identity and society with a focus on LGBT persons and culture.

social relation thus offers an opportunity to grasp the logic of the domination exerted in the name of a symbolic principle known and recognised by the dominant and the dominated – a language (or a pronunciation), a lifestyle (or a way of thinking, speaking and acting) – and, more generally, a distinctive property, whether emblem or *stigma* [my own emphasis].” (2001:1-2).

In this way, stigma is a form of symbolic violence and is subscribed to by both the stigmatized and the stigmatizer and opposes Goffman's notion of a more active-passive process beginning with the 'normal'.

Nevertheless, Goffman's theory of *virtual social identity* does offer a good explanation of homophobia. What forms *virtual social identity* is culture, and the case of Poland helps illustrate this. Men are not expected to be gay in Poland for a variety of reasons. One of the most commonly cited reasons is religion. It no doubt plays a part in Poland's lack of tolerance for LGBT persons. Various passages from the Bible are used to shame same-sex action. Interesting to consider is whether the Church's view is a representation of pre-existing homophobia in society or whether it created negative attitudes itself. As Geertz notes, religion and society support each other: religion is both a model of, and a model for, society:

“In religious belief and practice a group's ethos is rendered intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life ideally adapted to the actual state of affairs the world view describes, while the world view is rendered emotionally convincing by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs peculiarly well-arranged to accommodate such a way of life.” (Geertz 1993:90).

Furthermore, other religious countries have a far more tolerant attitude towards gays, compounding the notion that religion causes homophobia<sup>11</sup>. Nevertheless, the Church is an important institution in Poland; it is an interest-group acting as what Becker calls a 'moral entrepreneur'<sup>12</sup>. It no doubt has exacerbated the situation and provides a suitable banner under which people feel legitimised in their distaste for homosexuals.

Also frequently touted as a cause of homophobia in Poland, and the rest of Eastern Europe, is the impact of communism. “[A]ll bar one of the former communist member-states of the European

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<sup>11</sup> It is difficult to judge religiosity and tolerance towards LGBT persons objectively. However, countries such as Spain, Israel and Argentina have progressive policies for homosexuals and strong religious self-identification.

<sup>12</sup> See: Becker 1963.

Union fall below the EU average with reference to support for gay rights, suggesting that the impact of communist ideology and the communist experience must also be taken into account when examining intolerance towards gays...” (Mole 2010:6)<sup>13</sup>. During this regime, there were clear gender roles and boundaries; anything that deviated from this was considered unacceptable. The public became working class, and as Bourdieu notes, masculinity is the symbolic property of the working class<sup>14</sup>. As briefly discussed below, masculinity and homophobia often go hand-in-hand. Women were meant to be mothers not lesbians and the gay man was seen as the product of capitalist society. The collapse of communism did not make the situation better; it arguably made it worse. There was great social upheaval after the fall of socialism and in this time there was little tolerance of diversity, due to the fact that it appeared threatening to an already unstable political landscape. Furthermore: “In many former communist states, political elites rejected their communist past and harked back to the pre-communist period, to the 'golden age' of the 1920s and 1930s and its traditional values and norms. As this period was considered the opposite of the abnormal communist experience, 'traditional' thus became equated with 'normal'.” (Ibid:7). Right-wing groups in Poland often advocate for a return to this 'tradition'.<sup>15</sup>

A lack of left-wing political parties – or well organised ones – in Poland makes matters worse. The political landscape is various shades of conservative, and as the country has sought identity post-communism it has pushed aside the homosexual, who is considered not to have the sort of masculinity attributed with nationhood and the attributes that go with it: strength, courage, honour. “...masculinity is nationalized in a new way. With the nation under perceived threats of disintegration, attempts by non-normative men to access civil society can appear to threaten the nation itself.” (Boellstorff 2004:479). Homosexuality here is an incursion onto masculinity, which under sociological theory is 'zero sum', in that to increase your masculinity someone else's portion must go down. Homosexuals are easy targets for this, due to their perceived femininity, flamboyance and passivity. “Far from being an extraneous phobia, homophobia appears to be intrinsic to contemporary heterosexual masculinity. The very structure of male heterosexual identity contains a tightly wound coil ready to be triggered against homosexual threat or temptation.” (Adam 1998:394).

Polish mentality has a strong emphasis on the family too. Gays are seen as incommensurable with this. They “support same-sex marriages for the sole purpose of destroying the Polish family and, thus, the Polish nation. The fear of modernity and the obsessive attachment to the phantasm of the

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<sup>13</sup> The Czech Republic was the only country above the EU average.

<sup>14</sup> See: Bourdieu 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See Section 5.3 for the example of Tradycja, Rodzina, Własność (Tradition, Family, and Property).

“Polish family” in danger are the real causes of attributing these particular features to Jews and gays”.<sup>16</sup> Homosexuals are seen as unable to reproduce, or worse, perverts who threaten children (my own research). Finally, the emergence of homosexuals on the social sphere and their want of recognition causes an increase in homophobia. Boellstorff notes that homophobia occurs “not when they [gay men] make sexual propositions to other men in private, but when they appear to stake a public claim to civil society; that is, when they appear political.” (2004:479). Poland's issues with homosexuals began when they sought recognition. Before this, homosexuality was not such an issue. As one informant told me: “Gay life quite happily existed in the past. Everyone knew that some actor or musician was gay and that this was not a problem. Issues occur when this person suddenly has a problem: for example his partner dies and he wants to continue living in their home.”

The amalgamation of all this makes the situation in Poland difficult for homosexuals, although it is important to remember that homophobia is a world-wide problem. Western dominance in the past centuries has assured that heteronormativity and traditional gender identities are hegemonic. (Bereket and Adam 2006:132). Historically, homosexuality has been prevalent in nearly all societies, including those as severely opposed to it as, for example, Islam. This is discussed below.

### 2.3 Defining the homosexual

A few words must be said on what constitutes a 'homosexual', for it is the socially constructed 'gay' identity, which has only appeared in the last few decades, that seems to be the point of attack for many conservatives. 'Gay' is a recently created identity, one that many homosexual men, but by no means all, choose to adopt. During my time in Poland, I met men who choose to define themselves as nothing but 'men who have sex with men'. In his study of deviance, Becker notes:

“...our theories are likely to be quite inadequate if we believe that all homosexuals are more or less confirmed members of homosexual subcultures. A recent study reveals an important group of participants in homosexual relations who are not in the least confirmed homosexuals... How many other varieties of homosexual behaviour await discovery and description? And what effect would their discovery and description have on our theories?” (1963:167).

Homosexuality (and bisexuality) is defined by KPH as “a person that has the ability to engage in

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<sup>16</sup> [http://www.opcit.art.pl/cms/index.php?p=text23\\_01](http://www.opcit.art.pl/cms/index.php?p=text23_01) No longer available, but quoted in: Biedrón, R. (2009) “Introduction” in (ed.) Czarnecki, G. *When Words are Weapons: Homophobic Hate Crimes and Discrimination in Poland*. Warsaw: Campaign Against Homophobia.

sexual, romantic and emotional relations with persons of the same sex.” (Abramowicz 2007:9). This emphasis on ability is perhaps misleading, given that in circumstances anyone might at some point find themselves attracted to a member of the same-sex. It is also possible to force oneself into committing homosexual acts; prostitution is an example of this. Rather, 'Gay' is a western term, and is more of an identity construction. It has been in use since the 1970s and has now come to encompass a somewhat stereotypical lifestyle and identity. The word 'gay' can be shorthand for LGBT community. A homosexual woman too can be 'gay', although is commonly referred to a 'lesbian'.

Homosexuality in humans has been documented thoroughly in history and anthropology: the prevalence of same-sex action in Ancient Greece is well-known, as is homosexuality in Samurai culture in pre-industrial Japan. Homosexuality even exists in societies that are tightly bound to an established gender-binary construction. A man who has sex with another man is not at odds with society as long as he takes the 'active' role in sex (penetrator), and is masculine in manner and attire. Likewise, to be the 'penetrated', that is take the passive role, is to be truly homosexual. This category is often effeminate, cross-dresses and adopts attributes usually reserved for women – thereby conforming to the traditional gender-binary: masculine/feminine, active/passive, manly/effeminate. There are many examples to support this. In Nicaragua: “Whatever else a *chocón* might or might not do, he is tacitly understood as one who assumes the receptive role in anal intercourse. His partner, defined as 'active' in the terms of their engagement, is not stigmatized, nor does he necessarily acquire a special identity of any sort.” (Lancaster 1995:114). In contemporary Turkey, “Tarkan [the informant] claims that he likes younger men who tend to be feminine in every way and who are only *pasif* in bed. This preference conforms to the traditional constitution of same-sex relationships within the prevalent sexual ideology in Turkey.” (Bereket and Adam 2006:138).

This relative acceptance of gay lifestyle continues in various parts of the world. It is when western concepts of 'gay' enter public discourse that traditional masculinity is threatened. Many “..seek to deconstruct 'western' gay identities and tend to read them as imperial impositions onto non-western cultures.” (Ibid:132). The esoteric language used to denote concepts of homosexuality such as coming-out, active, passive, does not help the situation of the LGBT movement. This is discussed later on. Further research on this topic would be a worthwhile path of enquiry. For now, it is important to note that gay identity is seen as a western phenomenon in both Poland and other countries that are witnessing a rise in their gay populations. This helps to explain why xenophobia and homophobia often go hand-in-hand.



### Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I discuss my choice of methodology, and its limitations and strengths based on the work of Geertz (1973) and Spradley (1980). I then detail my fieldwork, highlighting the importance of its timing. Finally, I discuss my own experience in the field, drawing upon Goffman's model of stigma to explain some of the problems I faced.

#### 3.1 Choosing a methodological approach: participant observation

I chose participant observation as my research method. I knew from an early stage my thesis would draw on social anthropological theory, and with this I wanted to do ethnographic fieldwork. It was the most suitable method of data collection, in that I would be approaching a large social situation with a narrow focus.

“You will begin by making broad *descriptive* observations, trying to get an overview of the social situation and what goes on there. Then, after recording and analysing your initial data, you will narrow your research and begin to make *focused* observations. Finally, after more analysis and repeated observation in the field, you will be able to narrow your investigation still further to make *selective* observations.”  
(Spradley 1980:33).

This process allowed me to focus my study on one particular social 'miniature' – one particular set of meanings from what I had observed. Having the ability to focus at my own pace is why I decided against formal interviewing. I did not enter the field with a clear hypothesis; I knew that I would have to go through several rounds of what Spradley calls the 'ethnographic research cycle', constantly observing, testing and concluding and beginning again. (Ibid:26-27). I considered formal interviewing 'too formal', in that it would have changed my position in the field from a participant, observer and friend, to more of a researcher in a binary researcher-informant relationship. I would have had less access to the 'backstage'<sup>17</sup>. It is possible that this relationship to informants (more formalised research-subject) is what made the experience of my fellow intern at KPH more difficult (see Section 3.4). Rather, choosing participant observation gave me the freedom to explore my own ideas in a longer time period. Conversations, chatting and socialising were paramount for data collection. In fact, some of the deeper, longer conversations I had could be considered 'informal interviews'.

Description is paramount in ethnographic fieldwork, which is “the work of describing a culture. The

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<sup>17</sup> See: Goffman 1959.

central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view.” (Ibid:3). I knew that the gay subculture of Poland, specifically Warsaw (once I had established this as my field), would be complex: it is heavily stigmatized yet confrontational. In doing qualitative research therefore, I was aiming for what Geertz's describes as a 'thick description' – describing not just behaviour but also the *context* in which it occurs. “...culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described.” (Geertz 1973:13). By achieving a thick description, I would have data meaningful for social anthropological analysis. Furthermore, I also wanted to *experience* this context and saw participant observation in the form of working, socialising and marching with gay men and lesbians, as the best way of sharing the feeling of stigma.

