ADAPTING TO ADVERSE CONDITIONS:
LGBT COMING OUT STRATEGIES IN UKRAINE

By

Ievgeniia Kharchenko

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisors: Professor Dorit Geva

Professor Violetta Zentai

Budapest, Hungary

2014

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores strategies of coming out of LGBT people in Ukraine, a country where there are adverse and contradictory conditions for people from sexual minority groups. I describe situation in the Ukrainian society as a factor that alters standardized coming out process as a part and a property of homosexual/transgender identity formation. LGBT people living in Kiev were asked about coming out to family, friends and classmates, participation in LGBT community, concomitant circumstances of disclosure and partnership relations. Every block of the interview guide was also dedicated to stages of homosexual/transgender identity formation based on the models of Troiden (1989), Cass (1979) and Carrion & Lock (1997). The research demonstrates that there are three common strategies of coming out which are influenced by Ukrainian context: coming out as a result of moving out, partial coming out, and a 'dual' life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

On April 28, 2014 I was sitting in the office of All-Ukrainian Charitable Organization listening to Anatoliy's story of coming out:

> My friends presented me satin men's briefs in the color of the rainbow. I loved Lolita's songs in childhood. And I sang and danced in these briefs to her songs. At this point my mother came into my room. Music played loudly, so I did not hear that she entered the room. And when there was a pause between songs, my mother said, "I think we need to talk. You look like a man who sleeps with men. I am worried." I replied, "Yes, Mom, I'm gay." She said, "That is offensive. I was raising a son, but a daughter grew up. Well, my daughter, let us go to make pancakes." And then she began to laugh. In our family everyone laughs in critical situations. Then there was a pause in our communication for three weeks: my mother did not want to talk to me. She generally treats me like a sick child. This is the most accurate description. Something on the similarity of "He is our son; therefore we have nowhere to go from him".

> For two months I had been preparing my elder brother to the fact that there are different types of sexual orientation. My brother was a local bandit. Two months later he sat me down and said, "If you're going to say that you are a gay, I would say that you're my brother and I love you no matter what." I replied, "Yes, I'm gay." He jumped up and started yelling "Fagots are in the house. Mom, your son is a fag." My mother flew out of the kitchen and said, "Do not shout! Neighbors will hear." My brother started running around me with the sleeves rolled up and saying, "Who did this to you? Who did this to you? I'll kill him!" I pointed to my mother. She screamed "I have nothing to do with it." I told her, "Wait, this is you who gave birth to me."

This story is important because it clearly shows how adverse are conditions for LGBT people in Ukraine.

An intensive exploration of issues connected with differing types of sexual orientation and sexuality in Ukraine began only in the last decade. However, there are only a few publications which represent the researches on LGBT topics in Ukrainian context. Moreover, the conduct and the creation of originally Ukrainian researches and theories are tangled because of the fact that most of the queer literature is in foreign languages. Therefore, many researchers are largely focused on the translation of the existing foreign resources. In addition, there is no state request for such type of studies; the research on LGBT issues in Ukraine are

mostly done by members of the LGBT organizations that receive funding from foreign grants or are self-financed. As a result, these topics are studied only by a small range of the stakeholders. Even more, since these organizations are only gaining momentum in their work and there is a lack of support from the public authorities, institutions or media existing publications are mainly a general overview of the situation of Ukrainian LGBT and the level of homophobia in society at various levels and in various fields.

Nowadays, there is no focused and detailed information about the properties and strategies of disclosure as LGBT and homosexual/transgender identity formation in terms of the Ukrainian society, except one article by Svitlana Shymko (2012), where the author described characteristics of coming out of children to family, parents to their children, and pretense of being heterosexual by homosexual and bisexual people.

Moreover, the conditions for LGBT people in Ukraine are specific. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the need to transform the communist economy into the capitalist one had a strongly negative influence on the general situation in Ukraine and life chances of the younger generation. In addition, the Church regained its influential position in society and politics and continues to strengthen its power. Furthermore, issues about health and preserving the population of the Ukrainian nation are a matter of a great concern in the society because of the recent gaining of independence by the country. In connection with the high level of two-sided dependency between different generations which is a common phenomenon for most Ukrainian families, and strong propaganda of traditional family model, above mentioned aspects form obstacles for homosexual/transgender identity formation and coming out process within Ukrainian society. Therefore, within this thesis I assume that in terms of specific conditions existing in Ukrainian society LGBT people adapting to adverse conditions reproduce types of coming out as a part of homosexual/transgender identity formation which

differ from models developed by Western studies. Thus, the research question of my thesis is *what are the strategies of coming out caused by the specific situation in Ukrainian society?*

This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first one is dedicated to an overview of the conditions in which Ukrainian LGBT people live, a general description of the phenomenon of coming out and models, characteristics and factors of homosexual/transgender identity formation. Firstly, I describe church and far right anti-gay propaganda, Ukrainian traditional family values, and a level of homophobia in society as processes an phenomena which influence features of coming out and identity formation. Secondly, I make a general overview of what is coming out, how it happens in western societies, and how coming out is connected with moving out. And finally I present three models of homosexual identity formation in connection with concepts of internalized homophobia and ghettoization of LGBT community. In this chapter I show, on the one hand, the specificity of Ukrainian society in terms of LGBT issues, and, on the other, I produce a description of western established theories which are supposed to work for all LGBT cases.

The second chapter provides the results of in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian LGBT people living in Kiev. Using this data I test the above mentioned theories in terms of Ukrainian realities and figure out common strategies of coming out determined by the situation in Ukrainian society with the indication of the type of dependency between different factors and strategies of the disclosure.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1.   Homophobic practices and family forms in the post-Soviet Ukraine

Currently there are no conditions for the normal life for people from sexual minorities in Ukraine. Although Ukraine was one of the first countries of the former Soviet Union which after its collapse in 1991 decriminalized homosexuality, the level of homophobia has increased in recent years. Ukrainians demonstrate an increase in the level of homophobia. For example, in 2002, according to results of poll of public opinion conducted by sociological company "TNS Ukraine", 33.8 % of citizens of Ukraine were against LGBT people to have the same rights as others have, while in 2007 this figure grew to 46.7 % (Kravchuk, Maymulakhin and Zinchenkov 2007). Even more, Gfk group made a sociological survey among Ukrainians who are older than 16 about their attitudes to LGBT people which showed that almost 80 % of Ukrainians indicated that they were against all kinds of relationships between people of the same sex (Kravchuk and Zinchenkov 2014).

In addition, the influence of the church on the state and society has increased so the anti- homosexual campaigns and organizations held by the church have considerable response among the masses. Furthermore, right movements have gained popularity in the last years. One of the main aims of those movements is the health and strength of the nation which is reflected in their actions and campaigns. "Love Against Homosexuality" and its sister project "Together", "Parental Forum of Ukraine", People's Council of Ukraine, Ukrainian Charitable Foundation "Family", "Young Men's Christian Union of Ukraine", and the Embassy of the Blessed Divine Kingdom for All People are some of the most famous among the church and right-wing anti-gay organizations (Yarmanova 2012). In addition, Ukrainian deputies rudely disparage sexual minorities, particularly homosexuals, in their speeches (Martsenyuk 2012). Homosexuality in all above mentioned actions is presented as a threat of the Ukrainian nation.

Another point which influences the public opinion on LGBT issues is the fact that the level of fertility significantly decreased after Ukraine became independent which resulted in the demographic crisis. Perelli-Harris (2008) believes that it has happened because of changes in economy, health care service, social policy of the state and family form.

She writes that it was considered that a woman should give a birth to a child at approximately 20 years old in order to be healthy herself and to have a healthy kid in the Soviet times. Doctors labeled 28-years old women as an "old" for childbearing and intimidated them by the high level of probability that their child will have Down Syndrome. Although it is hard to state that a level of health service is better now in Ukraine, women are less concerned about early childbearing.

