

“A click of a mouse away”
The Internet as a hallmark of queer existence in Serbia

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Abstract:

This paper is a small – scale empirical research whose main aim is to specify, in the context of contemporary Serbian society, the role the Internet plays and the needs that it facilitates for its homosexual users. Opposed to the ideas of favorable and affirmative influence of internet usage on social interaction, this paper tends to presents accounts on utilization of this channel of communication strictly as a tool for securing sexual gratification and maintaining users' spoiled identities. Drawing from the set of Erving Goffman's notions on identity management, the research seeks to address the fluidity of on-line queer identities. Being methodologically conceptualized in twofold manner as a mixture of survey and interviews, it generated few findings. The internet in the present day Serbia is the means to be employed in order to get in contact with other LGBT people. Moreover, it is highly utilized, especially through gay chats and personal ads, for approximating potential sexual engagements among homosexuals.

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INTRODUCTION

*“We exist in a world of pure communication,
where looks do not matter and only the best
writers get laid”*

(Anonymous member of a gay chat room, in Woodland 2000, 416)

Homosexuality in Serbia is barely visible. Still treated as a taboo in everyday life almost completely neglected by scientific research, the homosexual lifestyle is kept hidden. As in many other pariah states of South /East Europe, the contemporary Serbian society is crammed with the abundance of examples of surreal props of everyday gay existence.¹

In the period between the mid-nineties towards the present period, the use of the Internet becomes quite popular in Serbia. A great number of LGBT orientated sites have been created and they appear to be an important means of communication for the largely marginalized LGBT

¹ One such example was the attempt to draw public attention and enhance the social visibility of the homosexual population in the form of the gay pride event that took place on June 30, 2001. Imagined to be a part of liberal social repercussions taking place right after the overthrow of the conservative Milošević regime, the event had turned into its opposite. No sooner had people started to gather in one of Belgrade's most frequently visited public places, a huge crowd of soccer fans, ultra-nationalist youth and skinheads stormed the event, attacked and seriously injured several participants and stopped the manifestation from taking place. Except the few side reactions, there was no significant disapproval from prominent political figures. Another, more recent event, was the statement given by the Mayor of Jagodina municipality in Serbia (publicly prominent on the state level) when he was asked to give his brief outlook on the issue on homosexuals in that town. Apart from the fact that he stated that he would not have any kind of “business” with such people, he said that, in his good knowledge of facts, there are no homosexuals in the place he governs whatsoever. In the last official census from 2002, Jagodina municipality had 70,894 residents (Source www.wikipedia.org). The statement, although in Serbian, can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbKLGyEj3Jg>.

population. The most frequently visited are www.gay-serbia.com² and www.queeria.com whose main intention was to inform and connect the LGBT population by presenting information about LGBT everyday life as well as offering free dating services. Following these, web sites that are specialized appeared in order to facilitate and host more diversified needs of sexual minorities (i.e. exclusively lesbian, exclusively transsexual, gay-urban etc).

At this point, one can pose the question – is the increase in the number of the LGBT web sites followed up by any significant improvements in the quality of the ‘face to face’ social engagements of the aforementioned population? Similarly, do the new ubiquitous means of communication contribute to the stronger communal feeling among the members of the aforementioned social category?

I will depart from the claim that the gay community in Serbia, like in many other East European countries, has, largely, “cyber” features (Velzen, Gruszczynska in Kuhar and Takacz 2007) in the sense that the vast majority of communication of this population has been done exclusively through the Internet. It seems that the Cyberspace³ remains the only space in which risk-free communication can be established. The Internet, with its ability to provide anonymity and safety, is highly utilized as an essentially friendly medium for LGBT people (Gruszczynska 2007, 102)

The common way of reasoning would suggest that a minor marginalized social group (gays) has been suppressed due to a variety of cultural, religious and historical circumstances such as

² It is quite surprising, taking into account invisibility of the LGBT population, that www.gay-serbia.com was ranked as 28th among the top 100 visited web sites in 2004 in Serbia. (source <http://www.zion.co.yu/forum/printthread.php?TopicID=1111>)

³ Cyberspace is a domain characterized by use of electronics and the electromagnetic spectrum to store, modify, and exchange data via networked systems and associated physical infrastructures. (source www.wikipedia.com)

nationalism and several wars in the Balkans during the nineties. In a scarcity of every other available mode of communication, the population chooses the medium (without a plan or agenda, though) that offers the highest level of anonymity – the Internet and the virtual space it creates. Moreover, the group utilizes the means of communication and operates with it further turning from it not only into the vehicle for conveying information related to such lifestyle but also creating from it a sort of a hallmark of their social existence (Velzen 2007, 25).

The chief concern of this thesis is to outline the role and the properties of Internet mediated communication among the male homosexual population in contemporary Serbian society. By departing from the socio – cultural context in which the homosexual identity/ ies is/are embedded and by stressing the obstacles in establishing homosexual encounters and emotional engagements in everyday life, the work tends to specify, in the light of the effects of new ubiquitous technology, the role which the Internet plays and the needs which it facilitates for its gay users to meet.

Put differently, the question is: do the visitors of gay chats and the members of gay forums ascribe “illuminative” potential to it (Vedres et al. 2005, 171) in terms of establishing more profound relationships and connections with other members of the social category? Or conversely, is it perceived as a kind of a “techno elixir” that offers both the instant (virtual) sense of belonging to a group and the possibility for quick and risk - free connecting with other “pleasure seekers”.

Instead of being seen as illuminative, I put forward the claim that communication done through the Internet is predominantly utilized as a tool in both finding other “pleasure seekers” and accelerating the process of establishing "shallow" homosexual encounters.

Central to the theoretical frame of the prospective research will be Goffman’s notion of management of a spoiled identity. His work “Stigma” represents a good “pigeon hole” for framing “Serbian cyber” gay existence. By following Goffman’s general assertions, stigmatized individuals are people who are unable to conform to social norms (Goffman 1963, 13). Having said that, the homosexual identity, by not fitting into the general (hetero) normative, can be perceived as largely spoiled.

Torn between their “off” and “on” line existence, the vast majority of the gay male population employs extra identity managing techniques. Being at one moment the “electronic persona” represented by a nickname, which in most cases embodies almost everything that one is not in one’s “real” life and, on the other hand, being the one who has not accepted one’s own sexual identity or that hides it “in the closet”, calls for extra identity managing efforts. At this point, the properties of internet communication come into play as a strong enhancer and preserver of such a spoiled identity.

Drawing from this central notion, the empirical research seeks to highlight the fluidity of on-line identity/ies by relying on the notion of a shifting identity as discussed by Bauman (Velzen 2007, 16). The notion of shifting identities is recognized as the process “in which association and identification with the certain ‘community’ depends on ‘context and contingency’”. That is to say,

members of sexual minorities interact with their immediate social/ (virtual) surroundings by choosing to express their sexual preference, depending on the immediate context (Velzen 2007:17). Such context/contingency approach in managing alternative (sexual) identity, relies to a great extent on techniques of passing, which are presumably, as forms of acting, acquired and learnt at an early age among the members of sexual minorities in Serbia (Moss in Velzen 2007, 20).

Owing to a history of repression, marginalization and exclusion that sexual minorities were facing because of their “otherness”, the social vacuum of anonymity provided by the Internet has contributed to a remarkable rise in its popularity amongst sexual minorities. More specifically, the virtual space that the Internet provides is a blend of advantages of both physicality of public social spaces and anonymity that “the closet” offers. Put differently, these “on-line ‘queer spaces’...are third spaces in combining the connected sociality of public space with the anonymity of the closet” (Woodland 2000, 418). Given these connotations, the Internet transforms into the utility that can bring “the gay club” to the smallest provincial town in Serbia and elsewhere.

The methodological approach in gathering the data was conceptualized and conducted in a twofold manner. Initially, the basic data on the frequency, characteristics and attitudes towards the Internet usage are conducted by means of a questionnaire with 51 close-ended questions, grounded on a few “pilot” surveys tested on the gay chat and several forums. Furthermore, the statistical data obtained in this manner are supplemented with five semi-structured interviews conducted via telephone. Finally, data obtained in the pair of aforementioned approaches will be

enriched with personal reflections obtained from participant observations of discourses from the public chats.

The paper begins with contextualization of homosexuality by funneling down the theoretical assertion from abstract ones to the ones dealing with the phenomena in the Balkan context. I introduce the reflections on the relationship between the Internet and community and I circle theory part by framing it into Goffmanian concepts related to identity management appropriated on cyber (virtual) context. Next, I introduce the twofold methodological approach to the phenomena examined. By following theoretical assertions, I present statistical findings related to the character of internet communication among the Serbian visitors of gay chat rooms and forums. I add another layer to my analysis by demonstrating how statistical findings correlate with the reflections obtained from the interviews with the internet users. Ultimately, to conclude, I address the logic of the virtual homo-encounters by contextualizing them further into Serbian social settings.