As Geertz notes, “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete.” (Ibid:28). It is incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to have complete understanding. Under each layer is another, much like the splitting of an atom to reveal subatomic particles only to find quarks. “It is well to realise that what you write is true of every ethnographic description: it is partial, incomplete, and will always stand in need of revision.” (Spradley 1980:160). It is not possible to achieve full analysis of a social meme, but this is not necessarily a damning factor. Anthropology should not seek to find the fundamentals of life, to find some hidden underlying meaning to everything. Rather, ethnographers should “try to keep the analysis of symbolic forms as closely tied as [they could] to concrete social events and occasions, the public world of common life...” (Geertz 1973:29). Analysis should not run amuck, conjuring lofty conclusions from the study of isolated villages. The subsequent interpretation of meanings and behaviour from ethnographic data collection can never aspire to be more than guesses: “Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses...” (Ibid:19).

To do this, the ethnographer must write: “The ethnographer “inscribes” social discourse; *he writes it down*. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be reconsulted.” (Ibid:18). I knew that I enjoy writing, and so felt that ethnography was a good choice of data collection. Ethnography takes the form of extensive fieldnotes, writing down all that happens and everything that is said. This is certainly a challenge – and did prove to be so – but it is crucial to the process. The end product is a vast amount of qualitative data, necessary for anthropologic analysis.

Ethnography is not without its limitations, however. As said above, it cannot explain everything –

although Geertz argues it should not seek to. Another aspect of ethnography that proves challenging is its 'microscope' nature. Anthropologists deal with small cultural units to produce “ethnographic miniatures” (Ibid:20) and then draw from these miniatures to create larger conclusions.

However: “For a science born in Indian tribes, Pacific islands, and African lineages and subsequently seized with grander ambitions, this has come to be a major methodological problem, and for the most part a badly handled one.” (Ibid:20). This move from the small-scale location to a large world-view is a dangerous one; fundamental aspects of human nature cannot be found by placing the world in a tea cup. Anthropology has suffered in the past due to this emphasis on finding the 'untouched' – in particular the villages and islands of indigenous peoples – in which to study 'universal fundamentals'. There is no true laboratory, however. Nothing is static and everything manipulable. The anthropologist's very presence will in some way skew his interpretation of the processes occurring within the location. “The ethnographer comes to his subjects as an unknown, generally unexpected, and often unwanted intruder. Their impressions of him will determine the kinds and validity of data to which he will be able to gain access and hence the degree of success of his work.” (Berreman 1962:8). My own examples below effectively illustrate how informants' impression of the researcher affects his data.

By staying as close to the social context as possible, the anthropologist can avoid this trap. Anthropological analysis should never be entirely removed from the environment it seeks to analyse. It is a discipline that belongs in circumstantiality. By staying grounded in this circumstance, anthropology can become less introspective and more for the sake of the informant. “There was a time when “knowledge for knowledge's sake” was sufficient reason for doing social science... But that time has long since passed.” (Spradley 1980:16). Ethnography can become a better practice if it serves the needs of those it catalogues. Much has been said on this, some quite vocal: “...will anthropologists become public advocates for *structural* change... or will they instead continue to write for specialized, academic audiences of peers...?” (Binford 1996:200). Finally, anthropology is nothing but an interpretation itself. It is created by anthropologists. It exists only in theory and not in the actions of villagers who are being studied. When constructing analysis, we are putting forward our own arguments and theories based on *our* interpretations and not on some objective universality we may believe to have found.

When choosing to do ethnographic fieldwork, I knew I would be trying to interpret a complex social situation. This is what drew me to the practice – the emphasis on interpretation. By realising I was not to find the answers to grander questions by putting a box around the gay community of

Poland and studying it with grand notions of peace and conflict in mind, I was able to approach my fieldwork with sensible actuality. It was the study of the context that attracted me too; I wanted to create a record of this fleeting moment in LGBT history. “The essential vocation of interpretive anthropology is not to answer our deepest questions, but to make available to us answers that others... have given.” (Geertz 1973:29).

### 3.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in Warsaw from June to August 2010. This was a relatively short period of time for participant observation. However, the timing for the study of the LGBT movement in Poland was significant as Warsaw had been selected to host 'Euro Pride' – a pan-European event that gives particular attention to the gay Pride march<sup>18</sup> in the chosen city, drawing larger crowds and increasing media attention. Warsaw's selection was significant: it was the first time an Eastern or Central European city had been chosen. Compared to the previous hosts of the event (Stockholm 2008, Madrid 2007, London 2006), Warsaw's (Poland's) record of gay rights and treatment of homosexuals is left wanting. Therefore, the Euro Pride selection felt highly political and brought the LGBT conflict to the front of the nation's mind. The activists worked with a heightened sense of importance and determination while LGBT persons from around the country came to the capital to join in the struggle for recognition of gay rights, enriching the fieldwork process.

Euro Pride was held between 9-18 July, with the march occurring on the Saturday of the last weekend. During the run-up to this, LGBT groups in the city held numerous events and catered for a significant influx of tourists. Special film screenings and club nights were combined with Pride House – a week-long event and area organised by Campaign Against Homophobia; it held social, cultural and educational events ranging from seminars, panel discussions, and workshops to drag queen shows and discos. Pride House became a focal point of the entire Euro Pride event. Serving as a bar and cafe, LGBT persons, activists, tourists and journalists frequented the space. At all times it was buzzing with activity.

During my time in Poland, I became an intern at Kampania Przeciw Homofobii (KPH) (Campaign Against Homophobia)<sup>19</sup>. The non-governmental organisation works for the rights of LGBT persons in the country, and is the most serious of its kind. It has some full-time employees and many volunteers, who constitute the main body of KPH. It was also one of the main hosts of Euro Pride. I

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<sup>18</sup> A Pride march is a parade celebrating LGBT culture. There is a strong political aspect too; many of those marching are doing so for the betterment of gay rights. Pride marches usually occur in the summer months, as a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots of 1969.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on KPH: <http://world.kph.org.pl/?lang=en>

originally wished to attach myself to the Cracow branch of their organisation, as the city is more familiar to me and I already had contacts in the area. I quickly discovered however, that Cracow was on relative shut-down in the summer: nearly all students (who comprise the bulk of the LGBT community there) were on holiday, and the activists of the branch were themselves taking a break for the summer period. As a result I contacted the main branch in Warsaw, explaining that I wanted to do research by attaching myself to their operations. We quickly agreed that I could work as an intern. Although this was to be on a voluntary basis, I nevertheless worked full time, five days a week, at the organisation. As discussed later, this carried with it its own strengths and weaknesses.

The work of the organisation includes awareness campaigns, education (of both LGBT persons and teachers, policemen, parents and so forth), psychological assistance to gay persons and victims of homophobia, legal assistance, lobbying for equal rights and the hosting of events for the LGBT community. KPH works closely with other European organisations, especially those of Eastern Europe. It has also produced annual reports on LGBT issues, ranging from violence against homosexual persons to hate crime and discrimination. During the Euro Pride march, the organisation had its own float, which was filled with activists and was one of the busiest on show.

Importantly, the activists working at KPH were some of the most well-known proponents of gay rights in Poland. One of the couples working at the organisation is often attributed with starting the gay rights movement in the country; they helped found KPH and have directly contributed to the betterment of the situation of homosexual persons in Poland. They receive frequent media attention and are known to politicians and their opposition.

Day-to-day work at KPH ranged from the mundane to the highly enjoyable but nevertheless provided the perfect opportunity to work with, observe and participate in a LGBT movement. Tasks included proof-reading, writing reports, researching and categorizing the library at the office. Most of my time was spent working with volunteers or employees; this was especially so during the Euro Pride week. Nearly all of my fieldwork during this time was spent at Pride House. I was asked to take minutes at panel discussions and then summarise them for the internet, help set up events and to generally volunteer in whatever way I could. A great deal of time was spent in cars with the activists, taking supplies to or from the office or picking up/dropping off items needed for Pride House. This proved invaluable for in-depth discussions with the workers at KPH.

On top of working at KPH during the day, I socialised exclusively with the activists. This included

evening and weekends, and during Pride House event nearly all my free time was spent with the gay community there. Although my fieldwork time period was relatively short, I did manage near total immersion, spending my working day at the office and my free time with those that worked there and the wider gay community. I became close with some of my informants and now consider many of them friends. As such, I have decided against providing real names in this thesis as a gesture of respect towards these relationships.

### 3.3 Reflections and challenges

My fieldwork was not without its problems however. The first issue was that of language. Prior to my departure to Poland I was under the impression that I had adequate language ability to join in working and social life. This proved to be somewhat incorrect: I found my understanding and ability to speak relatively limited for a workplace environment. Nevertheless, I managed to record most of what was said, or would write down phonetically the parts I could not understand and then translate later.

Although my Polish certainly improved during my time spent at KPH, it was weaker at the beginning. This set the precedent that some would speak to me in English. As my social life originated from the office, this precedent continued when socialising. Many of my informants spoke to me in English, which no doubt affected my data collection to a degree.

Fortunately, my Polish was by no means so insufficient as to render me useless. Importantly, most of the office chose to speak English to each other. One of the main employees was himself born and raised in America and so primarily spoke to others in English. The other intern at the time was from America too, which furthered the English speaking environment. During the Euro Pride event, the large amount of foreigners required English speaking volunteers, and nearly all material was provided in English. My proficiency in Polish certainly came in use. As such, the language barrier was not too critical a problem, yet I did feel that I was somewhat held back by my inadequate Polish skills, which placed me in a category of 'foreigner' despite my Polish ethnicity<sup>20</sup>.

Another serious methodological issue was that of my internship. While working at KPH was invaluable, I found it extremely time consuming. I would often have little or no time to make notes through the day or as things occurred, and would frequently write later based on my memory. When working on a computer, this was not an issue: I could have a document open and write down things verbatim. During Euro Pride however, this was far more difficult. As a volunteer I had a hectic

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<sup>20</sup> I was born and raised in the United Kingdom to Polish parents.

schedule and many of my tasks did not provide me ample opportunity to write things down at the time. For reasons outlined below, I did not want to rush off to write something down as soon as it occurred: many of the KPH staff were already somewhat dubious (albeit in a humorous manner) of my fieldwork and I felt that noting down exactly what they were doing *as* it happened would only increase this paranoia.

Many ethnographers have highlighted the need for detailed description and a verbatim record of what people say. Spradley identifies the importance of this through a “verbatim principle”, where the need for word-for-word recording should be met at all times. He goes on to say about general note taking: “In writing up fieldnotes we must reverse this deeply ingrained habit of generalization and *expand, fill out, enlarge, and give as much specific detail as possible.*” (Spradley 1980:68, author's emphasis). This proved difficult working as an intern in a busy office. After an initial period, I realised my fieldnotes were too sparse and so began a greater effort to record what was happening; at some points, I simply requested time during the work day to update my records.

Two other problems compounded my research. Goffman's model of stigma is useful to understanding these methodological issues.

The first is the notion of *The Wise*, who Goffman identifies as sympathetic normals, that is they are accorded some level of acceptance by the stigmatized group and may advocate on their behalf. They are “normal but whose special situation has made them intimately privy to the secret life of the stigmatized individual and sympathetic with it, and who find themselves accorded a measure of acceptance, a measure of courtesy membership in the clan.” (Goffman 1990:41). In my fieldwork, I witnessed evidence of the wise, and of the problems they carry with them: “a cult of the stigmatized can occur, the stigmaphobic response of the normal being countered by the stigmaphile response of the wise. The person with a courtesy stigma can in fact make both the stigmatized and the normal uncomfortable: by always being ready to carry a burden that is not 'really' theirs...” (Ibid:44). Due to political correctness and an aversion to hypocrisy<sup>21</sup>, there is little to stop a sympathetic normal from joining in activism. This can irk those who believe they 'truly' represent their group. The wise often have an agenda of their own: they would rarely join a controversial movement for unselfish reasons. Academic research, political sentiments towards liberalism, transference (from a psychological perspective), personal relationship with a stigmatized and similarity to previously fought causes, others or own, are plausible reasons for the wise to join on a fight 'not necessarily their own'.

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<sup>21</sup> An activist fighting anti-discrimination laws could hardly prohibit a straight person from becoming an LGBT activist.