Furthermore, Ukraine had one of the most complicated process of economic transformation from communism to capitalism. In between 1991 and 1998 Ukraine did have even a year of increase in economic sphere. In those years Ukrainian GDP reduced by 60 percent, while a level of unemployment grew to 12 percent. The amount of people who cannot afford living standard was about half of the nation in these years. From 1986 to 2003 an inequality was sustainably growing especially for women. Therefore, the emergence of market competition made people to concentrate on career. In addition, because of low level of economy usually both of spouses should work not only in order to have a high level of material security, but even just to survive.

There is also an increasing amount of unregistered marriages and cases when women choose to be alone or to become a single parent. As a result those women cannot afford having a child at a young age. Even more, for different reasons couples choose to conduct child-free life which is easier to maintain because of decriminalization of contraception and abortion (Perelli-Harris 2008).

On the basis of concern about strength of the nation and decline of population a preservation of Ukrainian traditional family values is in the center of anti-homosexual propaganda. A traditional family, according to the above mentioned movements, is one where one of the spouses, a woman, does not work and conducts household and family care while a husband earns money, does not deal with household and children's bringing up, but is a leader of a family.

In addition, at the most recent time LGBT issues in Ukrainian society have been the matter of concern because of confrontation of two sides on the territory of Ukraine: Western developed countries and Russia. Cooperation of Ukraine with West, especially the European Union, leads to spreading the ideas of deepening of LGBT emancipation. At the same time, Russia tries to influence Ukrainians in a way to strengthen homophobia using Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (Kravchuk and Zinchenkov 2014).

Taking into account the fact that there is a demographic crisis in Ukraine which occurred after the independence and, in addition, has fallen into disrepair the concept of cosmopolitanism which was a part of Soviet ideology and was replaced with considering that a national identity is determinant, it can be claimed that the rise of homophobia in the Ukrainian society is associated with anti-gay policies and stereotypes of the Soviet Union, renewal of the Church's role in society and the independence of Ukraine.

This general situation in Ukrainian political and economic sphere influences the process of homosexual/transgender identity formation and disclosure to one's inner circle. That is however also associated with two-sided connectedness between parents and children. In the situation of low level of economy it is hard for young people to start an independent life because of the lack of opportunities to start prospective career or even to support themselves financially especially for those who are from small towns and villages where it is a small

diversity of places to work which are usually occupied by the older generation or employment to which depends entirely on the local social ties. Moreover, the vast majority of young people from small towns and villages cannot afford renting an apartment in big cities without the help of parents. On the other hand, newly created families which are oriented to having children are faced with different problems, for instance, lack of state support and need to spend much money on bringing up, especially on high education; those families therefore invest a great amount of resources in their children and expect to get a significant feedback from them in a future. As a result, alternative sexuality of a child may be considered as an obstacle or even a destruction of parent's expectations.

All the above mentioned characteristics of the situation in Ukrainian society are considered in this thesis as factors that influence the process of coming out. These factors, to my mind, led to the emergence of the alternative forms of the LGBT disclosure determined by the specific Ukrainian environment.

1.2.   Properties and strategies of coming out

Coming out is a process when the LGBT person creates a new personal image in the minds of others by informing them about his/her LGBT identity. There are three groups of people who are audiences of coming out: family, heterosexuals and the LGBT community. However, Mosher (2001) claims that coming out may be not only voluntary when a person consciously tells about sexual orientation, but also involuntary as a result of different factors which make other people to suspect or be confident about someone's sexuality. Involuntary coming out happens because of rumors, expressive and distinct behavior which does not fit into typical gender displays inherent to person's biological sex, and close cooperation with heterosexuals who do not witness heterosexual relationships conducted by a person, etc. the

decision to come out does not necessarily mean that a person should disclose to everyone. Coming out may be a very risky act; therefore LGBT people should prepare before informing others about their sexuality in order not to be in danger after it. As a result they might be silent with homophobic people or those whose negative attitude can lead to significant change to worse of their life.

Mosher (2001) asserts that awareness of family about a person's homosexuality is a matter of great concern for all LGBT people. Sometimes a homosexual comes out to parents because of the fear that they will figure it out anyway. Taking into account the fact that most parents are heterosexual and traditional, homosexuals expect that their disclosure will lead to scandal, conflict and non-acceptance of child's sexuality. For this reason LGBT people might talk to other close relatives about it in order to see reaction and get a support in family circle. In addition, they may try to prepare their parents to disclosure, for instance, by telling stories about other LGBT, asking about their attitude to these people, and informing them about different aspects of homosexuality. In the case when a person chooses family audience for the first step of coming out, a reaction of parents can influence his/her decision to come out to other people.

Eliason (1996) analyses the reasons why the LGBT people disclose. The decision to come out to heterosexual inner circle may be a result of impossibility to stay silent because of suspicions of others about a person's sexual orientation or burden of secrecy when further communication and friendship with heterosexual people cannot develop properly without disclosure of this aspect of personality. Moreover, in case when heterosexual inner circle suspects person's homosexuality, but does not receive answers, secrecy might result in mistrust on the part of heterosexuals and also leaving LGBT without support. However, a homosexual can decide not to come out to everyone in order to avoid conflicts with those who

has a high level of homophobia. On the other hand, disclosure to particular people and hiding from others puts a homosexual in conditions of discomfort in communication with those who are unfamiliar, but still can get an information about person's sexuality. Besides, such a situation makes LGBT people conduct two different model of communication depending on awareness of particular category of people about his/her sexual orientation.

Schubotz and McNamee (2009) consider coming out to other lesbians, gays, bisexual or transgenders as an absolutely different type of disclosure, because when the LGBT person decides to come out to representatives of sexual minorities he/she expects that those people, in contrast to heterosexual ones, will provide their support. Having other people with the same or similar sexuality in person's inner circle is a means to learn more about LGBT identity, understand that different from hegemonic sexuality does not necessarily mean abnormal sexuality, and get friends or acquaintances in whose company LGBT can feel free to open all sides of his/her personality. However, it is risky to meet homosexuals with internalized homophobia in such circles, because arguments and condemnation of alternative sexual orientation uttered by LGBT may influence not formed personality very seriously and lead to complication of his/her homosexual identity formation and further coming out. Even more, to be accepted in LGBT community as representative of sexual minority does not necessarily mean to be accepted as a person with different political, religious, racial views, etc. Moreover, depending on type of sexuality there might be a hierarchy, segregation, or conflicts within the LGBT community, for example, opposition of gays and lesbians. In addition, bisexual people can be considered as those who deny both homosexual and heterosexual identity; they therefore may feel as outsiders in LGT and heterosexual circles at the same time. Finally, a person can be faced with heterophobia in LGBT community which can lead to cutting connections with heterosexual world and opposing him-/herself to all heterosexuals and having problems in fulfillment of all stages of homosexual identity formation.

9

To my mind, coming out is mutually connected with moving out. Lewis (2012) supports the idea that leaving the native locality in order to disclose is especially topical for people who live in rural area. It is harder for those people to find representatives of sexual minority. In addition, rural inhabitants are usually more conservative because of lower level of cultural life than in urban area. However, in my opinion, moving out in this case should not be considered just as leaving native town in seeking for divers cultural environment of a big city, but also as leaving parental home even staying in the same locality. As it was mentioned above, most parents are heterosexual; therefore coming out can cause a conflict on the basis of child's sexual orientation which may result in depravation of living condition because children are financially and territorially dependent on their parents. Besides, as Pikley (2013) claims, it is hard for LGBT people who live with parents to conduct homosexual practices, because territorial intercommunity gives parents a high level of control over the private life of their children.

On the other hand, according to Lewis (2013), moving not only out of parental home, but also to metropolis gives LGBT people much more opportunities for coming out. Firstly, the LGBT movement is usually more developed in cultural centers of a country which means that a person can much easier find people with the same life experience and situation connected with sexuality. Secondly, a big city is a place where people do not interfere and even are not interested in private life of the others; LGBT therefore can avoid many risks connected with having the same-sex relationships. Finally, moving to a new place means a change of inner circle which helps to build new image of self without hiding sexual orientation.

1.3. Theories of homosexual identity formation

There are, to my mind, three main models of homosexual identity formation: Troiden's, Cass's, and Carrion and Lock's. They, along with the ideas of Mead and Goffman on identity and stigma, Bourdieu's concept symbolic violence, notions of internalized homophobia and heterophobia as a result of hetero-normativity of society, provide a profound idea of the main aspects of LGBT issues. However, my further empirical chapter will demonstrate that the above mentioned theories still have several omisions.