The interest and the sensibility in relating the issues of Internet use among gay population in Serbia is primarily derived from many hours spent in negotiating personal sexual identity with other members of the Serbian virtual community. These multifold virtual acquaintances on public gay chats enabled me to get an insight into the version of their “internet story”. By bringing forth their narrative of inclusion and finding their reference point in the broader virtual community or, in a far greater number of cases, by criticizing and stressing the “shallowness” of communication done through the Internet, I wanted to supplement personal experiences with both more profound theoretical reflections and an empirically based survey.

Chapter 1 - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1 *Balkan Gayscapes*

According to the latest public opinion survey on homophobia 70% of respondents⁴ agreed with the claim that homosexuality is a disease, 51% agreed that it should be cured and prevented by joint action of public institutions while 36% considers it as the western imported “product” that endangers family as the base of reproduction of the nation. On a more individual level, regarding the social distance towards this social category, the survey reveals the following facts: 70% of respondents expressed that they would be unhappy if they had a homosexual person in the family. What is more, one fourth would not like to have a homosexual as their fellow citizen. (CeSID 2008).

In order to frame homosexuality in Serbia I will follow Huseyin Tapinc’s analysis on the construction of different homosexualities in contemporary Turkish society. In many respects, his analysis is applicable to the Serbian context, because both Serbian and Turkish societies share particular configuration of patriarchy and homophobia (Lembevski 1999:403).

Tapinc departs from the meanings ascribed by individuals engaging themselves in homosexual relationships. Accordingly, these relationships strictly revolve around the rigidly understood distinction between masculine / feminine dimension. The four types (scenarios) of homosexualities. Tapinc comes up with are the masculine heterosexual; the masculine

⁴ The representative sample of the survey counted 957 respondents aged 15 years and above.

“heterosexual” and feminine homosexual; the masculine homosexual and feminine homosexual; and the masculine gay.

Tapinz’s first scenario, the masculine heterosexual, involves sexual behavior confined in mutual masturbation and excludes all other modes of sexual contact. Participants in this behavior do not regard it as a homosexual experience. Rather, due to the absence of penetrative sex act (which is seen as a crucial to conceptualization of homosexuality) they refer to this relation as a sort of a “male bonding” ritual.

The key aspect of the second scenario of homosexual relationships - the masculine “heterosexual” and feminine homosexual is the “clear distinction between masculine, “active” inserter, and the feminine, “passive” insertee, who regard their sexual / gender identity as heterosexual and homosexual, respectively” (Tapinc 1992:42). The common sexual practice among participants in this scenario is anal intercourse in which the well-defined conventional sexual roles perpetuate the whole relationship. It is vital to stress here that although this kind of relation takes place in a homosexual context for the active participant it satisfies only a heterosexual need.

Tapinc’s third homosexual scenario is the relationship between “masculine homosexual” and a “feminine homosexual”. Although both “parties” in this scenario assume a homosexual identity, the distinction masculine/feminine (active/passive) sexual roles are rigidly enforced. However, the erotization of the body during the sexual intercourse includes more areas, that is to say,

departs from pure genital sexuality and involves kissing, fondling. These sexual acts do not threaten the binary logic of masculine/feminine identities involved in a relationship.

The fourth scenario of homosexual relations emerges as a recent phenomenon in Turkish society. In this type of homosexuality partners transcend the active/ passive logic of homosexual relationship. Most gays develop a high sense of their masculinity and differentiate from those who operate according to the traditional “inserter – insertee” logic (Tapinc 1995:46).

Briefly, central to Tapinc’s discussion is that there are several types of homosexualities rather than one single category. Furthermore, schema of penetration (who inserts and who is insertee) is decisive in the conception of homosexuality. Ultimately, active / passive division of sexual roles among participant individuals perpetuates the myth of genuine masculinity, expressed through the concept of hypermasculinity. In other words, it appears that hypermasculine person is omnipotent – he “...can screw a man as well as a woman” equally good (Tapinc 1995:48).

In his queer ethnography, Lembevski (1999) appropriates Tapinc’s four scenarios of homosexuality to the Macedonian gay scene in the nineties. Among the few vital findings related to the impact of class and ethnicity in constructing homosexual identities at the scene, he comes up with several attention-grabbing generalizations from the field.

He puts forward the distinction between the terms “homosexual” and “gay. While the former has mostly medical connotation (used in institutions, statistics), the latter is used by a tiny minority of middle class (ethnic Macedonians) to describe a very fragile hybridized form of homo-

identity that only simulates gay subjectivity as known in the West (Lembevski 1999:403). Different from this, dominant Macedonian homosexual identities revolve around the first three traditional scenarios proposed by Tapinc. In order to highlight the features of “active/passive” logic, Lembevski comes up with two types of homosexuals on the Macedonian scene. The first, “tetki” (aunties) who play passive role, and the second, “ebachi” (fuckers) who participate in the division of sexual labor as an active agent (Lembevski 1999:405). Regarded in class dimension, the body of feminine aunties corresponds to the middle-class positions in the society.

Having in mind the similar past embodied in the ex – Yugoslav experience, the constellation of types of homosexual identities by Lembevski can be appropriated to the Serbian context. Although the term of “ebachi” do not entirely correlate with Serbian “jebači”, the term “tetki” can fit into the description of Serbian “tetka”. What is more, it seems that most of these aunties have “cyberdyzed” themselves and transgress into cyber – aunties.

The funneling scheme, from the abstract Turkish types of homosexualities to Macedonian “ebachi/tetki” distinction and their transposing to Serbian context is presented with the aim to map out the axis along which the Serbian homosexual division of role revolves.

1.2 The Internet /Community

In investigating the newly emerged cyber communities, Toennisian conceptions of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, rendered by Nisbet's into a concept of pseudo – Gemeinschaft are of great assistance. In reviewing the development of societies through the growing individualization of human relationships (egoism, impersonality and competition becoming more dominant) Nisbet asserts that the following phase of the development (in terms of transitions from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft) "...represents modern society's effort to recover – through techniques (read it as the Internet) of human relations, social security within the context of the Gesellschaft-like private or public corporation some of the communal securities of earlier societies" (Nisbet 1993:76).

Having in mind the plurality of associations made possible by the Internet communication, the virtual community can be perceived as the social aggregation that emerges as a consequence of the interaction among sufficient number of individuals around the certain topics/issues (Kojadinović, 2001:115). Indeed, the question can be posed: What can a means of communication such as the Internet offer to its users (geographically scattered and heteronomous conglomerate of people) in terms of what has been stressed in relation to "warm" attributes of Gemeinschaft existence?!

Some theoreticians such as Manuel Castells assert that these two concepts, namely the features of "warm" community and the special dispersion of members of the group do not go along the lines with each other – when commenting the case of the gay population in the United States he stresses that "...when gays are spatially scattered, they are not gays, because they are invisible." (Castells 1997: 213)

In explaining and connecting concepts of community and the intrinsically related concept of sociability, I will turn to Manuel Castells. The most distinctive feature of (virtual) communities (based on on – line internet communication) is the separation between locality (which was essential aspect of *Gemeinschaft* – like social groups) and sociability in the process of the formation of a community. Following that account the Internet and the communication done through it can be seen as a new form of sociability. Furthermore, the use of the classical Simmelian comprehension of the notion can be helpful: the Internet can be regarded as a “playform of association” which is a form of social interaction involving activities such as competition and proving mental and physical abilities”. (Tucker 2002: 121).