The wise and their ability to make the stigmatized uncomfortable was certainly evident during my fieldwork. From my own perspective, I have never been a LGBT activist before and as such felt on occasion an 'outsider'. Although I was never met with open hostility, at the beginning I did feel as though my colleagues questioned my presence: *why is he here? He's not an activist*. While I was clear that my main purpose was to conduct research, I nevertheless felt the need to justify my presence: *I too care (about LGBT issues)*. One of the most frequent questions I was faced with at the beginning was whether I was an activist back home, or had I ever been one before. It was as though I required acceptance into the group and to demonstrate my own ability to care about and fight for gay rights. Once I had been an 'activist' for a few weeks, acceptance occurred. "And after the sympathetic normal makes himself available to the stigmatized, he often must wait their validation of him as a courtesy member." (Ibid:41).

My fellow intern, a Polish-American, was also conducting research at KPH and felt similarly regarding in-group acceptance. In her case the feeling of uncomfortableness was more severe. As a heterosexual woman already married, she felt somewhat unaccepted by the gay community, which she felt was "unopen compared to the equivalent in America. I feel uncomfortable being a straight and an activist and I think it's weird that the only straight people here are myself and the lawyer." Her feelings regarding this impacted on her research; on more than one occasion we talked at length on the issue. I both agreed with and consoled her; she was at times emotionally distraught by the perceived coldness of the gay community. As time went on, her relationship with those in the office became better. She worked hard and participated in all activities, and eventually became accepted as an 'activist'.

My experience was less difficult than hers. I attribute this to my own gender (the office was mostly male), sexuality and open-mindedness. As a young, not unattractive male, I found a role in the office by being the object of a playful desire. Flirtation was common. Furthermore, I am not married or in a relationship – which were both perceived by the activists as 'boring' (see below). Nevertheless, I did find the activists problematic on occasion. Coming from Northern Norway, they viewed me as a rural, 'straight' man, and I would often be reprimanded for my lack of knowledge on gay culture. On a car drive with one of the employees of KPH, I was berated for not identifying a Celine Dion song that was being played on the radio. When I laughed at my friend for liking this artist, he got mock-angry and shouted: "She's a gay icon!" This sort of humour became frequent. The most senior activist often joked that I was a 'straight spy', and that I didn't know cosmopolitan things as I had come from rural Tromsø, which was "in Russia or the countryside somewhere." I



was constantly quizzed on gay culture, songs, magazines, and clubs. These sorts of jokes and jibes continued throughout my fieldwork. While I felt accepted, I was on occasion perceived as 'the wise' rather than a true, gay activist. This no doubt coloured my ethnographic data; as stated above, informants' impressions of the researcher are reflected in his work.

The lawyer mentioned above was frequently portrayed as an outsider and many would speak negatively about her when she was not around. When I said to some of the senior activists that I wanted to informally talk to the lawyer regarding her work at KPH, they looked at me incredulously. One of the activists said: “*Why* do you want to interview her? She's *not* gay.” They seemed confused and frustrated that she was working for LGBT rights. Furthermore, they considered her boring. In a car ride with another senior activist, he said: “Straight people are boring. [The lawyer] is boring, she doesn't go out with us.” When I delicately suggested this may be because she is pregnant, he replied with: “She's pregnant because she's straight, which makes her boring.”

The fact that a straight woman would want to work for a gay rights organisation was confusing to the activists, who felt irritated by her presence. When she was due to stop work for maternity leave, interviews were held to find someone to temporarily replace her. I enquired as to who was being interviewed, to which one of the board members replied “one gay man, one straight man, one straight woman.” When I asked whether he would prefer to hire a gay lawyer, he smiled and playfully said: “obviously you can't discriminate on sexual orientation!” Despite his words, the true meaning was obvious. The organisation could be almost hostile towards straight society then, and some of the staff and volunteers were made to feel (initially) unwelcome. Although this problem was solvable through time and effort, it did cause issues in the first few weeks.

The final methodological issue can be attributed to the highly intellectual nature of the activists. “Fieldwork, then, involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think and act in ways that are different. Rather than *studying people*, ethnography means *learning from people*.” (Spradley 1980:3, author's emphasis). This became exceedingly difficult in an environment where most were highly educated (Master's level or Doctoral) and knew exactly what participant observation was. The office was a constant point of study and contact for researchers. Myself, my fellow intern (who was doing her doctoral research) and at least one more woman completing her Master's, were in the office on a regular basis.

To make the issue more difficult, many of the activists had detailed opinions on society at large.

Their intellectualism “stimulates the stigmatized individual into becoming a critic of the social scene, an observer of human relations. He may be led into placing brackets around a spate of casual interaction so as to examine what is contained therein for general themes.” (Goffman 1990:135). In other words, activists are in some respects amateur anthropologists. This proved difficult for one trying to gain anthropological insight into a situation where the activist is the key player.

However, on occasion this was actually beneficial. Spradley notes: “Sometimes the people you are observing will make suggestions about things they feel are important. You can then take their advice as the basis for selecting an ethnographic focus.” (1980:105). One of my informants, a senior activist at KPH, had a PhD and would often tout theories or possible research ideas. Although I found my own focus, these suggestions did help in overall understanding. It highlighted too what the activists themselves thought important of their own history. On one occasion, I developed a side theory that Poland had entered a state of 'moral panic'<sup>22</sup> over the rise of homosexuals on the political landscape. In a prolonged discussion with one professor who is well-known in the gay community, he made it clear, based on his own understanding of the relevant theory, that Poland had in fact not entered a state of moral panic. We talked about this at length and based on his arguments, I agreed. This saved me time; without such discussion I would have dedicated too much valuable time to exploring this theory. My fellow intern, a PhD student herself, was also helpful. We could discuss our hypotheses and ideas. In some respects then, it was a stimulating environment in which to research.

Earlier, it was mentioned that the activists were dubious of my research, constantly remarking that they were worried about what I was going to “write about them”. This in part stemmed from their knowledge of academia, research methods and theory. They tried to guess my hypothesis on occasion and believed that I was going to describe them unfavourably in my ethnography. Unlike the American-Polish intern, I was not conducting formal interviews. Her presence as a researcher was based on these. Mine was based on participant observation. The activists felt as though I was “milling around”, constantly writing down or remarking on things, asking questions and getting involved. This form of research, undefined yet present throughout the working day *and* in social situations unnerved them. I found that a helpful solution to this was to establish that I already had a hypothesis and that it had been proved – in other words, 'I've already found what I'm looking for'. This de-emphasised my inquisitiveness and reduced tension anytime I asked a question. I was no longer the researcher on the prowl but rather someone who had achieved what they had come for, and could now help out in a more relaxed manner. In reality, I was continually researching and

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<sup>22</sup> See: Cohen 2002.

updating my hypothesis. I do not feel as though I lied to my informants; many ethnographers highlight the importance of concealing one's hypothesis, although the general research aims should be explained: "Informants have a right to know the ethnographer's aims. This does not require a full course on the nature of ethnography. The scholar's aims can often be explained simply." (Ibid:22). I could achieve this by saying my aim was to study the Polish LGBT movement, while leaving out the specifics of my hypothesis.

## 4. Theory

This section introduces the main theory used in this thesis. It should be noted however, that some theory will be introduced or expanded upon in the other chapters. It would be cumbersome to detail every piece here; as such, when a new theory is brought into the discussion it will be explained in relative detail then.

### 4.1 Symbols

All conflicts use symbols. From the burning of the Qu'ran to the flying of the Russian flag underneath the Arctic Ocean, symbols go hand-in-hand with political action. Better understanding them and the way in which they are used offers significant insight into the underlying nature of the conflict itself.

#### *Definition*

There is no uniform definition of symbols. Turner states that the Oxford Dictionary definition is agreeable, where a symbol is “a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought.” (Turner 1975:151). Cohen defines symbols as “objects, acts, concepts, or linguistic formations that stand *ambiguously* for a multiplicity of disparate meanings, evoke sentiments and emotions and impel men to action.” (Cohen 1974:9 quoted in: Ibid:145, author's emphasis).

This thesis concerns itself with political action and symbols, which go hand-in-hand. Edelman notes that: “Politics is for most of us a passing parade of abstract symbols...” (Edelman 1985:5). Harrison defines a political symbol as “...anything which is used to represent symbolic capital and which is therefore a politically significant or strategic asset. More accurately, the function of a political symbol is to bind a quantity of symbolic value to the political identity of some group or person.” (Harrison 1995:269). It is most evident in political processes that symbols are instrumental, where “...the manipulation of symbols is prominent; in ritual processes, the exhibition of symbols to actors, even the enactment of symbolic activities by them, is the cultural keynote. Symbols are here in their richest concentration...” (Turner 1975:157). Symbols can be instrumentally used to bring people to arms, to unify groups or to heal conflict.

Edelman's definition of *condensation symbols* is important to political action. “Condensation symbols evoke the emotions associated with the situation. They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them.” (Edelman 1985:6). For Edelman, condensation

symbols are the main constitute of politics: “Practically every political act that is controversial or regarded as really important is bound to serve in part as a condensation symbol.” (Ibid:7).

Symbols are semantically open. They are not closed and static but dynamic and can hold meaning both publicly and privately. Their openness to interpretation is highlighted by Harrison. “[O]ne assumes that the essential feature of symbols is that they convey meaning. They are signs rather than values and the central questions they pose concern their interpretation. Studies of political symbolism often shows such symbols to possess complex and richly multivalent significations.” (1995:269). Cohen's definition of symbols as “ambiguous” is therefore congruent with Harrison's.

#### 4.2 Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital is an important concept when examining political movements. As shown below, it helps explain how a political group betters itself outside of the realm of economic funds and material goods. Many analysts will be quick to point to the economics of conflict without giving much attention to concepts such as honour and prestige, which have an equal albeit abstract influence on the socio-political position of a group.

##### *Definition*

Symbolic capital is a form of economic capital. Rather than being wealth, resources or land, this form of capital has respectability and prestige as its funds. Both economic and symbolic capital are reflections of each other: “...the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as local or national notable.” (Bourdieu 2008:291). Symbolic capital is finite: to acquire more, the symbolic capital of others must be taken. The definition may be nicely summed up as follows:

“To Bourdieu, symbolic capital is at least in part a disguised, mystified form of economic capital. The economic capital of a Kabyle descent group, for instance, is its land, manpower and other material resources. Its symbolic capital is its reputation or prestige. A group can accumulate symbolic capital by behaving honourably in its dealing with outsiders; for instance, in the forceful pursuit of blood feuds. But this symbolic capital is also partly a reflection of the group's economic capital and may in turn be 'cashed in' for various sorts of economic credit and assistance, and so be converted into material wealth.” (Harrison 1995:268).

Symbolic capital is important as it allows us to understand how a group acquires more economic capital outside of usual economic activity. Concepts such as prestige and honour do much to improve one's status, and with status usually comes concessions, gifts and increased interest. In the political sense, increasing one's symbolic capital can also result in 'cashing in' for other capital (see: Section 5.2): the more symbolic capital a party has, the better it will succeed on the political landscape. Voters, who also donate their money and time, will be more inclined to support a party that has an image of respectability. Similarly, a rich political group does not necessarily equate to one with a good reputation. A political group must also create a version of itself that exists outside of the realm of the material, to become more than just the sum of its parts. It uses symbols as a method to do this: "Every groups tends to set up the means of perpetuating itself beyond the finite individuals in whom it is incarnated... In order to do so, it establishes a whole set of mechanisms, such as delegation, representation and symbolization, which confer ubiquity and eternity." (Bourdieu 2008:72).

However, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic capital is tied too tightly to economic capital and material gains. In his theory, the two go hand-in-hand: symbolic capital is exchanged for economic capital. As this thesis demonstrates, symbolic capital can also exchanged for political concessions: the use of Pride marches as a political tool is an example of this. Through these marches the LGBT community of Poland has gained security and legality. Must all symbolic capital be exchanged for some sort of commodity or resource, however? Can symbolic capital not be 'for itself'? It is arguable that concepts such as prestige, honour and recognition are end results in themselves. The accumulation of honour does not have to be tied to the idea of exchanging this honour for gains; perhaps the accumulation is enough in itself. A genuine sportsperson does not play so that he can exchange his prestige for money; he plays to be the best. The LGBT community does use symbolic capital for political concessions, but it also tries to improve its symbolic capital for no other reason than to be more honoured. Perhaps the LGBT community pushes its own value system (see Schwimmer below) not just to challenge the majority and establish its own position, but also because it *does* think it best. This idea will be readdressed in Section 6.