Troiden (1989) developed the four-stage model of homosexual identity formation. The first stage, *Sensitization*, consists of the feeling of being attracted to people of the same sex, but without any sexual implication, because it happens before puberty. During the first stage a person does not sense stigmatization: there is no division into heterosexuals and homosexuals at this point. Nevertheless, children may still feel their marginality in terms of being different from the majority. The next one, *Identity Confusion*, is characterized by doubts about personal identity. A child usually goes through this stage in adolescence. A person starts to reflect on the reasons of above mentioned feelings and presupposes that he/she might be a homosexual. However, there is a lack of certainty about his/her own sexual orientation which in total with experiencing or becoming aware homosexual stigma leads to rejection to belong to this category of people. In addition, at this point a teenager usually has little knowledge about homosexuality. On the third stage, *Identity Assumption*, a homosexual stops rejecting his/her sexual orientation, but it happens slowly starting from tolerating homosexuality and finishing with full acceptance. He/she also starts to look for others with the same identity, explore LGBT subculture, and make experiments with his/her sexuality. The last stage, *Commitment*, begins when a person not only conducts gay behavioral and sexual patterns, but also considers sexual orientation as a property of lifestyle (Troiden 1989).

The Cass Model (1979) of formation of homosexual identity consists of six stages: *Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride, and Identity Synthesis*. The first one is characterized by emergence of feeling of being different from other and probably having homosexual orientation. On the second stage a person mostly accepts the fact of being homosexual, but still compares him-/herself with heterosexuals and keeps behaving and perceiving the world through heterosexual identity. The situation changes on the next stage when a person understands the need to fulfill homosexual needs and starts looking for chances to meet others who have a different sexual orientation. In other words, he/she tolerates his/her homosexual self-image. At the time when *Identity Acceptance* takes place a person opposes him-/herself to society which creates opportunities only for heterosexuals. A person tries to find similar-minded people and joins different LGBT communities. It is a period when homosexuals close themselves within the LGBT inner circle and cut connections with heterosexuals. However, at this stage a person is not ready to come out as homosexual. This happens on the stage of *Identity Pride*, which is characterized by high involvement in the LGBT movement and disclosing themselves to family, friends, and the closest surrounding. But a person still does not let heterosexuals into his/her life, because of perceiving people from the point of being "gay" or "not gay". The most complicated stage is the last as it requires a high level of self-reflection. *Identity Synthesis* is a period of full acceptance of own homosexuality, but without considering sexual identity as a pivotal factor in everyday life. Therefore, gays start to communicate closely with heterosexuals without making comparison between those two sexualities (Cass 1979).

To my mind, these six stages can be divided into two groups. The first three stages can be characterized as those in which a person perceives his/her homosexuality as an instinct. Homosexual needs opposed to heterosexual are in the core of forming gender identity. Sexual desire is the main concern in this period. The next stages are the process of understanding that

being gay is not just a type of people who sexually attract, but also as incorporating gay values and patterns of behavior regardless of sexual practices.

Carrion and Lock's (1997) model is the most multistage one: it has eight turning points. The first, *internal discovery of the sexual orientation*, consists of bewilderment, shame, minimization, and denial. This is a period when a person feels that he/she is different from others on issues of objects of sympathy and doubts about his/her own identity. At the beginning a person reacts quite normally to attraction to people of the same sex. However, later this reaction changes into confusion and fear of being different. As a result a homosexual rejects this kind of sympathy by ignoring it and then by assuming that he/she may just be on testing phase of his/her sexuality. Internal contradictions lead to absence or lack of sexual investigation which is the reason why homosexuals on this stage conduct heterosexual behavioral patterns. *Internal discovery of the sexual orientation* transforms into *inner exploration of attraction to sexual objects* when a homosexual makes attempts to actualize his/her sexual desire. Afterwards comes the third stage of homosexual identity formation – *early acceptance of an integrated sexual self* - when self, identity, and sexual orientation stop conflicting with each other. On the stage of *congruence probing* a person realizes that there are other people with the same orientation and starts to look for opportunities to communicate with them. Coming out happens on the fifth point of homosexual identity formation which is called *further acceptance of an integrated sexual self*. The most intensive confrontation with outer world takes place on the stage of *self-esteem consolidation* when a homosexual accepts his/her own sexual orientation, but is faced with realization of social stigma. However, further perception of the world through categories "gay"/"not gay" leads to identity pride emergence on the stage of *mature formation of an integrated self-identity*. This state of self- and world-perceiving changes into *integrating of homosexual identity in social context* leaving aside previous conflict on the basis of sexual orientation (Carrion and Lock 1997).

Realizing the obstacles on the way to obtain values and patterns, according to Hegna (2007), leads to the taking drugs on early stages of coming out as a gay and forming identity. Transforming sexuality is a complicated process which requires from a person making life changing decisions. Therefore, many people who are faced with the need to create the identity which differs from one which is considered to be normal in society may prefer to escape from tough reality using drugs and alcohol for this purpose. To my mind, it shows that identity formation is not just an unconscious process of influencing social norms personal practices, but, as it is in forming homosexual identity, also a set of decisions which a person should understand, realize and afterwards implement in everyday life with readiness to be responsible for his/her own choice in terms of possible disapproval of this choice by society.

Still society plays a pivotal role in identity formation. Mead (1913) claimed that there are two types of identity. The first one is unconscious and is formed under influence of social norms. People internalize those norms into their personality without reflecting on them. The second one can emerge only after reflection on own behavior and personality. In other words, it appears after person starts to look at him-/herself as if he/she was someone else, which means that second type of identity can appear only through prism of perceiving some particular person by other person. That shows that personal identity is not that personal, because even in the first type being in society and social relationships, as follows having social experience, is a necessary condition of identification. If we look at LGBT identity from this standpoint we can see very obviously why there were many problems in how this identity is formed. At the beginning of life people internalize patterns of behavior which is considered as characteristic for person's biological sex. Afterwards in the age when a person can reflect on his/her identity he/she can see a discrepancy between own perceiving of his/her personality and image of him/her which others have in their conscious. These two types of identities start to be in conflict which leads to long and painful identification.

14

Goffman (1976) used Mead's ideas in his identity theory. He considers that gender identity is constructed by its carriers according to their expectations and social demands on them. Homosexual identity is a reason for people to be stigmatized. In hetero-normal society heterosexuals are those who are supposed to make demands about the stigmatized. That is the basis of virtual identity of stigmatized gays which in actual social identity shows up as opportunities to possess. Being opposed to what is considered as normal in society stigmatized, i.e. homosexuals, seek similarly oppressed to form a community which may force others to accept their identity as equal to all other identities. Goffman in his theory uses the concept of "gender display" as an aspect of identity. He argues that how gender display is fulfilled depends on a person's free choice in order to get the biggest benefit for him/her. This, however, does not fully work for LGBT, as it will be seen in empirical chapter, because regardless of display conducted by a homosexual he/she will be stigmatized on the basis of his/her sexual orientation. Nevertheless, it can be observed in the stories of my interviewees that choosing particular types of behavior or selective coming out helps to minimize stigmatization.

Social groups are victims of stigmatization due to the fact that some of their characteristics do not comply with a certain 'social norm' that is established in morality, law, tradition, religion, and other social institutions of a particular society. Goffman's theory (1976) shows that although acting against social norms is complicated and even harmful, it can be controlled by a perceiving person so that to minimize the negative consequences.