Furthermore, the previously mentioned concept of sociability should be complemented with the new one – the concept of random sociability as an inherent and distinctive feature of Internet communication (Castells 2001:116). The concept is related to the very nature of rapid development of ubiquitous and cheap technology such as the Internet; it emphasizes the very nature of internet communication – its artificial and non-physical character; Moreover, the classical “face to face” interaction disappears by leaving space for never-ending, shallow and random sociability. The critics of the Internet communication say “...the Internet is leading to social isolation, to a breakdown of social communication and family life, as faceless individuals practice random sociability, while abandoning face-to-face interaction in real settings.” (Castells 2001:116)

The literature on sociability done through the Internet as well as the social implications of the computer mediated communication put forward the following reflections: some (earlier)

researches on internet usage which suggest that computer mediated communication inhibits personal communication and is not favorable to the formation of community (Gauntlet 2000, 75). More specifically, some theoreticians stress that communication which the internet allows is most suitable for those users who are introvert and passive; the only benefit they gain from it is sheer lurking – to watch and obtain insight into matters without any kind of participation (Kojadinović 2001: 110)

However, more recent theoretical discussions stipulate the fact that not only does the internet increase the exposure to various sources of information but it also has favorable and affirmative influence on social interaction. Namely, in the surveys conducted by a series of American researchers in the field it is established that there is a positive feedback between online and offline sociability. (Katz and Rice 2002, 88). Correspondingly, internet users tend to have larger social networks than non-users. (Castells 2001: 121)

Particularly, the literature related to the Internet usage suggests the Internet is a vehicle that is highly suitable for and well appropriated by marginalized social groups. Particularly, in scarcity of every other available mode of communication, the group chooses the one (without the plan or agenda, though) that offers the highest level of anonymity. Katz and Rice (2002: 88) assert that “the Internet allows people who are isolated to interact with others who share their views and thereby to have their view reinforced and developed further”. For instance, the beneficial effect is reported in the analysis of resocializing and acquiring the new identity of boys who feel orientated towards homosexuality (Egan in Katz and Rice 2000, 88). This study obviously

indicates that the Internet can be quite beneficial in developing their self-identity or even acquiring the new one.

Much of the literature on cyber gay communities is focused on Northern American societies, especially the United States. In order to highlight and contrast different features of the internet usage in the case of the Serbian gay homosexual population (with special emphasis on the traditional and patriarchal context) a comparison with other similar cases is valuable. Such examples are ones conducted in Taiwan and Korea which dealt with the assessment and examination of features of the Internet usage among the queer population (Berry Chris and Martin Fran in Gauntlet 2000:74). The authors of these reports claim that in Taiwan and Korea, which were, until the nineties, societies with strict patriarchal kinship conventions and closely focused on heterosexual reproduction; in such a social context “queer communities and subjects used computer – mediated communication to construct their identities and communities on and off the net in a dialectical and mutually informing manner”(2000:75). Moreover, other findings suggest that the previously mentioned subjects have a particular investment in retaining and further developing the connection between their on line and off line lives.

In one of their web-ethnographical articles, Tikkanen and Ross (2003) draw the parallel between the present-day cyber chat rooms and Humperey’s ‘tea-room’⁵(Tikkanen and Ross, 2003,122) as meeting venues of homosexual pleasure seekers. As the Internet venues today, these places were providing advantages of both public and private social settings. By attracting large volume of potential sexual partners, the tearooms, except providing opportunities for rapid action with a

⁵ The Tea-room trade refers to sex exchange in the public spaces, especially in lavatories (<http://aaronsgayinfo.com/AlphaMenu/Tterms.html>)

variety of men, did not have any influence on improving any other aspect of gay life. Similarly, almost forty years after the publishing Humpreys's ethnographical account, the things have not much changed. Namely, one of the findings of the study is that chat rooms, as tea-rooms previously, attract people who mostly do not identify themselves as homosexuals. Rather, the chat rooms attract mostly young and married users who are "exploring and experimenting with their sexual identities without coming out as homosexual in real life. (Tikkanen and Ross 2003: 128).

What then the Internet offers? Is it a place in which one would take pleasure in all commodities of the "warm" community, or conversely, a basis of total alienation?

1.3 *Virtual Goffman*

Homosexuality and the subversion of "0-1" gender identity dyad are unacceptable to the mainstream discourse in present-day Serbia. At best, it tolerates the "threatening Other" (Štulhofer 2005, 86) by pushing it/him into a insubstantial "virtual space", far from the judging gaze. The gaze compulsively obsessed with a "medical" urge of designing symbols (symptoms) that will ensure the criteria for clear distinction between the stigmatized "them" and normal "us" (Goffman 1990:15).

In Goffmanian trope, stigmatized individuals are people who are unable to conform to social norms (1963:13), that is, those who avoid conforming to heteronormativity. Physically deformed, blemished regarding their individual character, "tribally dissimilar" or those ostracized on any other grounds must constantly strive to adjust to their precarious social identities. Their image of themselves must be (frequently) updated with the image of themselves

others reflect back to them. The alternative sexual identities in Serbia are to a great extent spoiled, requiring a lot of managing techniques to be employed.

The social imagery related to “the homosexual” plays a very important part in the course of re/shaping such a flawed identity. In the Balkans, “the homosexual” gains its identity constructing capacity from the negative content of social representations (Takacz, 2007:190). These negative habitual similes have an important role in the identity construction of Serbian gays. Indeed, homosexual identity can be seen as a social fiction shaped in a threatening social environment rather than taken as something that can be a “supporting pillar of individual self – identity” (Takacz 2007:197).

In such a context, the spread of the new cheap communicational technology comes as a cure. To its queer users, the Internet offers recognition, freedom and above all, the sense of inclusion. Therefore, being or becoming a gay in contemporary Serbia is increasingly and intrinsically linked to cyberspace. The Internet commodifies the techniques of handling the spoiled identity – it is a matrix that enables far more advanced techniques of segregating roles and audiences. Can it be stated that the liberating dimension of associating through the Internet is just a “utopian framework” which, by emphasizing the connectivity and ubiquity of a new medium, points to its presupposed transformative (illuminative) potential. (Vedres et al. 2005:171)

By focusing on the maintenance of fragile identities (handling for preserving), I will appropriate (“virtualize”) several of Goffman’s theoretical assertions and use them as working hypotheses to be adapted to context/specific type of cyber-interaction.

Initially, I will turn to notion of passing. By stressing that, information management plays an important role in cooperation with “the normals” (Goffman 1963:56), he defines passing as management of undisclosed discrediting information about the self. Applied on the virtual context, the properties of internet communication appear to be beneficial in preserving the “spoiled identity”. Therefore, the Internet will be regarded as a utility added to the set of passing techniques used by sexual minority. The Internet and the communication it facilitates reach its “passing” effects in a twofold manner – as a prop (support) of an off-line (real time) existence in maintaining the flawed identity and as a set of techniques which enable designing, appropriating and shifting one’s identity on-line.

Secondly, identity management in virtual space will be framed with Goffman’s dramaturgical conception of social interaction. In the center of this conception of social reality lies a relationship between performance of social actors on and off the “stage”; the actor is being watched by an audience, but at the same time the actor is an audience for his viewers. Appropriated to the virtual context, the actor/passers/user has the ability to choose his stage (chat room, forum) props as well as the costumes (macho, feminine, active, passive) he puts on in front of a specific audience. The actor's main goal is to keep his⁶ coherence, and adjust to the different settings offered to him. (Goffman 1997:25).

⁶ The “he” pronoun is used intentionally. Firstly, not avoiding to be politically correct, its use follows Goffman’s style in “Stigma”; secondly, of less importance, refers to the subjects of the research, men.

1.3.1 Maneuvers in the dark – passing on – line

A few accounts will be provided in order to map out passing in the virtual context, relying on several related concepts.

A person that passes leads a double life. No matter how the person is “Dr.Jekyll-Mr.Hyde” alike “...the true facts of his activity cannot be (that) contradictory or unconnected with each other” (Goffman 1990:81). The uniformity of off-line “rounded personal biography” is often challenged “with the multiplicity of selves one finds in the individual looking at him/her from the perspective of social roles”(Goffman 1963:81). The space for maneuvering and exercising the passing techniques will be expanded if a passer conducts a vigilant role and audience segregation enabling oneself to sustain “different selves” (Goffman 1990:81). The virtual space comes as a strong playground for decomposing of “rounded biographies”. Specifically, the exchange of information done through the Internet appears as a significant upgrader/ enhancer/ multiplier of persons social attributes. Put differently, not only that cyberspace (the area for identity management) offers more room for maneuvering, but it also enables the user to employ a greater number of passing techniques.

The stigmatized undergoes a moral career; a learning experience that develops different kinds of adjustments to one’s identity. Often times, this include learning about “normals” and the consequences of possessing the stigma. (Goffman 1990:45). It includes developing and sophisticating the passing techniques to handle personal identity in various contexts ultimately aiming to become one. Stigma can be late developing, forcing people who once thought of

themselves as “normal” to readjust radically. The stigmatized therefore go through a number of “affiliation circles”, patterns of fluctuating identifications. Some of them might be marked by critical incidents which are also used retrospectively to account for the adoption of one’s identity, as the case of coming out as a gay.

Often, the Internet boosts the moral career by speeding up identifying circles of affiliation, provoking the late development of stigma. For many users, the first logging on to the “WWW” is remembered as a critical incident in developing further moral careers and adjusting their identity-handling mode to higher/lower level⁷.