#### 4.3 Symbolic conflict

This section details the strategies used when deploying political symbols such as flags. How do movements increase their position? The strategies outlined by Harrison and Schwimmer effectively illustrate this. The symbolic nature of the conflict itself (the underlying significance) will be presented in the analysis chapter (Chapter 5).

Harrison

“Competition for power, wealth, prestige, legitimacy or other political resources seems always to be accompanied by conflict over important symbols, by struggles to control or manipulate such symbols in a vital way.” (Harrison 1995:255). Political use of symbols is apparent in times of conflict; by better understanding these processes our study of peace and conflict can be furthered. Groups rally under symbols while trying to destroy others; they create flags and national anthems or adopt the symbols of others to assume legitimacy.

Harrison identifies four ways in which a political symbol can be used: valuation, proprietary, innovation and expansionary contests. All four are a form of competition for symbolic capital, as outlined and discussed above: “Each of these is simply a strategy for manipulating political symbolism so as to affect the distribution of symbolic capital.” (Ibid:255). It should be understood that these are idealised forms. In reality, the four types “are not so much substantive kinds of conflict as aspects of most, or perhaps all, political action”, they work in strategy, in combination, and “can only be separated analytically.” (Ibid:255). Moreover, symbolic conflicts rarely concern just one symbol but rather a complex set of symbols: in the larger effort, the strategies work on different parts of this set.

In valuation contests, symbols are ranked against one another. Groups attempt to increase the rank of their own symbol, while decreasing that of another. “[T]he issue at stake is the ranking of symbols of the competing groups' identities; their ranking, that is to say, according to some criterion of worth such as prestige, legitimacy or sacredness.” (Ibid:256). There are two methods of increasing the relative value of symbols, one positive, the other negative. The former involves promotion of one's own symbols, through display and devotion. It is easy to think of examples of this: North Korean displays of military strength use a vast number of flags and depictions of Kim Jong-Il, with all the pomp and extravagance expected from such ceremonies. The negative tactic is “directed at the symbols of opposition and consists simply in attempts to diminish their status.” (Ibid:256). The recent symbolic burning of the Qu'ran by extremist groups in America is an example.

Propriety contests are also important to this thesis. “[G]roups often claim... proprietary rights in their distinguishing symbols, and treat attempts by other groups to copy them as hostile acts. A proprietary contest is a dispute over these rights and, at its simplest, takes the form of a struggle for the monopoly or control of some important collective symbol or symbols.” (Ibid:258). For this to happen, both groups must agree on the value of the symbol they are competing over. Often, this

symbol has a legitimizing factor: gaining control over it puts the availing group in a position of (political) authority. An example is ownership of names, especially in the case of countries. Harrison points to the dispute over the name of Macedonia between Greece and the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia (Ibid:258). To sum up these first two types of conflict, as they appear most frequently in this analysis: “A valuation contest can result in shifts in the comparative prestige value of group symbols; a proprietary contest can result in shifts in their social distribution.” (Ibid:259).

Unlike valuation and proprietary contests, innovation contests involve the actual creation of symbols. Where the other two contests involved a closed set of symbols, innovation (and expansionary) contests involve the modification of symbolic inventories.

Innovation contests involve either the creation of new symbols, traditions or ceremonies, or elaboration of them. “The other dimension is the competitive creation of new categories of symbolic forms... In this way, an innovation contest is a process of escalation in the quantity and complexity of the competing groups' diacritical symbols.” (Ibid:261). Innovation can be seen in the establishing of nationhood. Southern Sudan's recent decision to separate from the North after years of conflict has spurred a flurry of creation of symbols. The writing of a national anthem has been particularly emotional, with a national contest held even before the referendum was held<sup>23</sup>. With the national anthem will come a new flag and other symbols: “An internal conflict splits a group in two, or a faction within some larger group seeks independence. To establish a separate identity in this way, a seceding group must generate a distinct set of symbolic *representations* of that identity.” (Ibid:261). Innovation contests involve equality. Often, a new symbol is created to compete with others of the same type. Therefore, a flag is made so that a nation may have equal footing with other nations, in that they have flags too. Pre-existing categories of symbols are important.

The fourth type, *expansionary contests*, is less relevant in this thesis. To sum it up briefly, it is when “...a group tries to displace its competitors' symbols of identity with its own symbols.” (Ibid:263). It results in the removal of the opponent's symbols. Most ethnographic examples of expansionary contests take the form of inter-ethnic or inter-state warring, with an emphasis on destruction. In the case of LGBT and Poland, the contests over symbols are found in subtle manipulation – not 'ethnocide'. Nevertheless, it could be argued that expansionary contests are still relevant in that the *overall* goal is the destruction of the opponent's symbols. Just as the Bolsheviks renamed St

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12164171>



Petersburg, Leningrad (Ibid:264), so are right-wing groups in Poland trying to rid the country of gays (through the use of the other manifestations of symbolic conflict) in order to keep symbolic possession over the 'traditional' country. Here, the aim is “to preserve one's mark or stamp on something in order to keep it.” (Ibid:264). This example shows how all four types of symbolic conflict work in unison.

The four types of conflict, valuation, proprietary, innovation and expansionary, are all strategies of increasing symbolic capital. This works on the assumption that a group's inventory of symbols is a representation of funds of symbolic capital: “Let us imagine the total assemblage of diacritical symbols belonging to some set of interacting groups as corresponding to a total pool of symbolic capital available to these groups.” (Ibid:268). Symbolic capital is zero sum, that is, it is a finite number. Therefore, by increasing one's own symbolic capital through the use of symbols, you are decreasing another group's symbol capital and the benefits associated with it. As Taylor notes: “I am using honor in the ancien régime sense in which it is linked to inequalities. For some to have honor in this sense, it is essential that not everyone have it.” (1994:27). The scenario can be thought of as ratios: so if one group reign supreme over another, it is 5:0. If the other group increases its pool, the ratio would change 4:1. At its simplest, this is what happens in a valuation contest: the alteration of symbolic capital ratios through a revaluation of symbols.

### *Schwimmer*

Schwimmer has a complementary notion, called symbolic competition. A minority may denounce a majority by claiming its value system to be wrong. The minority may then claim its own superiority, through its own ideology, and in turn create *another set of values*. This is what Schwimmer calls symbolic competition and it can be considered an aggressive tactic. Value is placed on a different criterion: in Schwimmer's example of Blood Reserve Indians, the Native Americans place great value on characteristics that constitute the essence of 'Indianness': “In this symbolic sphere, we find mentioned as characteristic of “Indianness” qualities the Indians demonstrably cultivate to a high degree... First, there is the criterion of Indian strength, endurance, good health and dexterity, in other words: physical superiority.” (Schwimmer 1972:129). These concepts become a political symbol. The Native Americans of the Blood Reserve bind a share of symbolic capital to the notion of physical strength – a symbol of 'Indianness'. This value system is different to that of the majority, who may not see physical superiority as important.

When the value system of the majority and minority is the same, the competition is called “direct”. When a criterion is agreed upon, such as sobriety and decorum (in Schwimmer's example), the

competition is less symbolic and non-aggressive. In direct competition, the minority will play by the majority's 'rules': they will adopt the values of the majority and attempt to compete with it using these very values or criteria. Schwimmer's symbolic/direct competition is not dissimilar (it is in fact complimentary) to Harrison's ideas of symbolic conflict. Both sets of strategies are based on the idea of symbolic capital. In Schwimmer's case, this resource can be accumulated through competing with a majority either symbolically (putting value on one's own rituals, icons, and concepts) or directly, using criteria that is already established as of value (by the majority) to one's own gain. The latter is close to Harrison's ideas of proprietary and innovation contests, in that the value of a symbol or the *category* it is in has already been established as representing a share of symbolic capital.

Schwimmer's idea is important as it reflects wider ideas of dichotomisation yet wanting to be the same. The Indians in his example emphasised their differentness; they placed value on attributes that were unimportant for mainstream society. However, it is arguable that in doing so the Native Americans in fact wanted to be the same as larger society: they strove for the freedoms, rights and quality of life enjoyed by other Americans. The same can be said of LGBT movements world-over: as shown in this thesis they emphasise and exaggerate their differentness, and yet are ultimately striving for 'normalcy' – that is, to be like everyone else. They seek marriage, children, the same rights as 'straights' and overall acceptance by society. Schwimmer's ideas of direct and symbolic competition touch upon this paradox. While this thesis concentrates on the strategies of symbolic conflict and their use in action, this problem and the fundamental questions it opens up should not be forgotten.

#### 4.4 Goffman's *Stigma*

Goffman's theory of stigma describes the behaviour of activists well. His model accounts for individual behaviour (why the stigmatized dislike 'normals') as well as group activity (how they come together and 'corporate life'). It also provides useful insight into interaction between the in-group and out-group, as well as interaction within the in-group itself. It is not without its problems however. The stigma described by Goffman is too passive. As outlined earlier, Bourdieu argues that the stigmatized has a hand in his own stigmatization. Goffman's model is also vague at times, describing processes and giving plenty of examples yet relatively lacking in in-depth analysis of the underlying questions stigma raises. Nevertheless, “Goffman's original model still remains highly respected and dominant.” (Carnevale 2007:12).

Goffman illustrates how social grouping may occur: “In the sociological study of stigmatized

persons, one is usually concerned with the kind of corporate life, if any, that is sustained by those of a particular category.” (Goffman 1990:33). Those sharing a damning attribute often come together and become organised, although some stigmatized will avoid such grouping: “he may find that the tales of his fellow-sufferers bore him, and that the matter of focusing on... the 'problem', is one of the large penalties of having one.” (Ibid:33).

Through this movement, an intellectually worked up version of the stigma is produced. Publications, speeches, success stories and academic study all contribute to the formulation of an ideology, a heightened sense of identity and an opposition doctrine. The stigmatized may find comfort in finding scientific information on his attribute or help on how to deal with it. This pooling of knowledge and meanings begin to constitute a culture.

Within this 'corporate' entity, are *professionals* – those who have contributed the most to the creation of this group identity. They are usually the most vocal inside the group and in their interaction with normals. We may call professionals, *activists*. Often activists find an identity in advocating, where they have felt their own identity somehow robbed or spoilt: “Among his own, the stigmatized individual can use his disadvantage as a basis for organizing his life... [he] may find that the 'movement' has absorbed his whole day, and that he has become a professional.” (Ibid:32-38). For activists, their stigma becomes deeply entrenched as part of their identity. They play up this very stigma as a sort of hostile yet necessary effort to change the boundaries of what 'normals' consider 'normal'. “He may also flaunt some stereotypical attributes which he could easily cover; thus, one finds second generation Jews who aggressively interlard their speech with Jewish idiom and accent, and the military gay who are particularly swish in public places.” (Ibid:138). Their distrust of normals may also be significantly greater than those who originally achieved some level of acceptance; this of course naturally follows: a professional must constantly deal with those who oppose him.

Activists are frequently seen as those who have 'shed' their stigma. Based on Goffman's work however, this thesis would argue that stigma is not static but is a *process*. It is self-perpetuating: initial stigma influences future experience. The experience of having gone through these processes is sufficient enough to alter the identity of the person. Past experiences effectively illustrate this argument: without them, the activist would have not felt motivated to change society. The most traumatic of this will be firmly entrenched in his memory and upon his character. He may use these past stories and experiences as symbols in his conflict with normals: “political action has an inherent expressive dimension and involves the deployment of symbols...”, in the case of activists,

their past traumas are “associated with persisting groups and signifying enduring group identities.” (Harrison 1995:255). The process of stigma continues then, either through sentiments of continual stigmatization (regardless of actuality) or hostile bravado, which is often found in activists.