In my opinion, it is important to look at how social order averts the possibility for people to bypass its norms. Bourdieu (2000) elaborates the concept of symbolic violence. This type of violence is mild; it is done indirectly through culture. Different norms and rules are considerate by people as axioms which do not have to be proved. People conduct their

15

everyday lives in terms of these norms and rules without realizing that they are imposed on them, that they emerged not naturally, but are social constructs which can be abandoned. That is, to my mind, very connected to the existence of internalized homophobia which is a characteristic of people with different sexual orientation on early stages of their sexual identity forming. As Frost & Meyer (2009) write, gays, after emergence of feeling that they are homosexuals, exclude themselves from social relationships because of having deeply incorporated heterosexual values. They cannot accept their homosexuality in terms of hetero-normal society. Because of symbolic violence which was conducted of a high quality gays do not realize that their not fitting into norms of sexuality is constructed. Therefore, on first stages of forming identity gays insistently behave as representatives of their sex stereotypically should behave. It leads to absence of deep and long romantic relationships which needs their sexuality. Those people have problems of identification and depression because of internalized homophobia until they realize that hetero-normativity is not apriority.

In the next chapter I will present the results of the in-depth face-to-face interviews with the Ukrainian LGBT people. Using this data I will discover strategies of coming out and specificities of homosexual/transgender identity formation stages which are formed by the context of Ukrainian society.

CHAPTER 2. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

2.1.   Methodology

During field work I interviewed 14 LGBT people living in Kiev, aged 19 to 34 years old. I will use pseudonyms for convenience and keeping anonymity. Eight interviewees are originally from other locations. Among them were 7 gays (Anatoliy, Denis, Igor, Maksim, Ruslan, Tymofiy, and Vitaliy), 4 bisexuals (Alisa, Kyrylo, Yana, and Yuliia), 1 lesbian (Kseniia), and 2 transgenders female-to-male (Ivan and Sergiy). At the beginning of the field work I used personal contacts in order to find interviewees. Afterwards my initial respondents provided me contacts of their LGBT friends. In addition, Denis posted information about my thesis on Ukrainian LGBT portal, and as a result three people expressed a desire to take part in the interview.

I used a method of semi-structured in-depth interview for my research. A guide consists of eight blocks. Each of them is associated with the type of the audience of coming out, stages of identity formation or types of self-adjustment to social pressure (The guide of the interview is attached to the thesis in Appendix). Every interview lasted for about an hour.

Interviews are an essential part of sociological research practice. Finding wide application in the field of sociological researches, it is, however, the method of a wide range of social science disciplines (Semenova 1998). In-depth interviews can both trigger a respondent to candor and makes it possible to put a respondent on a particular issue and to reach its proper understanding. (Fenneto 2004).

In-depth interviews are often used when the research problem cannot be solved by means of a standardized questionnaire or if this study would be less practical and reliable, would have considerable investments.

17

The purpose of semi-structured in-depth interview is, on the one hand, a profound disclosure of the research questions, clearing out details, opening a new, not just an evaluation of the known facts, and on the other, in contrast to open interviews to keep focusing on research-related questions. Sometimes only in the course of this interview it is possible to get a specific information which under other circumstances respondent probably will not tell. This method is also used in case when people do not want or are unable to answer questions because the answers seem to be quite personal, or those which are related to their self-esteem, or prestige when they cannot verbalize their motivation even realizing it.

I used the method of in-depth face-to-face interview because it provides the most relevant data to answer my research question. Firstly, the topic of the type of sexuality is sensitive; therefore it is easier for interviewees to be more opened while a personal talk unmediated by any devices. Secondly, I was interested in the narrative of the LGBT person's life in order to see the changes in his/her personality and world perception: diversity of the required data could not be provided by the standardized questionnaire. Thirdly, I was seeking specific information about process of identity formation and coming out process; therefore a need to direct interviewees' story telling with the guiding questions excluded the possibility to use a method of an open interview. Finally, it was necessary to get an information about LGBT life experiences from each individual in order to figure out common strategies and features; therefore a method of a focus group interview did not meet the requirements of this thesis.

2.2. Coming out as a decision

A feeling of being attracted to people of the same sex for most of interviewees appeared in adolescence at between 12 and 14 years old. However, there were three respondents who

stated that they not only sensed interest in same-sex relationships, but also conducted behavioral patterns which are perceived in society as inherent to the opposite sex, from early childhood. Nevertheless, in adolescence those interviewees as well as others felt that their interest in people of the same sex might probably not be accepted by society and their inner circle, which is the next stage of recognition. For all of them it took time to come out. The most widespread reason was lack of information about why they had those feelings, how to actualize their need of same-sex relations, and whether it was perversion or not. Interviewees claimed that there was no information about homosexuality in libraries, and in cases of respondents who are less 22 years old there was no good Internet with all needed information in their adolescence. Talking about awareness, Kyrylo's case is noticeable: he considered himself as homosexual before 20 years old, because the first time he fell in love with a boy when he was teenager. He did not know that person should not necessarily choose one sex for having relationships. The situation changed when he fell in love with a girl; he therefore regrets that he had no information about different types of sexuality in adolescence, because it could have made his socialization much easier.

What is remarkable is that Cass's (1979), Carrion and Lock's (1997) models of homosexual identity formation do not include a search for information explaining feelings of discrepancy and types of sexuality as a property of the first stages. Only Troiden (1989) briefly mentioned as a reason of problems of self-perception a lack of knowledge about homosexuality in the description of *Identity confusion*. To my mind, this is a significant omission, because access to this kind of information is one of the crucial factors of understanding roots, properties and outcomes of having alternative sexual orientation, dealing with internalized homophobia and social pressure, accepting his/her identity, becoming aware that there are other people with the same life situation, and coming out. All of the mentioned phenomena and processes emerge on further stages of homosexual identity formation, but

19

they cannot happen without knowledge about what is going on. Kseniia noticed about a great influence of awareness on dealing with reactions of people on coming out:

> The reactions of my friends were unacceptable to me. […] They argued as people now do with different social status and age: it is abnormal. Why not normal? Well, at that moment, so to speak, I did not have much knowledge about how to defend. It is now I can argue with a person and ask, "Why is it abnormal? And what is normal for you? What do you mean by traditional and non-traditional?"

That is especially critical in terms of Ukrainian society where it is hard to get needed literature about different types of sexuality even now. Many of my interviewees have websites and blogs where they post translations of foreign articles about LGBT in order to help others to become knowledgeable, because they realize that if they had access to needed information their identity formation and coming out would have been much easier and less painful.

The reasons why they decided to come out were different in all cases: some needed to tell friends about their sexual orientation, because otherwise it was impossible to have close, deep, and honest friendship; others could not be silent anymore; some were convinced that they did not have to hide their personality; another category of people came out in order to introduce their partner to loved ones; and in the couple of cases coming out was due to the fact that parents accidentally found evidence of homosexuality. Moreover, six of the interviewees did not make a full coming out: they did not inform their parents, or classmates and group mates, or heterosexual friends. There were two respondents who conduct a 'dual' life: homosexual friends are aware about their sexual orientation while heterosexuals do not know about it. They avoid conversations with the latter about sexual preferences in order not to come out to them.

All models of homosexual identity formation state that LGBT can proceed to other stages: *Identity Synthesis* (Cass 1979), *Commitment* (Troiden 1989), or *self-esteem consolidation* (Carrion and Lock 1997) – only after absolute coming out. However, all the

interviewees who did not completely come out demonstrate the feature of those following stages in everyday life: they fully accept their homosexuality and conduct appropriate patterns of behavior, but they stopped perceiving the world in categories "gay"/"not gay", and therefore do not consider homosexuality as the only determinant of their life. In both of observed cases those who have the 'dual' life perform last stages of homosexual identity formation even more distinctly that those who completely of partially came out. In addition, even though these models are supposed to work for all categories of LGBT, they do not fully cover transgender identity formation or at least their coming out. To my mind, it is important to understand that disclosing for transgenders have 2 stages or in some cases even three: the first stage is coming out as homosexual, and then as transgender. The situation becomes more complicated in the case when transgender was considered as heterosexual before changing biological sex. In this case he/she comes out as transgender and then becomes defined as homosexual. That is, however, not the only scenario of disclosing for transgenders. For example, for Sergiy, the bisexual female-to-male, this process is much more complicated: his identity formation was proceeding from being perceived as bisexual with stigmatization of relationships with females, then as a transgender, and, finally, as bisexual with stigmatization of relationships with males.