Likewise, enhancing the effects of passing techniques on the Internet in order to preserve spoiled identity is associated with a few other issues. Passing on-line excludes the negative effects of classical “real time” passing. Indeed, the presence of “the wise” (the one who “reads” one’s passing”), the “fellow sufferer” (the one who is familiar with the “the tricks of the trade”), the high level of anxiety caused by living a life that can collapse any moment (Goffman, 1990:109) are reduced to minimum. As in the case of purchasing new software on-line, the lack of restrictions (enabled by the Internet) facilitates the possibility to upgrade, downgrade or multiply one’s existing identity.

On the (gay) chat, a passer can assume any identity. Endowed with the anonymity of cyber space, the passer employs advanced “disidentifiers”. Instead of “intellectual glasses”, he utilizes staged profiles, angled pictures or “shallow” textual verbal techniques embodied in labels such as

⁷ Illustration found in the body of literature is the experience of Baszka, a 52- year old lesbian in Poland: At last, three years ago I dared to type that word “homosexuality” into Google....Two million pages. Then I typed: lesbian. One million pages. Oh my God, I thought, this world exists after all...”Gruszczynska 2007:102).

“normal”, ordinary, “regular”, designed to present everything about the passer of the chat / forum except the facts of one’s actual identity.

While seeing the potential of internet communication as an undoubted endeavor in itself, it has nevertheless aroused opposition. As stipulated, one’s passing potentials are significantly stretched out with the use of internet. It appears that the “risky” aspects of passing (handling “the wise”, blackmailing, “the fellow sufferer”) are reduced to minimum in the communication done through the Internet. Having said that, the cyber space can be perceived not as polygon for testing and improving of fragile identity but more as a playground of “bravado” maneuvers which aim ultimately falls not in liberation but rather reaches its peak in developing “double (multiple) biographies” (Goffman, 1990:99).

Chapter 2 - METHODOLOGY

Methodological issues related to the research will be presented in three sections. The first section will offer few accounts (justifications) on method selection of the research. The second will tangle few vital distinction and the third will deal with concrete methods utilized in the course of examining the phenomenon.

Methodologically, the research was conceptualized as a combination of survey and interviews. In its nature, the research is very inductive, in a sense that it is grounded on several years spent in “participatory observation” and communication with members of the Serbian virtual community. The outcome of this long-lasting process was a set of common reason thoughts on the nature of the aforementioned community, which sought for extra scientific justification. On that account, the extremely personal “baseline” of data was planned to be enriched with new information from a twofold methodological approach – reflections from the semi-structured interviews and the survey based on a questionnaire with close-ended questions. By configuring the methodological approach in this manner, I expected to benefit both from the illustrative potential survey offers and from advantages of quantitative methodology.

Before getting any further methodological issues, a few distinctions related to the language vital for understanding both methodology and further analysis. Therefore, in this research, the terms gay / homosexual will be used interchangeably and will refer to internet users visiting different modes of internet communication, for this research relevant, public gay chats, forums, personal ads, personal blogs and social networking websites.

Rather than getting deeper into semiotics and multilayeredness of the phenomenon, the research and the questionnaire sought to address the visitors of gay chats and forums, no matter how they perceive themselves. On that account, when referring to the sample of respondents as homosexuals, it should be noted that not all informants identified as such. Slightly less than one third of them placed themselves in the category of bisexuals.

Furthermore, the Internet use will be regarded as an exposure to various contents intrinsic to internet communication such as posting entries on forums, chatting on public chats, editing personal ads and connecting through the social networking web sites. These ways of communication via Internet will be referred as to modes of communication. Not perceiving other aspects of internet communication irrelevant to the issues, the research focused only on the mentioned ones.

The main body of the data was obtained with the aim of the questionnaire with 51 close-ended questions (the questionnaire is attached in the appendix 1). The questionnaire was designed in stages. Initially, a pilot questionnaire with several broad areas of interests regarding the use of various means of internet communication among the gay population in Serbia was sent to visitors of the gay chat room at www.gay-serbia.com. In due course, several subsets of questions were crystallized corresponding to reflections given by the chat /forum users. The end product of this process was the closed ended questionnaire. It comprises three subsets of questions. The introductory questions are utilized for obtaining background information on users. The second set of questions leads respondents to questions about their sexual orientation, previous sexual experiences and their on/off line disclosure of sexual orientation. The last set referred to

properties of internet usage in the given population.. The questionnaire was distributed by posting its link on www.gay-serbia.com and www.gayromeo.com. The web sites are chosen according to being the most visited LGBT sites in Serbia.⁸

The sample of quantitative part of the research was self-selected, meaning that a total of 84 visitors of gay chat rooms and forums responded by filling the posted questionnaire. Those respondents who clicked on the link posted on “gay-serbia” forum filled the majority of questionnaires. Less information was obtained while requesting filling the questionnaire by members of chat rooms.

It is worth stressing that methodological solutions and conceptual approximations are interchangeably connected with the very process of gathering the data and the limitations acquainted during that process. On that account, one should bear in mind the marginalization of the LGBT population and their need for anonymity. Certain limitations related to this issue should be highlighted.

The data collecting by means of a questionnaire started by provoking conversations with gay-chat users. After brief introduction related to the purpose of the research, filling in the questionnaire was proposed. Personal e-mail address was requested.

The process went too slow and it was time consuming. What is more, I came upon almost 100% refusal of chat users to fill the questionnaire by highlighting the answers in the word processor. The alternative solution was found in the form of web site (<http://www.createsurvey.co>) which is

⁸ <http://www.zion.co.yu/forum/printthread.php?TopicID=1111>

specifically designed for conducting on-line surveys. This contributed much in the economy of the research by both saving time in obtaining the data and by “depersonalizing” the process of conducting the survey. The statistical analysis of data included the use of SPSS 10.0 software. Specific technique used for generating profiles of internet usage was hierarchical clustering (subtype – ward clustering).

As an addition the quantitative part of the research, five semi-structured interviews (one in person and four via telephone) were conducted. These interviews are supposed to offer supplementary data and a more grained picture on the character of Internet usage among the visitors of gay sites. The structure of the interviews followed the subsets of questions in the questionnaire. All interviewees were recruited after several discussions on the gay public chats.

Chapter 3 – STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

3.1 *“Background information on the sample of respondents*

As a forerunner of the research, several conversations on the public chat were conducted with the aim of filtering out the main topics related to the internet usage among the gay population in Serbia. As a product of these discussions, I came up with several dimensions along which the final questionnaire was concentrated. On that account – the three fields of interest crystallized. As mentioned in the methodology part, the sets focusing on each of these fields was designed – the first, to obtain background information on users, the questions related to sexual orientation/ its disclosure and the third set of questions related to the properties of internet usage. Accordingly, following the order of research interests, the body of findings will be presented.

The sample of visitors of gay chats and forums included in the research counted 84 respondents. The distribution of respondents regarding their sexual orientation clearly shows that the majority of respondents are homosexuals – 60 (71.2%) while the rest of respondents declare themselves as bisexual. Other categories encompassed by the research (heterosexual and transgender) were not present in the sample of respondents.

The majority of respondents reside in the capital of Serbia (34). Counted together with the users from other larger cities in Serbia (Novi Sad, Kragujevac, Niš) the number reaches nearly the two thirds of population surveyed. However, the number of those living in rural areas is quite insignificant. Only 2.4 % of the population of respondents lives in such areas. The rest of the sample lives in ten smaller cities.

Regarding the age cohorts in which the respondents placed themselves a few facts should be highlighted. Initially, the two-thirds of the sample or respondents visiting chat and forum are young people aged between 19 and 30 years old. Visitors aged 25 to 30 are the most frequent users of chats and forums. On the other hand, the proportion of those older than 40 years is almost insignificant – only five users or 6 % of the sample.

Education is another variable to be considered. Half of the respondents (42) completed high school education. The fact that 39 respondents (46, 4%) hold graduate or post-graduate diploma might be indicative to assert that this social category is highly educated. Compared to 6.5% of people with higher education in the total Serbian population, this fact appears as significant. (Bogdanović 2006)⁹. In addition to this, slightly more than two-thirds of the sample of respondents stated that they are employed: 58 respondents making 69% of the whole sample.

The two-thirds – 57 (67.7%) of respondents co-habitate with their family members or relatives. On the other hand, only 15 (18%) respondents live alone. There is a small number of those living with their partners or spouses – 9 respondents (11%), all of which declared them as homosexuals. Having in mind the limited number of respondents, these facts deserve additional interpretation and can be indicative in two ways. Initially, it might confirm the general attitude of incapacity of establishing and preserving longer relationships among the members of homosexual social category in patriarchal / traditional social context. Secondly, not only social and emotional engagements are dependable on available space one has at his disposal but also sexual practice. The fact that one does not have a place of his own might have decisive role in choosing the Internet as a mode of communication with other members of the community.