## Chapter 5: Analysis

### 5.1 The activists

Goffman's theory of *The Professional*, as laid out in the theory section, is useful for understanding the Polish LGBT activist. Stigmatized persons often come together, to 'fight' perceptions toward their attribute: "Rejection may take a collective form. Groups of movements, of varying degrees of political militancy, may be established to provide mutual support in countering existing, negative, public stereotypes." (Page 1984:19). These groups become a repository of knowledge about the stigmatized attribute and society's reaction to it. Furthermore, they are frequently prominent within the stigmatized culture itself: as in the case of LGBT activists, these people were very well known throughout the gay community.

Goffman writes: "Starting out as someone who is a little more vocal, a little better known, or a little better connected than his fellow-sufferers, a stigmatized person may find that the 'movement' has absorbed his whole day, and that he has become a professional." (1990:38). In the case of Polish activists, entry into professionalism generally came as a gradual process. However, negative experiences were often a strong motivator: those who had suffered particular hardships were more likely to be involved in the movement. One informant described her own entry into activism, stating "it was a slow process of getting more and more involved. I never decided to go on a crusade." Some of the other activists – one with an especially militant view – described some of the hardships he had faced: "I have been spat on. In Poland it's very clear where the social constraints are: we can't hold hands in public; when I was teaching English at a private school, one class no longer wanted me as their teacher when they found out. I have been spat on at Pride events for holding a flag. The Pride in Cracow was actually life threatening – I had to run for my life." He was a particularly effeminate man; most of the hardcore activists were. This may be the 'hostile bravado' that Goffman described, or it may follow that those who are 'most gay' are also the most stigmatized and so choose to become activists. This is evidence of the 'self-perpetuating' nature of stigma as described in the theory section above.

It is often the role of the professional to become a presentation of the stigmatized group. There are two reasons for this: firstly, so that he may represent his kind in society through interaction with normals. Secondly, a presentation is important for the in-group, in that the professional becomes a role model (deliberately or not) and sets the tone of what conduct is acceptable or not and how to deal with anticipated problem:

“...[the stigmatized individual] will make some effort to find a way out of his

dilemma, if only to find a doctrine which makes consistent sense out of his situation. In contemporary society, this means that the individual will not only attempt to hammer out such a code, but that, as already suggestions, professionals will help out – sometimes in the guise of telling their life story or of telling how they handled a difficult situation.” (Ibid:133).

The activists in Warsaw were very much a professional representation of their kind to both the out-group and in-group. The leader of the organisation was well-known by both politicians and media: visibility seemed to be one of the most important methods of combating negative attitudes. Indeed, one of the earlier actions of the organisation was a nation-wide poster campaign of two men or women holding hands with the words “Let Them See Us” written underneath. The leader was frequently interviewed by more liberal papers, was often on television and has appeared in various movies on LGBT life in Poland. He has also authored books on the topic, which are well-known in Poland. During Pride House events, he or his partner would often interview the important figures invited or lead discussion panels. He was synonymous with the political movement itself, having both founded it along with some of the other senior activists, and continuing to be at its forefront since.

This has, at times, brought trouble. In recent events, the long-term partner of the leader of the organisation was publicly outed on national television by the Minister of Equality, Elzbieta Radziszewska, during a morning talk show, creating a furore in more liberal press and among activists. In a newspaper interview, he said on his television appearance: “In no other EU country would such a person still hold their post. I do not hide my sexual orientation, but it's my private business. My personal rights have been violated.” (Gazeta Wyborcza 25<sup>th</sup> September 2010<sup>24</sup>). Nearly all the activists at the organisation had experienced homophobia to various degrees, although they were not too willing to share some of their worse experiences. This atmosphere can be nicely summed up with a conversation I had with the leader. Early on, I asked him about levels of homophobia in Poland, stating that I did find the situation too dire as I had previously thought before arrival. In a serious and knowing manner of someone who had been through it, he turned to me and said: “Just wait, you'll see it.”

The professionals – living sometimes precariously in the public and political eye – also provided presentations to the in-group. All the activists at the organisations were well-known, popular and

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<sup>24</sup> Available at:  
[http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily\\_News/2010/09/25/Polish\\_Minister\\_of\\_Equality\\_Accused\\_of\\_Homophobia/](http://www.advocate.com/News/Daily_News/2010/09/25/Polish_Minister_of_Equality_Accused_of_Homophobia/)

respected in the community. Even among those who had only some presence in the movement, the activists were acknowledged as important persons doing important work. In social situations including bars and clubs, they were frequently approached and surrounded by other people, as though they were at the centre of the network. The older activists were often treated as peers by the younger members of the movement and the 'codes of conduct' described by Goffman were visible, albeit in a more professional manner. Telling others how to deal with situations came in the form of legal and psychological help, although listening to each other's problem and providing sympathy was frequent. One of the senior activists, believing to be on a date, was in fact used as a sounding board for a younger gay man's problems. Expressing disappointment at this to me later, he nevertheless sat with the younger man and listened to his problems. The 'life stories' described by Goffman were frequent: people were all too willing to share their experiences, opinions on society and their current situation. Car rides became an opportunity to listen to people's stories: one activist, a lesbian, spent the good part of half a day telling me about her experiences – both coming out and sexual – in excruciating detail.

## 5.2 The reduction of stigma

Activists attempt to change society by expanding the definition of 'normal'. They gain ground on the socio-political landscape by increasing their symbolic capital. Eventually, they will have enough symbolic capital to 'cash in' for economic or political concessions: the case of security during Pride marches mentioned below, illustrates this. Sometimes the concessions gained can increase symbolic capital. The European Court of Justice's (ECJ) involvement in certain human rights abuses in Poland is an achievement of accumulation of symbolic capital, but will also contribute to further accumulation. By demonstrating that an international body such as the ECJ is fighting alongside the movement, the activists gain further prestige. The notion of symbolic capital can be summed up as follows:

“By contrast, for those who, like the professionals, live on the sale of cultural services to a clientele, the accumulation of economic capital merges with the accumulation of symbolic, that is, with the acquisition of a reputation for competence an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as local or national *notable*.” (Bourdieu 2008:291, author's emphasis).

A case and point example of this would be the Pride marches of 2005/6 in Poland. In November 2005, a ban was placed on the Equality March in the city of Poznań. Regardless, a number of

activists assembled, only to be harassed by members of right-wing groups. 65 people were arrested, most of whom were LGBT activists. Poznań was only part of a series of bans: parades in Warsaw were banned in 2004 and 2005. Activists who took part despite the rulings were subjected to physical and psychological offence on the day. These political marches, symbolic in themselves but also a show of all LGBT movement symbols, created significant noise and ultimately recognition. As a result, in 2006 the ban was overturned, with Poland's Constitutional Court confirming that a ban was in fact illegal. (Amnesty International 2006:12). Here, through the deployment of political symbols, the activists garnered enough recognition to be able to achieve a different ruling concerning their Pride marches.

Since these marches, more people have been harassed. In 2006, a Tolerance March in Cracow was particularly violent. The determination of the movement to continue with these rallies has secured more concessions: adequate police protection is now given to the marches. The Euro Pride event had a very large number of police assigned. The entire march was protected by a column of police on either side. At one point, a large number of skinheads<sup>25</sup> had to be surrounded by officers. They wore scarves over their faces and showed their middle fingers to the parade. The layer of police surrounding them was over three people deep.

As the activists gain more political and economic ground, their presence and prestige grows. They become a more honoured part of the social landscape, rather than a blight. In time, felt stigma is reduced. This is achieved through what Schwimmer describes as direct and symbolic conflict: on the one hand they increase their own prestige through pre-established systems. They act as a political group, hold rallies and fly flags. On the other, they compete with the pre-established symbolic system by promoting their own values: the gay community emphasises its attitude toward sex as greater than that of more conservative society's. Both methods, fighting within the pre-existing system of honour while also trying to overthrow it, serve to reduce felt stigma in the long-term.

To do this, the movement uses political symbols: flags, the Pride march, sex and others are used in a combination of strategies, as described by Harrison. Sex is used through a complex set of symbols, and while it is abstract, it is perhaps one of the most defining political statements of the entire movement: traditional attitudes and liberal attitudes are constantly conflicting for superiority, with their ranking according to the criteria of 'normalcy'.

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<sup>25</sup> Skinhead subculture holds right-wing views towards race and homosexuality. For more on skinhead culture, see Gelder and Thornton 1997.



### 5.3 Flags

The most obvious symbol deployed by the movement was the rainbow flag. During the week leading up to the Pride march and the event itself, this totem was visible everywhere. The flag is arguably the most notorious symbol of the LGBT movement and depicts a classic example of symbolic conflict.

The flag originated in California in 1978 and was used in the Gay Freedom Pride Parade on 25<sup>th</sup> June of the same year. It was the work of artist Gilbert Baker, who assigned meaning to the then eight colours used in the design:

Hot pink : Sexuality  
Red : Life  
Orange : Healing  
Yellow : Sunlight  
Green : Nature  
Turquoise : Magic/art  
Indigo/blue : Serenity/harmony  
Violet : Spirit

The flag then became a main symbol of the LGBT movement after the assassination of openly gay San Francisco City Supervisor Harvey Milk in November of the same year. Due to the unavailability of hot pink coloured fabric and the problems associated with an odd number of stripes (the middle colour would be concealed when hung vertically from lampposts), the flag then became the six coloured version known today. This is an example of an innovation contest, where a symbol is created in a pre-existing category (that of flags, in this case). The birth of the rainbow flag allowed the LGBT movement to be on a similar level to other political groups.

The flag is now iconic of gay pride. It is used extensively in nearly all Pride marches and often is used as a marker of gay friendly places or businesses. In more open societies, the flag will hang outside bars, cafes, shops and other places to signify that gay clientele are welcome or that the establishment specifically caters for the LGBT community. In a political sense, the flag is a show of LGBT identity and solidarity and is used world over by movements. The flag itself is used at political demonstrations while the colours feature in a variety of other gay symbols (for example, two classic male gender symbols) or on t-shirts, necklaces and other everyday items.

For the Polish LGBT movement, which is heavily political, the flag has featured prominently. It has had an expressive dimension erring on the side of serious political statement, rather than a flamboyant show of identity. During the actual event itself, the conflict over this symbol was at times direct and violent. Examining these instances and the general contest of flags will offer insight into symbolic conflict and the political action of the LGBT movement's attempt to change society's perception of 'normality'.

Harrison sites ethnographic accounts of the 'fighting companies' among the Fante of Ghana. (Adler and Barnard 1992 in: Harrison 1995:256). These companies deploy a wide range of symbols in valuation contests, often parading around in rivalry in town: "Its flag is the central focus of its honour... At festivals, company members display the flag on their houses... Most flags make references in their iconography to Fante proverbs, in such a way as to glorify the company and to disparage its rivals." (Ibid:256). In many ways, the movement's use of the rainbow flag is the same. During the Pride festival, the flag was the central symbol of the LGBT community: it hung over Pride House, was on every t-shirt, badge, booklet, website and piece of information. The emblem was so venerated it was arguably a totem for the movement.

According to valuation contest theory, there are two ways in which a symbol may increase its rank (according to a criterion such as prestige or legitimacy): through positive tactics or negative tactics. The first is the promotion of one's own symbols through displays, rituals and boasts. An example of a valuation contest is the LGBT movement's display and reverence of the rainbow flag. Seen as more than just a set of colours, the flag was a symbol of past struggle and solidarity. Its own history and use at landmark events, such as the Stonewall Riots, imbued the emblem with symbolic importance. When marching, activists would cover themselves in a large rainbow flag. People on floats handed out miniature flags to passers-by and spectators. Stickers were also dispensed. Some activists marched while carrying very large rainbow flags, similar to military parades. There was a particularly large flag in one section of the march. It was so big that it had to be carried by at least 20 people, who walked underneath it and held it up like a canvas roof.