2.3. Coming out as a result of moving out

I see moving out not only from the point of moving to another city, but also as leaving the parental home even within the same locality. Eleven interviewees live apart from their parents. Moreover, twelve of them are financially independent. More than a half of those who live apart made coming out in their family after moving out from the parental home. However, some made it indirectly. They work in LGBT organizations and are therefore public

figures. Those people take part in TV programs about issues connected with sexual orientation. As a result, their parents, relatives and acquaintances are aware about their sexual orientation. Even in case of lack of publicity parents know about a place of occupation which should be a sign for them. Other financially and territorially independent LGBT come out to friends and peers only after leaving home. Nonetheless, they chose not to have an open conversation about sexual orientation with parents in order not to make them stressed even taking into account that they suspect that their parents are aware of or at least guess about their homosexuality or bisexuality. There were only three interviewees who came out while living in the parental home, but in two cases it was not planned.

However, only six of the interviewees made a complete coming out to family. In all but one case attitude of parents was negative. Arguments against homosexuality were primarily about: 1) the image of family in eyes of friends, relatives and neighbors, and 2) the unnaturalness and sinfulness of homosexuality. That is how Kseniia described reaction of her parents on coming out:

> My parents also reacted quite negatively. […] The conversation was quite emotional. The argument was the same [as friends' one] plus, of course, the disgrace of the family, and what the neighbors would say. Neighbors is the most important point, of course! [laughs] In this context, it was interesting to talk with my mother why she has just at this moment begun to worry what the neighbors would say, because before this moment it was not a point of concern. Yes, plus at such moments my and other parents begin to delve ourselves and think about what mistakes they made in the bringing up children… that it was a punishment for some sins.

> She also tried to reflect on reasons why her mother was so concerned about neighbors'

attitude:

> Well, I think it is some kind of traditional matrix, when people here lived, so to speak, in large groups, communities... and in private homes, where everyone knew each other, it seems to be an important moment, but at the moment we live in an apartment building, where anyone does not talk with anyone. So it was interesting to know why it was so important what the neighbors would say. Well, I think it is likely meant not

neighbors, but what society would say, and that we would look in the eyes of others as abnormal freaks ...

The matter of the biggest concern was an attitude of others towards the fact that one member of the family is LGBT. It happens, to my mind, because parents consider their children as those who should not only become successful in the aim of fulfillment of parents' ambitions, but also be an active participant in latent competition between families. In addition, many interviewees mentioned that their parents began to think about what was wrong in the way they were bringing up their child. The fact that parents start to look for the reason of "abnormality" in themselves demonstrates how strong the connection is between parents and children. Ivan even mentioned that the most pivotal disadvantage of changing biological basis of sex for his parents was an attitude of others, and only in the end as not that much important problem they said about influence of taking hormones on health:

> They [parents] were the most interested in what people would say. The most! Not something like how my life was going... They were most concerned about what people would say. Someone may somewhere there scream about love. Different parents, I mean. They also shouted about their love to me in due time, and about what they have done for me. And the one, and the second of parents at different times expressed about this. That is all their love! All their love was manifested in "what will people say?". […] The second [reason of negative attitude to change biological basis of sex] was health. The first was people, and only in the end they mentioned health. Dad said about the operations "Why do you want surgery? It is harmful."

Another common reason of negative reaction was considering homosexuality as unnatural and sinful. Although parents' confidence in this statement was very strong, they were not able to give any arguments to support it. They were weakly knowledgeable about homosexuality and transgender. Yuliia does not tell her parents about her bisexuality partially because of their lack of knowledge about LGBT issues:

> I do not tell my parents. I do not think that they will understand. We had conversations about the fact that homosexuality exists. Afterwards I understood that before coming out to them I have to make awareness raising activities for them. They confuse the most

23

simple things connected with LGBT and are not able to explain there negative attitude to homosexuals.

This vividly demonstrates how deeply is embedded homophobia which strong roots go from soviet past. It correlates well with the results of a public opinion poll done by the Sotsis Sociological Center in 2010 which demonstrated that almost 70 percent of Kyiv inhabitants perceive homosexuality as a digression or a mental disease (Martsenyuk 2012). Moreover, strongly embodied homophobia intensifies with hate speeches of political and religious leaders against homosexuality and representing LGBT issues in media as deviant.

That is an evidence statements presented in Yue's (in Lewis 2013) and Pikley's (2013) findings that the most difficult obstacle for LGBT people is to accept their identity and come out while being in parental home where homophobic and traditional family practices are conducted. Moreover, as it was demonstrated in my interviews as an evidence to what was claimed by Lewis (2012) and Pikley (2013), coming out is also associated with moving to urban area where LGBT communities are much numerous and average people are more liberal and tolerant.

Territorial distance in these terms helps both sides to save warm relationships. For those parents who cannot overcome homophobia, but do not want to lose connection with children, it is easier to ignore the fact that their child is LGBT and try not to force him/her to change from a distance. It is indicative that in two of three cases of coming out in parental home this led to parents' pressure: regular attempts of Igor's mother to make him to go to church or to a psychiatrist and violent abuse of Maksim. That is how Igor describes an outcomes of his disclosure to his parents:

> The first mother's reaction was "My child will not have his children. I will not have grandchildren. I have to fix it. It should be treated." […] Parents still make attempts to force me to cure my homosexuality with a help of church and medicine.

Maksim's parents accidently found out that their son was gay when he was in eleventh grade. Instead of denial his orientation he confessed about his homosexuality to his parents. As the result of coming out he was beaten by his father. This case is very unique, because after physical abuse on the ground of being gay Maksim went to the Committee on the Rights of the Child Protection in order to write a statement about home violence which is connected with sexual orientation. Committee workers did not expect that they would have such a case in their practice. My interviewee claims that he was the only child who came there to write a statement about home violence since the foundation of this Committee. Moreover, no one else before spoke openly about alternative orientation as a reason of abuse. This is his description of the above mentioned situation:

> I came to write a statement that I was beaten. All City Council was shocked, because it was the first time when gay, underage, and beaten came... Well, it was just a circus. They have been gathering this Committee on children's rights for an hour, and in general that was a day when the Committee had met for the first time in the history of its existence. All were shocked. Well, anything like that did not happen ... uh ... Well, for them it has been a shock, because a child did not come before by himself, because usually what kind of problems they [Committee] have: some where children of alcoholics, drug addicts… Something like that. Someone was caught in prostitution, etc. Beaten child have never come before; moreover, with the reason that he was gay and that is why his parents consider him sick.

This case demonstrates how nominal is the work of state agencies of children protection: they deal only with critical cases, such as dysfunctional families with low social status. On the other hand, it also shows that children cannot stand the problems out of parental home and rarely speak about domestic abuse.

As a result of his official complaint and actions of the Committee the parents forced my interviewee to leave their home. He had to start his adult life much earlier than his peers. He had to find a job in order to survive, because parental financial support was not available to him anymore. In this case moving out was an outcome of coming out, which indicates two-

25

sided dependence between those two phenomena. A crucial role was the fact that Maksim found other gays in his native city after he realized his homosexuality. Till the end of the school he lived in his gay friend's apartment. As it will be seen further, the presence of LGBT acquaintances is an important factor influencing the process of identity formation and coming out.

2.4. Partial coming out

The second strategy of coming out is partial coming out, when people choose not to disclose as LGBT to heterosexual friends, classmates or parents. I distinguished two-sided dependency between children and parents, internalized homophobia, and heterosexist Ukrainian environment as the reasons of conducting this strategy.

As I mentioned before, only six of the interviewees came out to their families. Furthermore, after conducting interviews I noticed that the bisexuals were less inclined to come out. Even more, they rarely have long term relationships with people of the same sex. Kyrylo, for instance, claimed that if he has sympathy to women in future, he will not look for a male partner. Another interviewee, polyamorous Alisa, usually has two partners while one is permanent and another changes from time to time. Her permanent partner is male and temporary one female. Her inner circle treats her as heterosexual, because they know or pretend to know only one side of her sexuality. At the same time, she does not see any need in ruining this heterosexual image in minds of her inner circle. Yuliia's story is very curious in terms of need to come out. She accepted her bisexuality at 27 years old after visiting psychotherapists. It happened about two years ago. Since that time she has not been in homosexual relationships, except one-night sex, but during this time she had sexual and

romantic relations with men. Yuliia told me that she did not feel a need to inform her parents about her sexual orientation before she finds a female partner for a long-term relationship.