⁹ The comparison of the fact with the proportion in the general population is done since there are no data available (in the best of knowledge of the author) on the educational level of the homosexual population.

The distribution of respondents according to their marital status reveals the following facts: the great majority – 77 (92%) is single (not married). Nearly half of the population, 40 or 47% of respondents, grounds their sexual practice on steady relationships with their sexual partners. One third of those respondents engaged in stable relationships, 7 or 11% of total number of respondents conceptualize their relationships as “open”, meaning that they leave an extra space for additional “maneuvering” with additional sexual partners. A pair of interesting results was reached when visitors of gay chats and forums were reflecting on their current sexual situation, visitors of chat rooms. Firstly, there is a significant number of those visitors of the gay chats and members of the gay forums who do not (willingly or unwillingly) engage in sexual relationships, i.e. they subject themselves sexual fasting - more than one third (36 or 42,5%) of the total sample of respondents. Secondly, the number of those who could be conditionally labeled as promiscuous (both, the ones grounding their sexual practice on “one-night-stands” and those practicing open relationships) is not that significant – 19 respondents or 23.7% of the sample.

According to the data, the biggest share of respondents 34 (40.5%) has never visited the places where the members of the LGBT population gather (bars, clubs etc.). Furthermore, 36 respondents (42.9%) visit such places occasionally and virtually nobody does it on a regular basis – 2 respondents (2.4%). Only 9.5% of respondents from the sample are involved in any LGBT activism. Reasons for such conditions of “off-line” social engagements can be found in two facts. First, there are only two cities in Serbia with venues for the LGBT population. The second reason can be that even in these cities that have such venues (Belgrade and Novi Sad) the “offer” is stereotyped and facilitates a limited and quite closed circle of people. As a result, both

the on-line and off-line gay scenes in Serbia are very small, and the gay life is characterized by tight social control, an “everybody-knows-everybody” mentality (Velzen 2007:28).

A few facts related to the properties of the Internet usage based on the survey should be presented. The visitors of chat rooms and forums mostly positioned themselves in the category of those users who, on daily basis, spend one to three hours in browsing the LGBT orientated web sites (46% of the sample) jointly chatting on public/private rooms, posting entries on forums and posting personal ads, etc. It is also worth stressing out that majority of respondents have used the Internet in the past five years or more (71 respondent or 89,5%).

Interestingly enough, a considerable number of respondents from the sample (34 or 40.5%) stated that they did not have any kind of contact with the members of the LGBT population before engaging into a virtual one via the Internet. Additionally, the significant share of the sample (27 or 32.1%) claims that they had only few acquaintances (up to two) before they started using the Internet. It can be asserted, by merging these two categories of users together, that nearly three-fourths of the sample did not have any or had a infrequent contact with the other non-virtual fellows. It can be claimed that, for most of respondents in the sample, the Internet and the communication done through it presents a “ground-zero” or departure point of their queer existence (see table 1)

Table 1. Acquaintances with the LGBT population before Internet

	Number	%	Cumulative Percent
No acquaintances	34	40.5	40.5
Up to two	27	32.1	72.6
A lot of acquaintances	19	22.6	95.2
Exclusively socializing with the LGBT people	4	4.8	100.0
Total	84	100.0	

In view with these facts related to sociability done through the Internet, the quantitative part of the research addressed the possible role the Internet plays in the lives of respondents regarding both accepting their sexual orientation themselves and revealing it to others. Regarding the acceptance of their sexual orientation, the body of respondents falls into two separate groups. The first group of respondents (44 or 52.4%) asserted that communication through the Internet did not have any, or had slight significance in accepting their own sexual orientation. Nevertheless, the number of those ascribing the Internet a contributive role in accepting their homosexuality/bisexuality is not negligible. Specifically, 35 (41.6) respondents believe that internet usage had an influence on them accepting their homosexuality/bisexuality. On the other hand, the majority of respondents, 52 or 61.9%, do not perceive the Internet as contributive in prompting them to reveal their alternative sexuality.

Dissimilar conclusions were reached based on the several semi-structured interviews conducted with the visitors of gay chats and forums. Although interviewees did not ascribe “eye-opening” role to the Internet in accepting personal sexual orientation, they stipulated the contribution of such communication if not in coming out process, then at least in gaining a sort of a sense of inclusion (connectedness). Communication among the members of virtual community evolves around two axes – the goal it tends to achieve (make new acquaintances, get in contact with potential sexual partner) and the modes through which these goals could be accomplished

(communication through the gay public chats, posting on gay forums, posting personal ads, associating through personal blogs and social networks). On that account, the sample of respondents was configured in the following manner: in order to establish new contacts with other members of the LGBT community, the majority of respondents choose to do so by using gay forums – 43 respondents (51%). The least used mode for this purpose is personal blog – only 16 respondents (19%). On the other hand, for getting in contact with potential sexual partners, most of the respondents from the sample utilize chat rooms.

The aforementioned finding corresponds to the results from the survey conducted among the visitors of Swedish gay chat rooms. In particular, the study compared differences among the men visiting chat rooms. The data pointed to the difference in the sexual practice between those who use chat rooms frequently and those who use it rarely. The former one were younger, more likely to have a female sexual partner, less open about their homosexuality, less likely to be LGBT activists, and more likely to engage in unprotected anal intercourse. The authors of the survey concluded that the Internet “might be a means of approximating homosexual contact” (Tikkanen and Ross 2003:122)

Having in mind all descriptions presented, the average Serbian cyber gay /bisexual is likely to have the following features: he lives in Belgrade or in one of larger cities in Serbia. He is young, probably student or holding a college degree. Not married, he lives with his family. (Surprisingly enough) he is not promiscuous, rarely visiting official places where other members of LGBT community gather. Rarely involved in LGBT activism, he uses the internet for a longer period and spends considerable amount of time in browsing web sites. Before chatting/posting ads or

entries on the forums, he did not have any social contacts with “off-line” homosexuals – the first logging to the “gay-serbia” site (or whichever gay web portal) was “ground zero” of his queer existence. Although that was the important moment in his life, he does not ascribe great significance to communication via the Internet both in accepting personal sexual orientation and in revealing it to others.

Finally, when on chat or forum, he rarely presents his picture or infrequently, his name. When he wants to meet someone new from the “circle”, he turns to public forums. When wants to “hook up” he enters the gay public chat.

3.2. “The Perfect User”: Profiles of users on public chat rooms and forums

In view of the general aim of the research to present accounts on what the internet represents and what kind of needs it facilitates for its gay users, the study moves from introductory descriptions to a more analytical discussion.

Deriving from the general attitude that homosexuals are not a homogeneous social category¹⁰, the analysis focused on delineating possible differences regarding internet usage among the sample of respondents and by doing so, to come up with some analytical tools to be utilized in the further scrutiny¹¹. Moreover, data collected show that there are significant differences among examinees when they utilize the Internet to find other potential members of same population

¹⁰ This is more practical than theoretical view that is a product of political efforts made in order to highlight the fact that homosexuals as a social category is diverse as the society in general. This view, is a shift from common “pathological” medical representation of homosexuals as a moonlit group, where all the features of its members are reduced to stereotype of the masculine woman or the feminine man. (Spasić 2000)

¹¹ The profiles of users will be contextualized further in the qualitative part of the thesis.

(whether they are seeking for LGBT orientated information, acquaintances or pure sexual satisfaction). In order to map out the sample of respondents on the grounds of data gathered, cluster analysis was performed.

The cluster analysis was based on variables representing the significance of various modes of communication through the Internet. Analysis was conducted by using two, three and four clusters¹². In other words, visitors of gay chats and forums were divided into several different groups. The aim was to find features that distinguish each group from the other. Attempts of segregating the sample into two, three and five clusters failed. Put differently, the difference among groups that were created has not shown any statistical significance – the groups (profiles) did not differ among each other. However, by using four clusters, statistical significance was achieved. Thus, homosexual / bisexual sample of respondents was segmented into four groups, each one with specific features and patterns of internet usage related to communication with other members of LGBT population. Each of these patterns of Internet has been labeled accordingly – the active, the opportunist, the passive and the (passive) discursive user profiles (see table 2).