During the Pride House event, a right wing group associated with Tradition, Family, and Property (TFP)<sup>26</sup>, an American organisation that concerns itself with the supposed moral crisis affecting Christian (specifically Roman Catholic) civilisation, began to protest over the road. They held many banners and flags, but the main one was a large red flag with "Tradycja, Rodzina, Własność"

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<sup>26</sup> See: <http://www.tfp.org>

(Tradition, Family, and Property) on it, written in gold. The fabric was of high quality and depicted a large, roaring lion, the symbol of TFP. According to the TFP website: “It symbolizes our ideological fight for the principles of tradition, family and property. The lion is a symbol of the cardinal virtue of fortitude. The gold symbolizes the nobility of our cause, and the cross on the lion's chest is the sign of Christendom. The red background of the standard stands for dedication.”<sup>27</sup> Speaking into megaphones, dressed in smart suits, the protestors handed out leaflets on the road opposite to Pride House to those passing by. Other, smaller banners read: “Stop Homoseksualnej Propagandzie” (Stop Homosexual Propaganda).

The reaction of the activists working at Pride House was to immediately go out onto the street and confront the protestors. In an attempt to compete with the protestors' use of large, visual banners, the activists took a large rainbow flag with them, held by at least two to three people. Many stood in front of the protestors and took photos while holding their flags. The activists, increasing in numbers, then found a megaphone too and a sort of 'face-off' occurred, where both groups stood in front of one another and spoke into megaphones while holding and waving their flags. This kind of contest is similar to those of the Fante of Ghana, where “...exchanges of visual, boasts, insults, challenges and provocations through which rival companies compete for status” occur. (Ibid:257). Central to the exchanges in the example however, was the flying of flags, the rainbow emblem versus the banner of Tradition, Family, and Property. They were the central symbol, and in this case the prestige of each was central to the competition, with each group – under their banner – attempting to create more noise and pomp than the other.

The negative tactic involves diminishing the status of the opposing group's symbol: “The negative tactics include the burning of flags, the desecration of tombs, or other sorts of verbal or physical attacks on the prestige, sanctity, or legitimacy of the symbols of a rival group.” (Ibid:258). Negative tactics during Pride involved the destruction of the large rainbow flag hanging outside Pride House on two occasions. Both times it was ripped down and disposed of, and the response of the activists was simply to fly another flag.

Propriety contests over flags also occurred during the week-long Pride event, most notably at the march itself. “In a propriety contest, the contestants agree on the prestige of the symbols but dispute their ownership.” (Ibid:259). This occurred with the Polish flag, arguably the most important symbol of nationality. Both sides attempted to lay claim to the idea of 'Polishness' – the movement believed itself to be a part of Poland, one that could not be subdued any longer. They identified

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.tfp.org/tfp-home/frontpage/frequently-asked-questions.html#2>

themselves with the 'new' Poland, one that was heading towards democracy, further integration into Europe and liberal values. On the other hand, the conservative parts of society and in many cases, the politicians, saw Poland as an island of 'normalcy' among European liberalness and immorality. The idealisation of the Polish family, the church and a strong sense of gender roles characterised these opinions. Symbolising both these 'Polands', the flag was used during the Pride march by both sides.

Many of the floats in the Pride parade were adorned with Polish flags alongside the rainbow flag. Flying side-by-side, the activists were claiming the LGBT community's place in Poland. Some carried large Polish flags while marching on the ground, similar to a nationalist parade. Many home-made banners, flags and signs made reference to Poland too: one depicted a large white and red heart (Polish colours) and the word "Polska" (Poland) written in similarly affectionate font. White and red balloons were visible throughout the entire column. A drag queen, on the organisation's float, was dressed in Polish colours. With feathers, pearls, a silk white dress, boas, the outfit was a mixture of the colours of the flag.

While many marched with the national flag or used the colours on signs and t-shirts, other symbols of Polishness were to be found. A good example of this was one of the senior activists in the organisation: he wore a home-made, white t-shirt that had the words "Gej, Ateista, Feminista, Polak" (Gay, Atheist, Feminist, Polish) written on the front in big black letters. The word 'Polak' was written in thick red, resembling the flag. There could be no clearer attempt to highlight oneself as both gay *and* Polish. Elsewhere, one of the marchers wore a traditional Krakowiak outfit: a thick blue jacket adorned with red and gold. A black and red hat is worn with a long feather protruding from it, and leather boots complete the outfit. This costume of Cracow – the town considered the cultural capital of Poland – is a symbol of tradition and royalty. The marcher wearing it did not have trousers, sexing it up slightly. This example shows the use of symbols of quintessential Polishness.

On the side of the protestors, there were many signs referring to Poland too. Many of the right-wing demonstrators who wore scarves around their faces and were dressed in black also waved large Polish flags. One of the first counter-movements, under a flag that read: "Ruch Suwerenność Narodu Polskiego"<sup>28</sup> (Movement for the Sovereignty of the Polish Nation), disrupted the parade near the beginning, halting its movement for around an hour. This flag had a large Polish eagle (white on red) on one side, and a picture of Jesus on the other. The movement is an extreme right-wing group who oppose many aspects of Western European life and believe that Polish

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<sup>28</sup> For more information, see: <http://suwerennosc.blogspot.com/>

independence has once again be lost. They claim to align themselves with the “real” Poland.

Many of the protestors standing alongside the parade were from religious groups too. At one point, a priest, speaking into a megaphone, sprinkled holy water on our float. Pictures of Jesus were held up, big and small. One large crucifix was held in the air: on it were thin ribbons in the colours of the Polish flag.

This contest over the Polish flag is what Harrison would describe as a proprietary contest, which “takes the form of a struggle for the monopoly or control of some important collective symbol or symbols... A precondition of a proprietary contest is a consensus among the rivals as to the prestige value of the symbolic property for which they are competing.” (Ibid:258). There is a consensus in the conflict for LGBT rights over the prestige of the set of symbols relating to Poland. Nationalistic sentiment and identity are especially important for the country, which is arguably seeking identity post-communism. The political show of national pride by the LGBT movement is an attempt to secure greater legitimacy. It also underlines that the gay rights movement is not a product of Western influence or demoralisation, but rather something that is being born out of Poland. This is an important political move as identification with a foreign nation (or set of values) might further alienate the LGBT community. Whichever side has greater control over the symbols related to Polishness, has a better vantage point.

Another point illustrates this well: during 'Queer Studies', a course educating people about gay history, culture and identity that I attended while working at KPH, the teacher would often take a critical stance towards using too much English terminology. The phrase 'coming out' provided a good example: it is esoteric for Polish people in that many would not understand it, and so it creates a sense of estrangement. He asked if there was not a better phrase in Polish, something non-homosexual people could understand better. The attempt to make homosexuality congruent with being Polish is on the political agenda of the movement, and language and symbols help do this.

#### 5.4 Pride

A Pride march is the largest political statement of the LGBT community. In more liberal countries, it has become a commercial event that draws in significant crowds. As a yearly event, this ritual is often seen as a time of celebration and there is a hedonistic atmosphere: “Ritual is a motor activity that involves its participants symbolically in a common enterprise, calling their attention to their relatedness and joint interests in a compelling way. It thereby promotes conformity and evokes satisfaction and joy in conformity.” (Edelman 1985:16). The march is symbolic itself, but also a

prime opportunity to display other political symbols: “[V]aluation contests pervade all that one normally thinks of as political theatre; that is, political factionalism manifested in expressive events such as parades, marches, rallies and demonstrations. Positive tactics... encompass all forms of group self-aggrandizement through triumphal displays of collective symbols.” (Harrison 1995:291). The Pride march is certainly a triumphal display: it is loud, coloured and at times debaucherous. It is also a symbol of human rights: the freedom to assemble, to free speech, to self-determination.

By continuing to march despite resistance, the Polish movement has secured more and more political ground and concessions. What was once banned and harassed is now fully legal and protected by police. This was achieved through accumulation of symbolic capital. It was also a form of direct competition, however.

### 5.5 Sobriety

The sobriety found at the Warsaw Pride event is important. It illustrates what Schwimmer calls direct competition rather than symbolic competition. Rather than upholding the LGBT's somewhat stereotyped culture of hedonism and consumption, the organisers of the march urged for decorum during the day. Knowing that authorities would be watching and that the Pride had secured protection by police, the LGBT community chose to adopt the values of the wider conservative society in order to demonstrate that they are serious and can hold a political event as orderly as a religious or political rally elsewhere. In this sense, the movement decided to forego its own value system (liberalism and hedonism) to directly compete using the criteria of straight society. This is direct competition.

The evident sexuality throughout the parade, as illustrated below, is an instance of 'symbolic competition': whereby the value system of the gay community (one of sexual liberty and openness) is *not congruent* with that of the straight community (traditionalism in family and sex) and is deployed in an effort to further an opposition ideology.

To return to the sobriety of the Pride event: Schwimmer, in his description of a Sun Dance festival of Canadian First Nation people, notes that the objective of keeping the event sober and conforming to standards was: “to demonstrate to the sceptics of White Southern Alberta that the Indians can run a large public function at least as well as they can, even if White criteria are applied.” (1972:144). While there are, of course, significant differences between an indigenous ethnic group and a LGBT movement, there are parallels to be drawn. Both groups are attempting to achieve political and economic concessions through increasing their symbolic capital. They are both stigmatised, subject

to stereotype and ignorance, and yet attempting to achieve recognition on the social landscape. The use of complex sets of symbols and value systems are paramount in both efforts.

At the Pride, alcohol was not drunk throughout the day. Only at the end were a few champagne bottles opened as a mark of success, and even these were not drunk but sprayed over the activists on the float. No problems of alcohol or drug abuse were recorded by the police at the end of the march. The event felt incredibly political, where other Prides are more of a celebration of gay lifestyle of which the consumption of alcohol, narcotics and general 'partying' are stereotypically central. Many of the participants were of an older generation and were marching for a particular cause, for example same-sex marriage. The leader of the organisation, arguably the most important man for gay rights in Poland, was dressed particularly smart in a white shirt and black trousers. Nevertheless, certain parts of the parade were more flamboyant and in line with the value system of the gay community. Sexuality in the Pride march is discussed below. It is important to note however, that even here sobriety was observed and nothing *too* extreme was evident. Only the bravest few or those dancing on the loudest floats displayed a level of nudity.

Here then, the Pride event was carried out by the criteria of the dominant society: it did not dissolve into 'an orgy' on the streets or display too much of what many in conservative Poland would call 'perversion'. This is an example of direct, rather than symbolic, competition. In an attempt to increase their own recognition and prestige, the LGBT movement's parade was done on the terms of the dominant society. This is not dissimilar to Harrison's notion of innovation contents, where one group creates a symbol in a predefined category. The activists marched, and sober. Marches and rallies have long been a political action; the LGBT community's adoption of this practice, and the decorum expected throughout, can be seen as an innovation contest.

Generally speaking however, the conflict over gay rights and recognition of 'alternative' lifestyles is generally one of symbolic conflict, that is, the value system of the gay community – finding it acceptable that two men may fall in love yet maintain an open relationship<sup>29</sup> – is relatively incomprehensible with that of conservative society. In this instance, the two systems must compete: “the opposition ideology may pronounce the dominant value system to be wrong and pernicious; or mean and second-rate. In that case it asserts the superiority of the minority, although by worldly standards it may be categorized as an oppressed and exploited minority. We may then speak of symbolic competition...” (Ibid:123).

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<sup>29</sup> An open relationship is one where the partners have decided to be together, but sexual encounters with other people are permitted.

## 5.6 Sexuality as a symbol

A liberal and open attitude toward sex is often associated with homosexuality. Though by no means the rule (many gay men successfully maintain monogamous relationships, of course), society and the homosexual community itself frequently view the gay man as promiscuous, sexually active and adventurous. As noted earlier, part of the gay flag itself represents sexuality. This is found in the pink stripe, which was later removed due to lack of material. In Warsaw, a complex set of symbols was used to increase recognition of these different sexual mores; generally speaking however, the promotion of liberal sexual values was an attempt to overthrow the pre-existing value system, which is less open in sexual behaviour. This is what Schwimmer would call symbolic competition. These liberal attitudes directly oppose the more traditional parts of Polish society and sex has become a prime symbol<sup>30</sup> in a conflict over larger values of modernism versus traditionalism; for the conservatives in Polish society, homosexuals are symbolic of modernism:

“...these changes have also contributed to the formation of reactionary social forces aimed at reinforcing the pre-eminence of traditional morality and culture and at 'disciplining' upstart and 'undeserving' emergent social groups. One might say that the organization of the contemporary gay and lesbian worlds, as well as its opposition, are inextricably associated with modernity.” (Adam 1998:397).