Talking about concealment of being LGBT from classmates, Maksim's situation is remarkable. He became a prey of bullying at school because of his sexual orientation and refusal to conform to gender patterns which were considered to be inherent to males among his peers. However, this bullying did not come from his classmates in his group at school. The school system in Ukraine is such that children depending on the place of residence are sent to the corresponding school. The division into elementary, middle and high school is obscure, because usually all of them take place at the same institution. It is possible to change a school, but many people study together starting from early childhood. Therefore, classmates spend together a large part of their lives which makes them if not close, then at least aware about most of aspects of their classmates' personalities. That is, to my mind, a factor which influenced the attitude of interviewee's classmates. Probably, he had a good image in his class, and as a result the advantages outweighed homosexual stigma.

However, one of Maksim's classmates who is a gay with distinct female features of behavior was abused by other members of his group. Similar situation was in Denis's class:

> We had a guy in the group. He is heterosexual, but by then everyone in school thought that he was a gay. Well, he had a shocking appearance: pink and long hair. And all classmates were very against him.

Teachers ignored all kinds of bullying connected with sexual orientation. As the result my interviewee decided to leave his native city in order not to be a prey of homophobic violence.

Kyrylo faced a similar situation at school. He was not abused by his classmates after coming out, because they were a part of one group for a long time which made them

27

connected enough to consider homosexuality as the insignificant feature. Nevertheless, other pupils were hostile towards him because of his sexual orientation.

School students practiced bullying towards every interviewee, who completely came out. When they were not able to make in a traditional way they conducted bullying by avoiding, as it happened with Anatoliy. His elder brother was a local bandit, school children therefore were scared to abuse Anatoliy, but they just stopped to communicate with him after his disclosing as a means to hurt him:

> I did not experience traditional bullying, but I knew what is a social ignoring. It was bullying as a social ignoring: because of my brother they could not hurt me physically, but they could ignore me.

The above mentioned phenomena are the reasons why other interviewees preferred partial coming not involving classmates. For example, Denis admitted that his school conducted patriotic ideology and as a result partially religious ideology, because being religious in minds of many Ukrainians is associated with patriotism. These two aspects of the ideology provide high level of concern about health and preserving the population of nation while homosexuality is seen as a perversion and an obstacle to procreation. For this reason he did not want to come out, because it meant to go against the system of the school:

> I studied in a gymnasium and therefore... am... when I came to the fifth grade, it became a gymnasium. Then followed embellishing reality in order to provide a status for school. Something like that... Children were educated to be patriotic. It was not so intensive before, but now I looked at school's website, and all these things are more developed there now. The last thing I have seen when I came to school two years ago…they hanged icons at the entrance of the school.

In all cases teachers not only tried to pretend that they did not notice abuse on the basis of sexual orientation, but also allowed themselves to express homophobic statements. However, they did not express their attitude to homosexuality in a radical way regardless of the connotation of their opinion. That is how Tymofiy described situation in his school:

28

Teacher of biology, with whom I communicated well, said on one of the classes on sexuality that there are different sexual orientations and all of them are natural. That was a minimum which a teacher can allow him-/herself, because everyone knows that there are parents who will make a scandal after hearing an approval of homosexuality expressed by a teacher. […] On the other hand, there was a teacher of history and jurisprudence with whom I also had a good relationship and said that she does not understand the possibility for people to have the same-sex marriages. […] But there were no statements like "gays should be beaten" uttered by teachers.

However, according to Tymofiy, sometimes their actions were a cause of discrimination of some students even of those who are not homosexual:

We do not have an understanding that some things should not be announced to others. This is actually a problem of our society. There was a guy in our school who had some disabilities which were not visually apparent, but he had some kind of mental problems. And teachers did not keep any confidentiality about it. Therefore, everyone knew that he had problems and for this reason he was a victim of discrimination. Even though he was absolutely adequate, because of the gossip that there was something wrong with his mental health he became a victim.

Taking all these reasons into account, some LGBT choose not to come out at school, as it is in case of Igor who disclosed to parents, but is silent at school:

You think, "Oh God, if someone finds out, I will be dead." I had been already a subject of bullying in school because of a kind of girlish behavior or predominance of girls instead of guys in my inner circle.

The next reason of choosing strategy of partial coming out is internalized homophobia. Six respondents admitted that they had internalized homophobia after realizing the fact that they were attracted by people of the same sex. Others declared that they did not have stressful feeling of refusal to accept their sexual orientation. It is hard to distinguish common factors of why the first group had internalized homophobia, because their life situations and characteristics of parental family differ. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace factors which influenced recognition of alternative sexual orientation without rejection. One is a negative example of hegemonic masculinity in the inner circle. Almost all interviewed gays had alcoholic fathers who conducted an 'originally' masculine display. Moreover, communicating

29

with fathers are very distant and cold. One does not maintain any contacts with his father, because he left the family. In the couple of cases there are elder brothers who are masculine, but deviant. Second factor is an early feeling of having different sexual orientation and conducting patterns of another gender display. In early childhood people do not fully sense symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2000) of hetero-normal society; they therefore accept this aspect of their personality before they understand that people will judge them because of it. Thus those LGBT repel imposed social norms of sexual orientation and gender. An understanding of psychology was crucial for two respondents: one was attending the psychology workshop, and another attended psychotherapy which helped her to realize that she was bisexual. Those people were knowledgeable about how to cope with stress connected with social pressure, and it gave them a possibility to accept those parts of their personality what is stigmatized in society with dominance of traditional family norms.

This shows the relevance of Frost and Meyer's (2009) claims that although coming out is an indicator of the fact that a person overcame internalized homophobia, it does not necessarily mean that lack of outness shows problems in accepting homosexual identity. In terms of victim of violence, people may decide to be silent. This especially works in situations when a person is dependent on homophobic parents or wants to save good relationships with family regardless of its role of survival mechanism, but because of emotional dependency on it. That is, according to Goffman (1976), a type of gender display fulfillment which is conducted in order to get the most benefit from life situation.

In all cases except two, those who had internalized homophobia overcame it with the help of older partner who has accepted his/her sexual orientation already. They were the source of information about models of behavior and coping with stress. Nevertheless, a pivotal may also be a role of heterosexual partner of a bisexual person because his/her

approval and positive attitude to homosexual part of their partner's sexuality may lead to more intensive and strong acceptance of sexual orientation and overcoming of internalized homophobia. However, an opposite reaction on bisexuality of a partner might make an opposite effect. Older heterosexual partner of bisexual polyamorous Alisa played a crucial role in her bisexual identity formation:

> Even though I always realized that I like women, every time I tried somehow to shut a possibility of relationships with them. I think that my boyfriend, my partner significantly influenced me. He does not consider relationship as something necessarily monogamic and does not see any need in such relationship. He prefers an openness instead of it. I guess that he was the first person who did not put any restrictions on me, like "you are with me or with someone else", "you are heterosexual or homosexual". Through the discourse with him six years ago I stopped forcing out my bisexuality.

In many cases the initiative came from older partners, because people with internalized homophobia and lack of knowledge about behavioral patterns were not able to overcome themselves and create same-sex relationships. In some cases respondents indicated that with other people who knew about their relationships they did not allow anyone to call them lesbian or gay, but they were not against it when their partner was labeled in such a way. All these points are essentially represented in Yana's reflection on her first same-sex relationships:

> We had a very difficult relationship. I was embarrassed of her. I was afraid to have sex with her. I was afraid that because of this I will become a pervert . Everything you could ever think of. She actually dragged it all by herself. For some reason she treated me better than I treated her. I still had a horrible homophobic contempt to her as a lesbian. You know, it is like when you are in the subject itself – you are a lesbian – but you say, "I am not a lesbian, that is my girlfriend who is a lesbian."