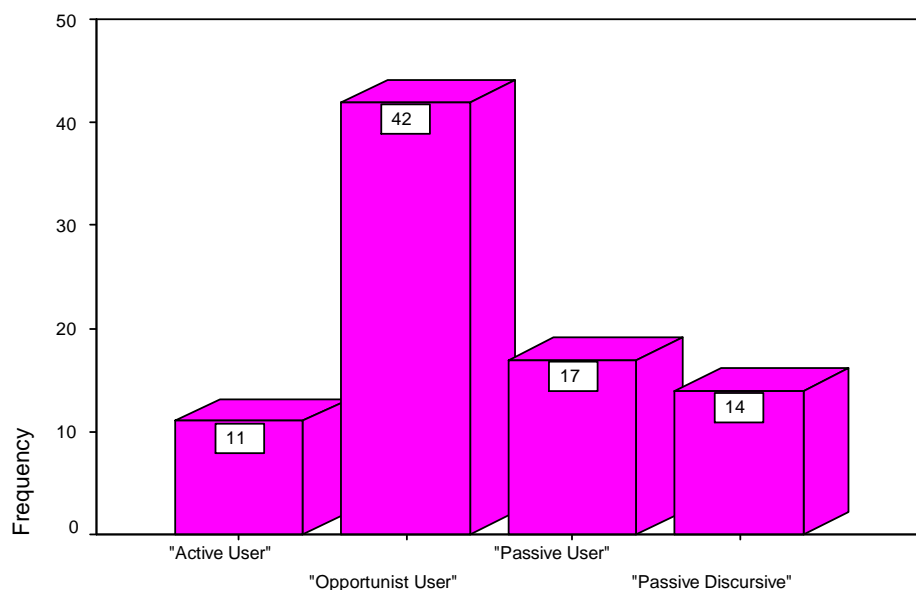
The variables that have been used for delineating the profiles included all the “importance” type¹³ of questions from the questionnaire measuring various modes of Internet communication (usage of forums, chat rooms, personal blogs, personal ads, social network sites). The usage of every mode of Internet communication was covered with the scale of values where the value “1” signifies unimportant, and the value “5” is very important. Examinees have assessed each mode

¹² Introducing more clusters would be inappropriate since the sample of respondents was limited to 84 respondents.

¹³ The list of these variables can be found in the questionnaire enclosed as an appendix. Questions 35 to 44.

of communication examined by the research both for making new acquaintances with other members of the LGBT population and for contacting possible sexual partners.

Table 2. The distribution of visitors of gay chats and forums according to features of their internet usage.



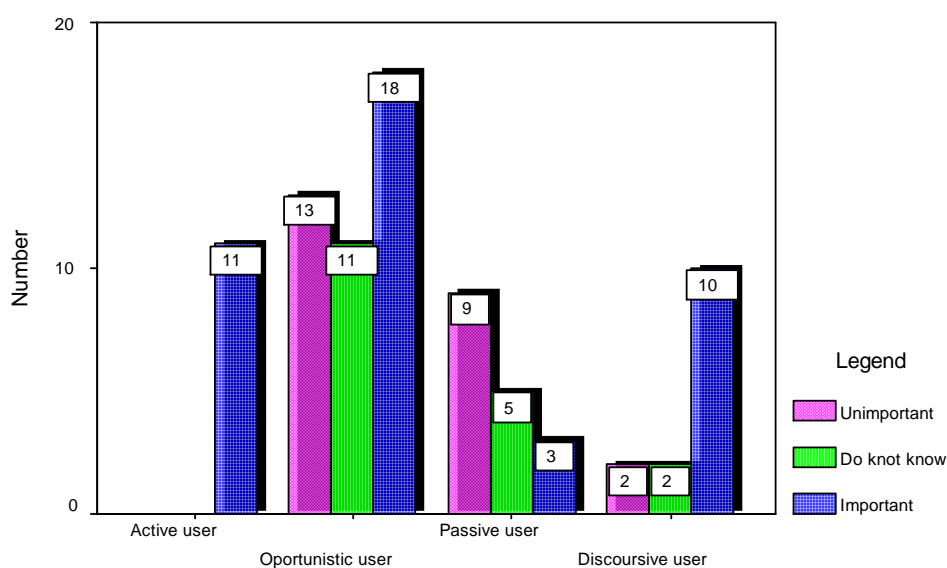
Therefore, the image of an average gay/bisexual using the Internet in Serbia calls for further updating and fine-tuning. For that purpose, profiles of users visiting gay chat rooms and forums will be presented. In due course, the features of profiles will be contextualized with other data relevant for the research.

3.2.1 Active user profile

Among the total number of respondents, the first profile has the lowest distribution in the sample – 11 respondents (13%). Respondents whose properties of internet usage correspond to this profile conceptualize their communication through the Internet by relying on almost every

available mode it offers both for securing potential sexual partners and making new acquaintances. More specifically, gay forums and chat rooms are extremely important in making new acquaintances while every mode (chats, forums, personal ads, blogs) is utilized for connecting purposes with possible sexual candidates (see table 3). Due to engaging in all possible modes of internet communication examined, this profile will be labeled as the active user profile (see table 3).

Table 3. The significance of chat rooms in making new acquaintances

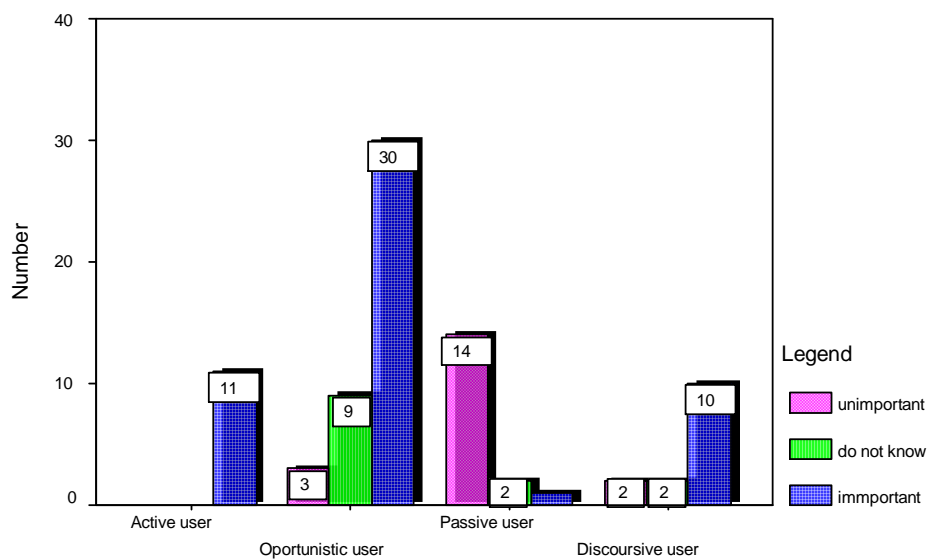


3.2.2 Opportunistic user profile

This is the profile with the most significant share in the sample of visitors of the gay chat rooms and forums. Namely, the total of the 42 (50%) respondents' properties of internet communication with other LGBT people correspond to features of this profile. Unlike the previous profile, this profile is highly selective when it comes to utilizing various modes of internet communication. Indeed, forums are neither used for seeking sexual partners nor for expanding the network of acquaintances. Blogs and social networking websites are also perceived as highly unimportant,

especially for making new acquaintances. On the other hand, internet communication is a vital utility employed when it comes to getting in contact with potential sexual partners. Specifically, around three-fourths (30) of those whose properties of internet usage correlate with this profile assert that gay chat rooms and personal ads play an equally important role in securing possible sexual encounters (see table 4 on the following page). In addition, this finding might point to interactive character of this profile.

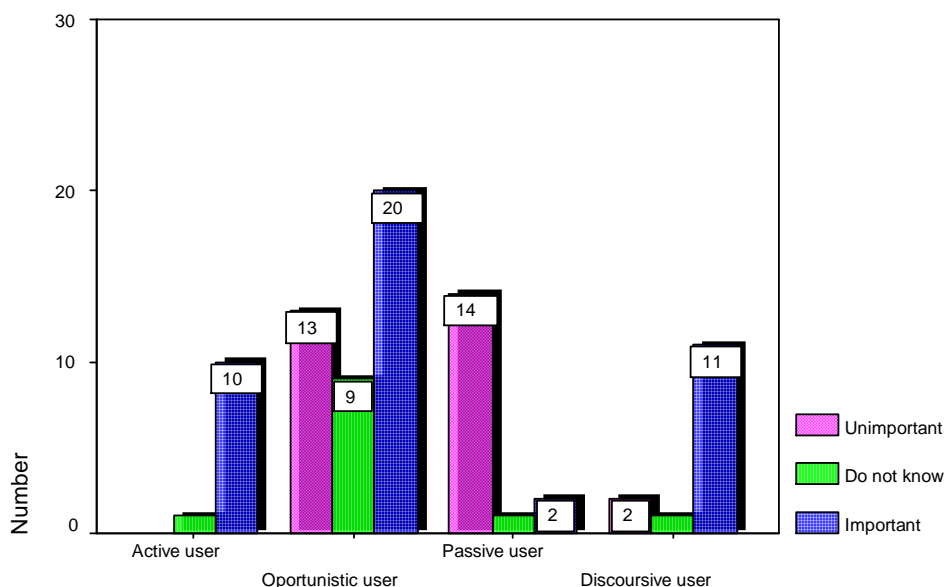
Table 4. The significance of gay chat rooms in contacting potential sexual partners



3.2.2 Passive user profile

The third profile of visitors of gay chat rooms and forums do not perceive any mode of communication via the internet as relevant for either making new acquaintances or contacting sexual partners. In the whole sample of respondents, there are 17 (20,2%) visitors of chat rooms and forums who can be subsumed under this profile. Labeled as passive, this profile has completely opposite features than the first (active) one (see table 5).