Sex has been important to social movements in the past. Bourdieu notes the differences in attitude toward sex between the new and old bourgeoisie, in his research on France: “It is opposed on almost every point to the repressive morality of the declining petite bourgeoisie whose religious or political conservatism often centres on moral indignation at moral disorder, and especially the disorder of sexual mores...” (Bourdieu 2008:367). The counterculture of the 1960s also emphasised more liberal sexual mores, and the subsequent sexual revolution resulted in the relaxation of laws over abortion, pornography and contraception. For Poland, sex is the symbol of gay identity and pride, in the conflict of conservatism versus progression: “To conservatives... homosexuality represents all that is wrong with modernity, all that is “unclean” and requires “cleansing.” To the progressive... the Equality marches have come to symbolize the need to defend free speech, freedom of assembly, the right to privacy.” (Graff 2006:445).

Sexual attraction to a member of the same sex is what defines a homosexual. This is what differentiates him from 'normals' in society. As such, the activist flaunts this difference – in this case

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<sup>30</sup> As discussed in the theory chapter, a symbol can be a concept, rather than physical item.



his sexuality: “[The stigmatized] may also flaunt some stereotypical attributes which he could easily cover; thus, one finds second generation Jews who aggressively interlard their speech with Jewish idiom and accent, and the military gay who are particularly swish in public place.” (Goffman 1990:138). To be 'in tune' with one's sexuality is seen as something particularly modern and the property of the gay community. On frequent occasions the activists at the organisation would emphasise the prominence of their attitude towards sexuality over those of straight people. When discussing why homophobia was so prevalent, one activist said: “These men and women are frustrated with their lives. They got trapped in something early, have had only one or two girlfriends and so they are jealous of gay men who can have sex when they want.” At another time, when dropping-off a motor used to power a stereo-system on one of the floats, one of the senior activists at the organisation and I got caught in rush-hour traffic. Looking around at the people driving back from work, he said: “I can't imagine a worse life, working everyday in the same place, eating the same food. I love my life of different men and doing different things and working on something new everyday.” Multiple sexual partners here was the main difference from 'ordinary' Polish people.

To be in a monogamous relationship or married from an early age was seen as a symbol of the old-age, of 'boring' traditionalism. Although many of the activists were fighting for the right to same-sex marriage or unions, a surprising number had ambiguous or even negative attitudes towards the ritual. In a conversation with the president of the organisation during one of our many car rides to and from Pride House and the office, he made his position on marriage clear. In a tone of mock-disgust, he firmly stated he would never get married. When I asked why, he simply said: “Do you think I'm stupid? I'm not that stupid.” Dislike of old attitudes toward sex was discussed by Bourdieu, who emphasised the disdain felt for those who have a low acceptance of sex: “These 'barbarians' who have not caught up with the 'sexual revolution' are once again the victims of a universalization of the definition of competence not accompanied by a universalization of the conditions of acquisition.” (Bourdieu 2008:368). Goffman's theory is relevant too here: he argued that stigmatized people will have a dislike of 'normals'; he argued that the process of stigmatization may make the stigmatized reassess the limits of 'normals' and their society.

During the Pride march, the most politically expressive event of the movement, liberalism towards sex and sexuality was evident. It must be said however, that when compared to other Pride events in Western and Northern Europe, this march was more conservative.

Nevertheless, semi-nudity was frequent: some men wore revealing clothing or almost none at all. On the floats with loud music and dancing, most men had their shirts off. One participant, a friend,

marched with only rainbow coloured Speedos on and nothing else. Worried about the reaction from protestors, he stuck to the middle of the parade. One lesbian carried a sign saying 'Dildo Rulez' – presumably in order to offend the right-wing protestors and religious groups who attempted to disrupt the parade at several points.

The contest over sexuality, ranked by what is considered 'normal', was made evident through some of the symbols used by the protestors too. Banners and signs particularly targeted homosexual acts, smearing them as dirty, perverted and unnatural. A popular banner used by right-wing protestors, both at the Pride march in 2010 and in others, was a cartoon depiction of two men in the act of anal sex in a circle that was crossed out. These were held by many of those attempting to disrupt the march; some appeared as very large banners. Another banner read: “1410: victory over the first union. 2010: beginning of the end of euro-sodom.” (1410 zwycięstwo nad pierwszą unią, 2010 początek końca eurosodomy). The connection between Europe and sodomy here illustrates that the European Union is seen as a liberal place of decaying morality. It also shows that 'sodomy' (anal sex) is used as a symbol of this decay. By placing negative value on the act of anal sex, the protestors were attempting to diminish the prestige of the gay activists, who were fighting for the acceptance of their sexual practices.

Research on homophobia has shown that the image of a gay man as weak and passive (in terms of sexual activity), is prominent in masculine circles<sup>31</sup>. (See: Adam 1998, Anderson 2002). This preoccupation with the passivity of gay men, in that they receive in sex like the female, is a strong factor in the dislike of homosexual men. The banners of the right-wing groups at the Pride march, who seek a return to traditional Poland, effectively illustrate this. Similar sexual metaphors were used by religious discourse in Iran to conceptualise processes of modernisation. Thaiss argues that the use of religious conceptions allowed people to understand modernization, an ungraspable process, by providing “a convenient paradigm or model for explaining placing in a logical framework aspects of existence which people find incomprehensible.” (1978:9). The situation is similar in Poland: rapid 'modernization', or at least democratization after a period of communism, is difficult to grasp for some. They therefore use the 'homosexual' as a folk devil<sup>32</sup> and as a metaphor for all that has become wrong with society. Thaiss shows how religious metaphors depict Muslim men as becoming weak, as allowing for change, through the concept of passivity:

“...the sexual imagery of being dominated “denotes the incapacity of the victim to

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<sup>31</sup> See: Adam 1998, Anderson 2002.

<sup>32</sup> See: Cohen 2002.

defend himself to prevent others from dominating him, hence meaning the latter is effeminate and lacks masculinity” (Zahra 1970). This is perhaps an even greater shame for it has implications of sexual passivity, of being dominated and penetrated and therefore has homosexual overtones.” (Ibid:6).

While the movement attempts to increase acceptance of their sexual lifestyle through the use of various symbols, the traditionalist protestors attempt to devalue this by using graphic banners that reference the passivity of gay men and therefore the feared passivity of the entire country at large. The degrading of anal sex has become a political symbol for right-wing groups, despite the fact that it is a practice available to heterosexual couples as well.

Not all attempts for recognition of sexuality involved such explicitness. Many of the events at Pride House were about sex, yet from an 'acceptable' viewpoint (as would be to 'normals'), such as art, film or education. Workshops such as 'How to talk to youth about safer sex', discussions on 'The Situation of Gay Art in Poland' (and how it differs from homoerotic art) and the screening of various movies about sex (such as *Einstein of Sex*) all furthered the emphasis on sex and the political attempt to change attitudes towards it.

An open attitude toward sex is also present in many of the activities of the organisation, outside of the Pride event. As noted earlier, stigmatized groups are often repositories of information: they house an a lot of intellectual and cultural information regarding the stigmatized attribute available to the members of the group: “If they don't read books on the situation of persons like themselves, they at least read magazines and see movies; and where they don't do these, then they listen to local, vocal associates. An intellectually worked-up version of their point of view is thus available to most stigmatized persons.” (Goffman 1990:38). At the organisation, this was certainly true: books, magazines, and movies were available. There was a library of such materials, including publications on homosexuality, the situation in Poland, newspaper clippings, DVDs, and theses. One day, I was asked to organise the library. Disordered and long overdue, this was no easy feat. The first day was spent sorting out pornographic magazines<sup>33</sup>, which took up a considerable amount of room. Confused as to why these were being stored, I asked the leader, who simply stated that: “they were an integral part of gay culture.” He then went on to explain that one of the more active volunteers at the organisation had appeared in a magazine himself, posing nude. These magazines also provided listings, advertisements, stories, articles and more than would have been useful to an underground LGBT community.

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<sup>33</sup> Mainly copies of 'Nowy Men' (New Men).

A pornographic magazine may not seem like a document worth keeping, yet for the activists they were a symbol that they highly valued. As a representation of their sexuality – or as the leader told me, 'culture' – their existence in the past created visibility, community, and recognition of a gay movement in Poland. To award them so much prestige as to catalogue them correctly and store them in an academic library highlights that they are a focal symbol of identity. They were valued positively as in Harrison's valuation contest. Yet the creation of such magazines was also an innovation contest: there were no doubt many magazines for heterosexual men, depicting naked woman and so forth. By creating a similar magazine for the homosexual man, they were further delineating the gay identity and bringing the movement on par with heterosexual society. “An innovation contest may generate a richly diverse profusion of group identity-markers. But this is a diversity within a highly specific genre of symbolism common to all the participating groups.” (Harrison 1995:262).

The political symbolism of sex is analysable in the framework of Harrison's four types of symbolic conflict; it can also be understood through Schwimmer's concepts too. Sex in the LGBT movement is part of his concept of an opposition ideology:

“An opposition ideology presupposes a relation of negative reciprocity holding between a dominant and subordinated group. The subordinated group is under strong pressure to accept the value system of the dominant one. This becomes distressing under conditions where the subordinated group considers they are not getting a fair deal in terms of their own system of values.” (Schwimmer 1972:120).

Although Schwimmer's work on opposition ideologies focused on the Native American group, his conclusions are nevertheless relevant here: “Being placed in this disadvantaged position, somewhat separate from the dominant group, it forms symbols of in-group solidarity and claims to have a “separate culture”.” (Ibid:122). Although Schwimmer did not discuss stigma, his ideas on opposition ideologies are similar to Goffman's theory of stigma. Both highlight in-group 'culture' and the creation of ideologies, although in Goffman's work this is a more a sort of 'code of conduct', whereby the stigmatized have noted methods of interacting with normals. Nevertheless, a different set of values does form among the stigmatized, which is not congruent with that of the normals: “[I]nsulated by his alienation, protected by identity beliefs of his own, he [the stigmatized] feels that he is a full-fledged normal human being, and that we [the normals] are the ones who are not quite human.” (Goffman 1990:17).

This opposition ideology of the LGBT movement, who held values not congruent with those of mainstream society, was symbolised in part through sex. Subsequently, there was a show of sex in both the political march and the behaviour and attitude of the activists. Some activists, however, concentrated more on attempting to underline that LGBT persons were just like straight people. Using pre-established values from normals, such as the strength of Polish family and desire to marry, they campaigned by emphasising how they too wanted to be 'normal' and aspired to these traditional rituals and norms. The resistance of the movement then, was a mixture of direct and symbolic competition. Some saw themselves as 'just like any other Polish person', and directly competed. Others formed an opposition ideology, in that the values they held were different from that of mainstream society: a liberal attitude toward sex, gender definitions and relationships. These were symbolised through a variety of ways: sex was on display at the Parade, it was a part of the historic movement through magazines and other artefacts, it was also in the attitudes and beliefs of the activists and was promoted as the defining characteristic of the LGBT movement. (Although this is also in part due to the nature of homosexuality, in that the action of men having sex with men is what causes someone to be labelled 'gay'. Therefore the movement will of course be centred around trying to define this sexual action as also 'normal').