This partially contradicts Frost and Meyer (2009) who stated that long-term and romantic homosexual relationship can appear only after overcoming internalized homophobia: first relationships while one of partner did not fully accepted homosexual identity were hard and in some cases doomed to failure, but they were not an outcome, but a reason, of coping with

31

internalized homophobia. Moreover, Vitaliy, for instance, who had a feeling of inferiority because of his homosexual orientation, claimed that he was looking for serious same-sex relationships starting from early realization of his own sexual orientation. Yet Hegna (2007) indicates the significant influence and need of adult homosexual's support in dealing with stress. Especially, in my opinion, partner's backing is important for transgenders in the process of transition.

2.5.   A 'dual' life

The last strategy of coming out determined by Ukrainian society is conducting a 'dual' life. Some may argue that it cannot be considered as disclosing strategy, because people who choose it do not inform a family and heterosexual inner circle about their sexual orientation. Nonetheless, in my opinion, those who accept their own homosexuality or bisexuality and are fully open about it in LGBT community and others connected with it still fulfills all stages of LGB identity formation and disclose but to particular categories of people. That is how Ruslan commented on the decision not to come out:

> The fact is, I have never talked with friends about my private life, I mean sexual relationships. I do not ask about it and I do not give answers to such questions. I find it unacceptable. And that was always so. Friends also did not come out to me. It has never mattered for me.

The common and important practice among my interviewees was to look for LGBT communities in their locality in order to get information and emotional help. Many of them now work in LGBT organizations. Though they overcame the stage of identity formation when a person perceives the world in categories LGBT and not LGBT, an inner circle of those people are those who have alternative sexual orientation or sexuality, that is, in their words, connected with their occupation and, what is more important, with the fact that it is

much easier to communicate with those with whom you have common experience. In Frost and Meyer's formulation, a feeling of being connected with the LGBT community reminds them that are not alone, and they therefore can count on support and help of others with similar life situation. Moreover, in Ukrainian society where the LGBT movement is on the early stages of development work in this sphere, actions in the aim to help others with problems of identification, coming out, and social pressure may be a means of becoming proud of his/her sexual orientation, and lead to overcoming minority stress. The description of Cass's stage of *Identity Pride*, where LGBT activism is represented in the connectedness with disclosing oneself to others, works well with my last statement, but it does not necessarily mean that outness must be to all acquaintances.

Nonetheless, respondents who are not involved in LGBT activism indicate that they do not want to be part of it because of the high level of heterophobia in some of such kinds of communities. Sometimes heterophobia is also applied to bisexuals, especially in lesbian communities because of double disposition against men: disapproval of patriarchal values and sexual/romantic unattractiveness of men. As the result, according to my respondents, representatives of such communities cut connections with heterosexual and sometimes bisexual world. It illustrates that those people have problems with completing the last stage: *Identity Synthesis* (Cass 1979) or *integrated self-identity within a social context* (Carrion and Lock 1997). In my opinion, this happens because of the high level of homophobia and heterosexism in Ukrainian society: some people after accepting homosexual identity and coming out feel strong pressure which they are not able to cope with, so they find a way to 'survive' confrontation of all differently-minded people. However, all my interviewees who do not oppose themselves to heterosexuals still have problems in communicating with them. Heterosexism is so strongly embodied in minds of Ukrainians that even those who try to be tolerant in many cases are not knowledgeable enough about homosexuality and do not

deepen their knowing in this sphere. Moreover, some interviewees mentioned that in routine conversations heterosexuals use many offensive jokes and anecdotes about homosexuals. The embodiment of homophobia is clearly visible in language: many Ukrainians say not "homosexual", but "homosexualist". Ending –ist is an indicator of mental disease, and in the Soviet Union homosexuality was considered as such. All these factors lead to self-imposed LGBT ghettoization (Martsenyuk 2012) and refusal to come out fully even by those, who accept themselves as homosexuals, who are not antagonistic to heterosexuals, and who do not perceive sexual orientation as the main aspect of personality. This strategy works well in terms of Troiden's (1989) model: he did not include overcoming of world's sensation through categories 'gay'/'not gay' and full outness, but stopped on conducting homosexual behavioral patterns in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was intended to discover the strategies of coming out caused by the specificity of the Ukrainian context. The research showed that there are three common strategies of coming out in the sphere of family and inner circle as homosexual, bisexual, or transgender in Ukrainian society: coming out as a result of moving out, partial coming out, and a 'dual' life.

The economy of Ukraine experienced great difficulties after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it is still far from being stable. Therefore, it is hard for Ukrainian youth to start adult life independently from initial financial family support. As a result young Ukrainians are highly dependent on their parents. However, dependency is two-sided. Parents usually are strongly emotionally tied to their children. That is also an outcome of the Soviet past, as most parents failed to fulfill their ambitions, because of hurtful transformation of society; they therefore transmit self-actualization into children. Moreover, there is a tough latent competition in Ukrainian neighborhoods in success of children, especially in small towns and villages. Consequently, in order to come out a young person should become independent from family. In addition, a family may stop supporting their child because it considers sexual orientation as an obstacle for actualization of their ambitions in a child. Nevertheless, in both cases coming out is strongly connected with gaining financial and territorial independence. Therefore, coming out is usually a result or goes simultaneously with moving out not only from one city, town, or village to another, but also out of parent's home to his/her own even within the same locality.

However, if moving out happens before coming out, LGBT try to maintain distant, but good relationships with parents, because of strong connectedness between them. As a result those people refuse to inform their family about sexual orientation, at least personally, in

35

order to avoid conflict. In case of opening to heterosexual friends they make only partial coming out. Nonetheless, the opposite scenario is also common when a person does not inform other heterosexuals about his/her sexual orientation after the disclosure to a family. It happens because of the high level of bullying in schools and lack of teachers' support of the victims of abuse.

In addition, Ukrainian society is highly homophobic which is also 'a heritage' from the Soviet Union, because homosexuals were considered as mentally ill and criminals in the USSR at the same level as pedophiles. Nowadays, the laws about alternative sexual orientation are decriminalized. However, the stereotype of homosexuality as an unnatural phenomenon, a perversion, and a mental disease is deeply embodied in people's minds. It is strengthened by huge anti-gay propaganda conducted by the church and far right organizations which as they claim want to protect traditional family values in the aim of 'healthy' society through their activism. In terms of homophobic society LGBT commonly conduct a 'dual' life, which means that they are honest about their sexual orientation only with members of the LGBT community while concealing this fact from all heterosexual inner circle. As a consequence of conducting a 'dual' life those people usually close themselves in the LGBT community and distance themselves from the outer world even after overcoming internalized homophobia and heterophobia.

A large number of theories and models on various aspects of LGBT issues have been developed in Western countries. Thus, the models of homosexual identity formation, for example, were created and tested there, so that their validity was confirmed for societies of developed countries (Eliason 1996, Schubotz & McNamee 2009, Mosher 2001). However, as my research has shown these models do not work fully in the Ukrainian realities: 1) the LGBT people who went through all the stages of homosexual/transgender identity formation

36

did not necessarily make a complete disclosure, 2) a person who stopped perceiving the world in "gay/not gay" categories and overcame heterophobia was, however, intended to close him-/herself within the LGBT community instead of expanding list of heterosexual friends, and 3) absence of access to literature on LGBT issues as an obstacle for accepting person's type of sexuality was omitted by all models. So I would argue that this thesis is an important step towards the development of a theoretical apparatus for the analysis of LGBT issues in societies different from the developed West.

However, due to limited resources and access to respondents I interviewed only those Ukrainian LGBT people who live in Kiev, have an active position and higher education which in accordance had an impact on the results and further analysis of my research. In this regard, it would be appropriate to expand this data in the future through a study of Ukrainian LGBT people who live in small towns, have lower levels of education and less opportunity to participate in LGBT activism. In addition, it would be useful to explore coming out of parents to their children which was out of the focus of this research due to its limitations.