Table 5. The significance of gay forums in making new acquaintances



3.2.4 Profile Four – Passive -Discursive user profile

This profile can be regarded as a sub-type of the passive profile since these two profiles have similarities. Among the total number of respondents, 14 visitors of gay chat rooms and forums can be categorized under this profile.

As its “sibling” (the “passive” profile) the group of respondents do not tend to use personal ads, blogs and social networking websites for both purposes (acquaintances/ seeking other “pleasure seekers”). They are also not keen to employ forums and chat rooms for finding sexual partners; rather, they use them (especially chat rooms) only to expand their social networks. By stressing the only aspect of internet communication (chat rooms), this profile is labeled as passive-discursive (see also table 5 the previous page). The fine-grained feature of profiles of visitors of the gay chat rooms and forums can be observed in the table 6.

Table 6. A brief description of profiles and their properties of internet usage

<p>Active User Profile</p>	<p>Networking sites – uses them rarely for making new acquaintances; similarly, do not see them as important in finding sexual partners. Forums – finds them important in finding sexual partners; likewise, sees them important in finding new acquaintances. Chat room – important in finding sexual partners; similar usage related to finding new acquaintances. Blogs – mostly important in finding sexual part; important for contacting acquaintances; Personal ads – important in expanding social networks, overallly important in finding sex partners.</p>	<p>Uses almost every mode of internet-mediated communication both for finding sex. partners and new acquaintances.</p>
<p>Opportunistic User Profile</p>	<p>Networking sites – ambivalent in using this mode for “acquainting” purposes; mostly not keen in using them for finding sexual partners. Forums – ambivalent for finding sexual partners. Do not use them for contacting acquaintances. Chat rooms – highly utilize them for finding sexual part but not for acquainting purposes. Personal ads – highly important in establishing sexual encounters; not important for making new acquaintances. Blogs – unimportant both for finding sex partners and friends.</p>	<p>Uses internet for securing sexual partners mostly through personal ads and chat rooms</p>
<p>Passive User Profile</p>	<p>Networking sites – unimportant whether expanding social networks or contacting sexual partners. Forums – unimportant whether expanding social networks or connecting with sexual partners. Chat rooms – unimportant whether expanding social networks or connecting with sexual partners. Personal ads – unimportant whether expanding social networks or connecting with sexual partners. Blogs – unimportant whether expanding social networks or connecting with sexual partners.</p>	<p>Do not ascribe any significance to any of examined modes of communication .</p>
<p>Passive - Discursive User Profile</p>	<p>Networking sites – unimportant for acquaintances; unimportant for securing sexual partners. Forums – unimportant both for sexual partner and acquaintances. Chat rooms – sees them as important in making new acquaintances, however, do not see them important for contacting sexual partners Personal ads – totally unimportant for sexual part and acquaintances. Blogs – unimportant both for contacting sexual partners and expanding social contacts.</p>	<p>Inert – not keen on relying on the Internet for contacting sexual partners. However relies on chats for expanding social networks</p>

3.3. The Profiles Contextualized

Let us now turn to see how these profiles correspond to other contextual aspects examined by the research. It has to be stressed that, unlike statistically significant differences established among the profiles regarding their internet usage, the generalizations to be presented have only a suggestive character¹⁴.

Although there are only five “older” respondents (aged 40 years and more) in the sample, most of them are situated in the group labeled as discursive users – two respondents.. The active as well as opportunistic user respondents tend to be in 25 to 30 age group.

The most educated are the passive users, having not one respondent within the category with only elementary school completed and the largest number of respondents with graduate or postgraduate degree (ten respondents or 59.9% out of all included in this group). On the other hand, the most uneducated are discursive users with the one fifth to the respondents (21.4%) with elementary school completed.

The opportunistic user mostly shares the comfort of his home with his parents or family. The general lack of private living space for most of the users of this profile¹⁵, coupled with the fact that most of them are aged 25 – 30 might have influence in deciding to choose internet communication as a substitute for real-time engagements. This fact, largely, complements the general picture of everyday life of homosexuals in Serbia. (Velzen 2007:20). Conversely, the active user is the profile with the highest number of respondents living alone. In addition, this profile of users, comparing to other three profiles, do tend to visit official LGBT places.

¹⁴ This fact is due to the limited number of respondents in the sample of visitors of gay chat room and forum.

¹⁵ The same can be asserted for most of the respondents from the sample – 56 of them or 66.7% resides together with their parents of family.

The opportunists tend to spend the largest amount of time in browsing gay orientated contents on the Internet (1-3 hours browsing personal ads, chats, forums etc) while active users spend the largest amount of time on- line in general (from 3-5 hour per day).

Most of respondents do not perceive Internet communication as contributive to both accepting their alternative sexual identity and to revealing it to others. This is especially the case with the active users regarding the revealing of their sexual identity to others – almost the three –fourths of those whose properties of internet usage correspond with the features of this profile see the Internet as unimportant in the process.

In the sample of visitors of gay chat room and forum, 11 (13.1%) respondents have totally revealed their sexual orientation to everybody (relatives, close friends, broader social context, members of LGBT community). On the other hand, there were 15 (17.9%) respondents totally “closeted”, not revealing their sexual orientation to anybody). The largest number of totally “closeted” respondents was concentrated in the active user profile. However, almost an equal number of those completely “out” was again associated with the same profile. This fact can lead to conclude that, there is not a profile among the four generated which is prone in revealing sexual identity. Specifically, the strictest users when it comes to presenting one’s personal picture are passive user respondents. More than three-fourths (82.4%) of the passive user respondents asserted that presenting someone’s picture or name could be harmful in some way. On the other hand, the most liberal regarding this issue are respondents labeled as discursive users – 50% of them present their pictures in one of the modes of communication inspected.

According to the data, the Internet is the way to be utilized in order to contact a potential sexual partner in Serbia. In particular, the discursive respondents have the highest percentage of those

relying on this mode of communication (92%). Moreover, public places are not favorable for finding possible sexual partners for the vast majority of respondents (See table 7)

Table 7. The place where internet users meet their sexual partners

	The "place" where I meet potential sexual partners				Total
	official LGBT places (bars, clubs, discoteques)	private parties	the Internet (chat rooms, ads, forums)	in public places (toilets, parks, train/bus stations)	
The "active" user	1	1	9		11
	9.1%	9.1%	81.8%		100.0%
% of Total	1.2%	1.2%	10.7%		13.1%
The "opportunistic" user	7	3	31	1	42
	16.7%	7.1%	73.8%	2.4%	100.0%
% of Total	8.3%	3.6%	36.9%	1.2%	50.0%
The "passive" user	3	1	13		17
	17.6%	5.9%	76.5%		100.0%
% of Total	3.6%	1.2%	15.5%		20.2%
The "discursive" user	1		13		14
	7.1%		92.9%		100.0%
% of Total	1.2%		15.5%		16.7%
Total	12	5	66	1	84
	14.3%	6.0%	78.6%	1.2%	100.0%
% of Total	14.3%	6.0%	78.6%	1.2%	100.0%

The most promiscuous (regarding the number of sexual partners), both in and out of internet communication context are opportunist user respondents. Almost three-fourths (69%) of the total number of these respondents have one or more than one sexual partner contacted via the Internet. Likewise, the largest number of these respondents also had one or more than one sexual partner in the past six months contacted outside the Internet context (see table 8).