#### 5.7 Maintenance of liberal sexuality within in-group

A further point requires clarification: namely, how the group continues its symbolic action amongst itself. Although the typology is on a different level (Harrison spoke of inter-ethnic conflicts in this example), the point is nevertheless the same: that different groups maintain their rituals and make them a focus of their identity and contention. "One variety of inter-ethnic valuation contest is a process that Schwimmer (1972) calls 'symbolic competition': the maintenance of distinctive rituals by disadvantaged ethnic minorities in which they assert, symbolically, the superiority of their own culture, values or way of life to those of the dominant majority." (Harrison 1995:257). Using this as a point of departure, it is arguable that the gay community, in particular the activists who have a heightened sense of gay identity, maintain their own distinctive rituals or culture – in this case lax sexuality – to symbolically compete with the dominant group, i.e. straight society. Of course this is an over-generalisation of the gay community: similar to an ethnic group in conflict with another, there are always many apart. It would be hazardous to say all the activists were sexually promiscuous people, yet the group did have a particular bond with their sexuality and this was evident in both their behaviour and the culture.

The liberal sexuality of Polish LGBT activists was visibly maintained within the in-group. 'Open'

relationships, promiscuity, 'dark rooms' in clubs and bars (rooms specifically set aside for sex) and a general lax attitude toward the sexual activity of others were just some examples of the attitudes of the community. In social settings and in the office, sexual jokes, innuendos, enquires into preferred sexual practice and so forth were common. One of my informants had a somewhat obvious attraction to me, which he had no problem vocalising when alone or in a group. He would often tease me about taking me out for a date and on occasion asked what it would take to sleep with me. Another informant – a particularly sexually-charged young man – casually asked me to his apartment for sex sometime. When I expressed disdain at his bluntness, our friends did not see any problem. While at a bar with some of my friends from the office, three of the chief activists poked at fun at me for wanting a monogamous relationship. This became a frequent joke against me: the fact that I, studying in Tromsø – which was considered a small, rural place – believed in old, outdated values. Those similar to me in opinion often felt the need to justify their desire to be in a monogamous relationship too.

The leader of the organisation, a man in his mid-30s who was in a long-term and open relationship, had recently had a love affair with a boy of around 17. He also participated in casual sex with others and spoke a few times of visiting baths – places where men go for casual sex with strangers. Conversation with him frequently centred around sex, whether people were 'active' or 'passive' (roles in anal sex), who had slept with whom, and so on. When I was meeting someone new he would often interrupt the conversation to tell me about the other person's sexual or relationship preferences. This sexual discourse and activity maintained the identity of the group. The activists frequently cited their sexual way of life as superior in some respect. They rallied behind it as a symbolic concept with which to compete against the majority's values: similar to Schwimmer's Native Americans who saw the physical strength of 'Indianness' an important symbol when competing with that of the majority. The sexuality of the conservative Polish people was something to laugh at or degrade. Bourdieu, in his work *Distinction*, highlights the role of sex in the new elite: "...the new ethical avant-garde urges a morality of pleasure as a duty. This doctrine makes it a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to 'have fun'... The fear of not getting enough pleasure... is combined with the search for self-expression and 'bodily expression'..." (Bourdieu 2008:367). As the gay activists were intrinsically linked to 'modernity' – democracy, the EU, high tolerance for difference – they were similar to this new elite. Finally, this maintenance of identity fits well with Goffman's theory of the stigmatized and self-organisation. Both theories highlight the creation of own culture and acceptable 'conduct'.

## 5.8 Images of Sweden

Sweden had a noticeable presence throughout the entire Pride event. This was seen mostly through the invitation of Swedish officials as guest speakers at Pride House, although during the march itself there was a noticeable accumulation of Swedish flags. For the activists, Sweden was seen as, and used, as a symbol of liberalness and progress. Having held the 2008 Euro Pride in Stockholm, Sweden was viewed as a 'haven' for gays and lesbians, with its progressive laws and inclusion of LGBT rights into its constitution<sup>34</sup>.

Two important panel discussions had Swedish guests. These were some of the most well-attended and publicised. The first guest was Katri Linna, the Swedish Equality Ombudsperson, who sat on the panel discussion titled 'European Equality Bodies Defending LGBT Rights.' Member of European Parliament Christofer Fjellner (Swedish Moderate Party) was the only guest at the panel discussion 'Why conservatives should be sensitive to LGBT rights?' These events were in-part organised by the Swedish Embassy. The Ambassador attended the events and as a result wine and food was served afterward, a courtesy extended to very few other events. The Swedish Embassy also invited KPH to attend drinks at their building. The coordinator of Pride House and I attended. During speeches and mingling at this event, we heard much on Swedish-KPH cooperation and how pleased the embassy was to lend a helping hand. Finally, a Swedish-Polish film director showcased her film entitled *Moral Revolution* about previous Pride events in Poland. These events, guests and close cooperation with the Swedish Embassy gave the country a significant presence during Euro Pride.

Sweden was used a symbol of progression for both the in-group and out-group: to reassure fellow LGBT persons by offering an example of 'paradise', and to show the opposition that a country as economically and internationally successful has 'got it right.'

For the former, Sweden was seen as a sanctuary for LGBT persons. The questions posed to the Swedish politicians at the panel discussions often asked what was still to be done considering the positive attitude to LGBT rights by Swedish people. Fjellner in particular was quick to point out that there *is* still a lot of work to be done in Sweden, and that homophobia is still present. This sentiment was shared by a lot of the Swedish speakers. The movie director said that 'homophobia in Sweden is still there but it's not spoken about. It exists behind closed doors.' The Ombudsperson argued that there was still a lot to do in Sweden for gay rights, and that gender binary it still a problem in Sweden. Nevertheless, for the activists Sweden was an image of acceptance. One of the

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<sup>34</sup> Sweden is currently the only country in the world to include discrimination against sexual orientation in its constitution.

founders of KPH said he came very close to moving to Sweden when times were particularly tough for Polish LGBT persons. He had even learnt some Swedish and had not ruled out moving to Stockholm in the future. From my own personal experience of living in Scandinavia where the laws and situation of gay people are advanced, it is clear to see that the image of Sweden held by the Polish activists was exaggerated. Living as a homosexual in any country is not easy: while laws may protect the gay man, homophobic sentiment continues to exist.

Nevertheless, the frequent citation of Sweden is arguably the deployment of a symbol in the conflict over recognition of the situation LGBT persons in Poland. The prestige of Sweden was felt and the events hosting Swedes were heavily publicised, with more ceremony, media and pomp surrounding them. The extra attention was a politically symbolic move; Polish officials have in the past spoken out against the attendance of foreign officials at LGBT events: “[Wojciech Wierzejski] commented on the possible attendance of politicians from western Europe at the march by saying “they are not serious politicians, but just gays and a couple of baton strikes will deter them from coming again. Gays are cowards by definition”.” (quoted in Amnesty International 2006:7). The Swedish Ambassador's presence was an important show therefore.

At the Pride event, there was a high proportion of Swedish flags. There were groups from Sweden too. At least 10 metres of the march were taken up by a Swedish group, dressed as sailors, who danced with blue and white flags. The high valuation placed on Sweden as a symbol of progress fits well with Harrison's ideas of valuation contests: the country is almost a totem. Furthermore, the help from the embassy was in no doubt an exchange of symbolic capital for economic capital.



## 6. Conclusions

### 6.1 Conclusions

This thesis has demonstrated how LGBT groups in Poland use political symbols as a means of increasing their own position on the socio-political landscape. The main symbol deployed was sex. The values held by members of the LGBT community were not congruent with that of mainstream, more conservative Polish society. For the activists at KPH, sex was frequent, enjoyable and not bound to mores. Promiscuity was the norm (while not the rule) and a blatant show of sexuality and liberalism pervaded nearly all aspects of working and social life.

The LGBT group used this set of values to compete with Polish society. Intimately bound to notions of modernity, liberal attitudes toward sex were offered as an opposing value system. The activists were not just fighting for acceptance of 'their way'; they believed it to be better. Heightened sexuality was a sign of progress, and was used symbolically through Pride House via the strategies described by Harrison. The activists disliked traditional attitudes and the 'straight' people who held them. Goffman's model explains this well too: symbolic conflict aside, activists did not like 'normals' based on past negative interaction. Despite their calls for equality and acceptance, activists were quick to stereotype at times, many holding a dislike for heterosexual men. "Yet he may perceive, usually quite correctly, that what others profess, they do not really 'accept' him and are not ready to make contact with him on 'equal grounds'." (Goffman 1990:18).

Other symbols were important too in the struggle for LGBT equality. The Pride march is an effective tool in the emancipation of homosexuals. It creates significant media attention and attempts to derail the event, before or during, are often met with international condemnation. They dramatically increased the symbolic capital of the activists in Poland, giving the events much needed security. During Pride, rainbow flags were seen everywhere. The sobriety of the event was a form of direct competition: it was a political rally following the pre-established rules of the majority. The gay community did well to keep it so clean and orderly.

These symbols worked in unison in a larger, cohesive effort. The strategies used to deploy them may only be separated for the purpose of analysis, as Harrison notes (1995:266). In reality, these strategies work together in a larger political effort. It is difficult to talk of valuation contests (the prestige placed on pornographic magazines) without discussing innovation contests (the publication of gay magazines itself). These actions increase symbolic capital, which in turn secure concessions. Harrison (and Bourdieu) underline that symbolic capital is another form of economic capital. This

thesis questioned that assumption: must the accumulation of prestige, recognition and honour be intrinsically linked to economic gain and material benefits?

If not, the activists may be deploying symbols to accumulate another fund: “de-stigmatization” or ‘normalcy’. From the campaigns emphasising visibility (“Let Them See Us”) to the emphasis on sex, these political actions could be seen as an effort to ‘normalise’ homosexuality. The actions of the activists increase their funds of ‘normalcy’; they hold rallies and have magazines like ‘normals’; they value their own lifestyle and subculture as do other minorities; they lobby for same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination, to have rights like ‘straight’ society. Deprived of their honour for being different, LGBT movement seek to become normal to regain this prestige. They show that they can be gay and educated, able to hold rallies, be well-organised and brave.

It is well noted that heterosexuals are more likely to have positive attitudes towards homosexuals if they know an openly homosexual person.<sup>35</sup> Can this fact not be taken to the larger level? By creating a familiarity with homosexuality through political actions emphasising visibility, will society not – like the heterosexual person – hold more accepting attitudes? Stigma, therefore, is not only for the individual; it is a collective experience. To stand alone and say that you do not feel stigma, is to ignore society's role in the process. For it is society that places stigma upon an attribute, which causes an internalised feeling of discomfort in the individual: “This is why when we try, even deep inside ourselves, to shake off these fundamental notions, we feel that we are not completely free, that something resists us, inside and outside.” (Durkheim 2001:19). It follows then that the only way to truly remove felt stigma is to attempt to change the society that shames the individual. To rid oneself of stigma therefore, group action is needed.

If ‘normalcy’ can be exchanged for accumulated symbolic capital then it would of course work in unison with the economic concessions gained through symbolic conflict. As Goffman noted, the stigmatized become political in an effort to reduce their own stigma, so the two resources (economic and ‘normalcy’) would go hand-in-hand. The very reason the stigmatized politicize is to remove this stigma and fight discrimination: “The relatively recent flourishing of visible gay communities is largely a result of political and legal struggles against prejudice and discrimination...” (Herek 1991:64).

In the future, Poland will eventually give better rights to its homosexuals. One activist said that same-sex unions were “about 10 years away”. The country will lead in this respect amongst its

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<sup>35</sup> See: Herek 1991.

neighbours. Until then, LGBT activists must continue their fight for visibility and recognition, and ultimately – the fight for their own honour.

## 6.2 Suggestions for further research

Further research is needed on LGBT persons and stigma from a social anthropological perspective. Nearly all study on the topic has come from the discipline of psychology. There is a general lack of research on stigma; Goffman aside, there have been relatively few attempts at providing overarching theories of stigma. His model remains highly respected; other definitions are ambiguous at best.

The 'end-game' of LGBT movements requires further study. Once the LGBT community becomes a permanent fixture on the socio-political sphere and stigma is reduced, what will happen to these movements? This has arguably yet to happen, but research on what happens 'post-stigma' would be an interesting path of enquiry. Do LGBT persons ultimately seek acceptance of difference, or total immersion into society? This is not dissimilar to the same questions raised when looking at Schwimmer's theory – gay society tries to be the same as everyone else by saying it is different. What happens when it has achieved this state however? Will it still claim to be different?

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