I analyzed strategies of coming out in Ukrainian context considering that situation in this particular society determined an emergence of diversion from standard disclosure. However, I do not argue that the same models and factors cannot work in the same way in other societies. Furthermore, the fact that homosexual/transgender identity formation models did not fully work for LGBT people whom I interviewed may not be an outcome of the specific situation in Ukraine, but a result of the imperfection of existing models. However, in terms of interviewing LGBT people living in Kiev, some of whom are originally from other localities of Ukraine, I am unable to make assumptions about disclosing strategies which take place in the other societies. Nevertheless, I do not exclude a high level of probability that in similar environments coming out diversion will be similarly-shaped. Moreover, as it was

shown in the description of situation in Ukrainian society according to attitudes to altering types of sexuality, family models and economy, Ukraine has a specific environment for LGBT people, which justifies my approach to the analysis of the observed types of the LGBT disclosure.

APPENDIX. INTERVIEW GUIDE

*Interview №*_____

*Age of the respondent*_____

*Date of the interview*_____

*Contacts of the respondent*_____

*Place of birth*_____

*Place of living*_____

*Level of education*_____

*Specialization*_____

*Occupation*_____

*Sex*_____

*Gender*_____

Block 1. Coming out as a decision, identity confusion (C), sensitization & identity confusion (T) & internal discovery of the sexual orientation (C&L)

Do you remember when did the feeling of being LGBT appear? What were your feelings?

Did it take time for you to come out? Why have you decided to come out? Where there any important events in your life before you came out? Whom did you decide to tell first about your sexuality (parents or friends)?

Block 2. Family, friends, identity pride (C), identity assumption (T), further acceptance of an integrated sexual self (C&L)

When did you tell your parents about your sexual orientation? What was there reaction on that news? Did you tell both of your parents at the same time? Did they make attempts to influence on your sexual orientation (psychologist, dates with heterosexuals, etc.)? Did you have conflicts with your parents on this basis? Has it changed relationships with your parents (with each of them)? Where they interested in LGBT topics after you came out? Are your

parents religious? Did they try to deal with stress with religion? Do they consider your gender as a sin? Do other your relatives know about your sexual orientation? Who informed them about it?

How did your friends get aware about your sexual orientation? What was their reaction? Did it influence your relationships?

Block 3. Moving out, identity pride (C), identity assumption (T), inner exploration of attraction to sexual object & congruence probing (C&L)

Do your friends/classmates from your native town know about your sexual orientation? When did you tell it to them? Do you communicate with them now? Did your coming out change your relationships with them?

Did you have a partner in your native town?

Block 4. Internalized homophobia, identity tolerance (C), identity confusion (T), inner exploration of attraction to sexual object & congruence probing (C&L)

When did you have your first relationships with LGBT? Where they serious/romantic? How long did you have them? How old was your partner?

Block 5. Closing him/herself in LGBT community, identity acceptance & identity pride (C), identity assumption & commitment (T), mature formation of an integrated self-identity (C&L)

Are you a member of any LGBT community? How long are you visiting it? Do you communicate with other members of LGBT community in everyday life? Where do you meet people for relationships?

40

Do you take part in LGBT activism? What types of activism you like? Why did you decided to take part in LGBT activism? How old where you? Do you remember about your first impression about participation? How was it?

Do you engage heterosexuals into LGBT activism?

Block 6. School/University, identity pride (C), identity assumption (T), further acceptance of an integrated sexual self (C&L)

Do university professors/ school teachers know about your sexual orientation? Did they judge you because of it? Did they demonstrate their attitudes to your type of sexuality? What was a general atmosphere in your school/ at university? Did you avoid attending school/university because of your sexual orientation?

Block 7. Drugs and alcohol usage

Do you feel stressed because of being LGBT? What is your means to cope with stress based on your sexual orientation?

Block 8. Identity comparison, identity acceptance & identity synthesis (C), self-esteem consolidation & integrated self-identity within a social context (C&L)

Where/are you comparing people according to their sexual orientation?

Is there any difference in perceiving other alternative sexual orientations?

Whom do you usually communicate with: heterosexuals or LGBT?

REFERENCES

Bourdieu, Pierre. 2000. "The Three forms of Scholastic Fallacy." Pp. 49-92 *in Pascalian Meditations.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Carrion, Victor and James Lock. 1997. "The coming out process: Developmental stages for sexual minority youth." Journal of *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2:369-77.

Cass, Vivienne. 1979. "Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model." *Journal of Homosexuality* 4:219-35.

Deviatko, Inna. 1998. *"Methods of sociological research"* (in Russian). Ekaterinburg: Ural.

Eliason, Michele J. 1996. "Identity Formation for Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Persons: Beyond a "Minoritizing" View." *Journal of Homosexuality* 30(3):31-58. Retrieved May 12, 2014 (http://www.researchgate.net/publication/14459671_Identity_formation_for_lesbian_bisexual_and_gay_persons_beyond_a_minoritizing_view/file/79e415091cfe7a5608.pdf).

Fenneto, Herve. 2004. *"Interview and questionnaire: forms, procedures, results"* (in Russian). St. Petersburg: Peter.

Frost, David M. & Ilan H. Meyer. 2009. "Internalized Homophobia and Relationship Quality Among Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals." *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 56(1):97–109.

Goffman, Erving. *1976. Gender Display.* Retrieved April 5, 2014 (http://www.csun.edu/~snk1966/Goffman%20Gender%20Display.pdf).

Hegna, Kristinn. 2007. "Coming Out, Coming Into What? Identification and Risks in the 'Coming Out' Story of a Norwegian Late Adolescent Gay Man." Journal of *Sexualities* 10:582-602

Kravchuk, Andriy, Andriy Maymulakhin and Olexandr Zinchenkov. 2007. *Ukrainian homosexuals & society: a reciprocation: Overview of the situation: society, state and politicians, mass-media, legal position, gay-community.* Kyiv: Center "Our world".

Kravchuk, Andriy and Olexandr Zinchenkov. 2014. *At the doorstep. The situation of LGBT in Ukraine in 2013* (in Ukrainian). Kyiv: Center "Our world".

Lewis, Nathaniel M. 2012. "Remapping disclosure: gay men's segmented journeys of moving out and coming out." *Journal of Social & Cultural Geography* 13(3):211-31.

Lewis, Nathaniel M. 2013. "Beyond binary places: social and spatial dynamics of moving out and coming out in Canada." *ACME* 11(3):305–30. Retrieved March 30, 2014 (http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=58972a3e-6f51-4008-acc5-ce909727fee6%40sessionmgr4001&vid=1&hid=4107).

Martsenyuk, Tamara. 2012. "The State of the LGBT Community and Homophobia in Ukraine." *Journal of Problems of Post-Communism* 59(2):51–62.

Mead, George. 1913. "The Social Self." Journal of *Philosophy* 10: 374-80. Retrieved April 4, 2014. (http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/us/mead3.htm).

Mosher, Chad M. 2001. "The Social Implications of Sexual Identity Formation and the Coming-Out Process: A Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature." *The Family Journal* 9:164-73. Retrieved May 6, 2014 (http://www.uk.sagepub.com/thomas2e/study/articles/section6/Article103.pdf).

Perelli-Harris, Brienna. 2008. "Family Formation in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Changing Effects of Education in a Period of Rapid Social Change". Journal of *Social Forces* 87(2):767-94.

Pikley, Brent. 2013. "LGBT Homemaking in London, UK: The Embodiment of Mobile Homemaking Imaginaries." *Journal of Geographical Research* 51(2):159-65.

Schubotz, Dirk & Helen McNamee. 2009. ""'I Knew I Wasn't Like Anybody Else'': Young Men's Accounts of Coming Out and Being Gay in Northern Ireland." *Journal of Child Care in Practice* 15(3):193-208.

Semenova, Viktoriia. 1998. *"Qualitative methods: an introduction to humanistic sociology"* (in Russian). Moscow: Dobrosvet.

Shymko, Svitlana. 2012. "Coming out and a probation of unconditional love." Pp. in *LGBT families in Ukraine: social practices and legal regulation* (in Ukrainian), edited by Galyna Yarmanova. Kyiv: NGO "Insight".

Troiden, Richard. 1989. "The formation of homosexual identities." *Journal of Homosexuality* 17:43-73.

Yarmanova, Galyna et al. (Ed.). 2012. *LGBT families in Ukraine: social practices and legal regulation.* (in Ukrainian). Kyiv: NGO "Insight".