Table 8. The number of sexual partners in the past six months contacted via the Internet

	The Number of sexual partners in the past six months contacted via the Internet		Total
	Not one	One or more than one	
Active user	4 36.4% 4.8%	7 63.6% 8.3%	11 100.0% 13.1%
Oportunist user	13 31.0% 15.5%	29 69.0% 34.5%	42 100.0% 50.0%
Passive user	8 47.1% 9.5%	9 52.9% 10.7%	17 100.0% 20.2%
Passive - discursive user	8 57.1% 9.5%	6 42.9% 7.1%	14 100.0% 16.7%
Total	33 39.3% 39.3%	51 60.7% 60.7%	84 100.0% 100.0%

On the other hand, discursive user respondents tend to contact a smaller number of sexual partners both in and out the Internet context. In the past six months, less than a half of “discoursives” (42.9%) contacted one or more then one sexual partner via the Internet and only one user managed to contact sexual partners outside the Internet context (see table 9)

Table 9. The number of sexual partners in the past six months contacted outside the Internet

	The number of sexual partners contacted outside the internet context		Total
	Not one	One or more than one	
Active user	6	5	11
	54.5%	45.5%	100.0%
	7.1%	6.0%	13.1%
Opportunistic user	21	21	42
	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%
Passive user	11	6	17
	64.7%	35.3%	100.0%
	13.1%	7.1%	20.2%
Passive -discursive user	13	1	14
	92.9%	7.1%	100.0%
	15.5%	1.2%	16.7%
Total	51	33	84
	60.7%	39.3%	100.0%
	60.7%	39.3%	100.0%

Briefly, while opportunist users respondents lean towards being promiscuous both in and out the Internet context, the discursive ones tend to be celibate. Although there was no statistically significant differences among the profiles of internet usage regarding these variables, there is visible pattern of securing sexual partners in cases of opportunist and discursive users.

Judging from all the data presented, it can be asserted that vast majority of visitors of gay chats and forums exclusively rely on internet communication regardless whether they want to expand their social networks or to secure sexual encounters. Certain modes of such communication, i.e social networking web sites and personal blogs are rarely utilized. Conversely, chat rooms are the most frequently used mode of communication, especially employed to secure possible sexual encounters.

Among the respondents in the sample surveyed, certain patterns of Internet usage are determined. Each of these patterns (profiles) is labeled in accordance to properties of internet usage.

On that account, the “active” and the “passive” user profiles represent the two opposite positions on the continuum of internet usage while the “opportunistic” respondents, making the majority in the sample visitors, stipulate the instrumental value of communication done through the Internet. They do so by favoring more dynamic and interactive mode of communication – chat rooms. Finally, the “discursive” user respondents configure their Internet usage in the same manner as passive although they tend to employ internet communication, especially via chat rooms, mostly for conversational purposes.

Chapter 4 - INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

4.1 Context

In order to highlight the vitality of internet communication among the homosexuals, the connection between the previous statistical findings and personal reflections of users will be established.

While taking into account reflections from all interviews conducted, the emphasis will be on the two respondents' narratives, namely I.D's. and S.S's. By selecting these two interviewees, I assumed that a maximum contrast in their narratives would be favorable for highlighting the vital aspects relevant to the research. The contrast in narratives is related to the difference in the general tone underlying the interviews and reflections on the role of internet usage in connecting with other LGBT people. In some parts of the analysis, reflections from additional three respondents will be included.

Since anonymity is guaranteed to all respondents, few basic facts will be provided. I.D, 29 years, holds a BA degree from a University in Serbia. Ex LGBT activist. Unemployed. Completely outed. Narrates in logical and well-structured manner. S.S, 28 years, completed high school education, involved in computer merchandising, employed. Considerably reserved, Completely closeted. Other respondents – C.S. 28, M.J 30 and J.P 26. All declare them as homosexuals.

4.2 Approach

According to concepts from the theoretical part, the qualitative analysis was framed in two ways. The stress was on identity management (both in on/off line context) through the various associated concepts – developing coping strategies, sexual orientation disclosure, “learning” experience related to being /becoming a gay (moral career) etc.

Further to this, I add another layer of analysis by paying attention to what users present on the issue and what stays hidden (assumed). For that purpose, I departed from the premise that interaction should be perceived as encounters between actors performing roles in front of each other, and categorize other. While doing so, they place certain elements in the front light of the stage of interaction (appearance, manners) while they leave others backstage (Goffman 1997:23). I assumed that these processes of giving, hiding and reading signs took place in the interviews and that from these instances (reflections) I can use in the analysis – put differently - I will assume how much of it stays in the realm of “backstaged”.

After offering the brief introductory clarification on the aim of the research and kind of issues it addresses, the respondents were requested to reflect on how they utilize the Internet through various means (chats, personal ads etc) and of how important is such communication for them in connecting and establishing social relations with other members of LGBT community. The initial “feed back” received from the respondents was positive, considering the context in which some of the interviews were conducted - reflecting about the sensitive issues (sexual orientation, partners etc) via telephone without previously knowing the person with whom they are talking

4.3 Comparative analysis of the interviews

4.3.1 “Moral career”

Most of interviewees started their narratives by stressing the bad position of the LGBT population in a traditional social environment, emphasizing the limited number of ways to get in touch with other members of the same community. In such context, most of them ascribed considerable importance to communication over the Internet both in accessing the information on homosexuality and, more important, in enabling one to get in touch with like-minded people.

Central to their contextualization is the common conception of a linear “homosexual career”. Although with different departures (stages in life in which interviewees revealed to themselves/others their homosexuality), all these histories more or less revolve around a critical event embodied either in the act of buying a computer or in the first logging on to the World Wide Web. Put differently, most of internet users interviewed follow (more or less) the same pattern. The pattern is linear. The time is counted according to “before – after” (buying computer / logging to www) logic.

Linear history with a critical event is offered by S.S:

I have had a personal computer for a long period. In fact, dealing with computers is my job... In 2001, I read an article in a newspaper on “gay-serbia”. Soon after I logged there and met someone – thereafter I started communicating with homosexuals. Before that, I did not know a single person from the”branche”.

A few sentences later, S.S continues:

”...six months from that moment I ended a three-years long relationship with my girlfriend...”

On the other hand, the narrative presented by I.D is different:

“I have been “hooked” to the Internet for the past 10 years; however, a long time has passed since I started logging to “gay-serbia”...I do not know, I do not see why I should go there – I had lots of friends, both “straight” and queer....and as for meeting someone special, I prefer meeting him in vivo”.

Although I.D. admits that chatting in public room or posting an entry on the forum was contributive (only) in expanding his social network, he does not ascribe much of the importance to such communication. Conversely, for S.S a contact established with the virtual community via the Internet was perceived as a turning point (Rubicon) after which he arrived at a new understanding of “ways he might peruse” in the future.

Moreover, seems like I.D disfavors communication through the Internet. In terms of “backstaging”, by putting forward only the quantitative aspect of internet communication and stressing that he already has many friends, one might get the impression that he relates to the virtual community of gays as artificial and actually not “real”. As it will be valuated by further findings, it seems that such I.D’s attitude is derived from the different ways of understanding the concept of community and communication. While S.S and the rest of interviewees do not mention word such as (LGBT) community, I.D. refers to it only as group of people drawn together by calling themselves homosexuals, mostly situated in the “virtual” context. At the same time, he contrasts this context with face-to-face relationship by favoring the former. This fact most probably coincides with the activism he was involved previously.

4.3.2 “To have sex or to die” - Coping strategies

The practice of passing as “straight” is widely spread among Serbian LGBT people (Velzen 2007:19). Shifting back and forth between a heterosexual and homosexual identity is necessity for most of these people in order to maintain their social and economical position in the society. On that account, many of them subject themselves to practice of self-policing and negotiating their sexual identity. Put in Goffman’s terminology, they have to develop special techniques of cooperation with the “normals”.

In such circumstances, most of LGBT people are forced to come up with “B plan” regarding their alternative sexual preferences. If circumstances allow (possession of a personal computer), they relay on virtual space which is a safe polygon where they can exercise different identities before occupying any of the public spaces.

I.D. offers a detailed narrative on this issue. It seems as it is of vital importance to him. He lists several reasons due to which he does not engage himself into internet communication with other members of virtual community. Among those, the most prominent is the one related to the discourse on the chat. According to I.D, the discourse mostly evolves around narrow interests – the size of one’s phallus or it comes down to gossiping.

The critical tone is more than noticeable. I.D. concludes his reflections on the issue by stating:

:’...the vast majority of faggots there are only in peruse for one thing...and we all know what that thing is”.

S.S. is less critical. He offers more ambivalent outlook on the role of the Internet in managing his homosexuality. Having no extra expectations regarding the people he meets in the cyberspace he says:

“...Ninety percent of gays I know, I met on – line....and most of them were okay”. He tries not to attach any emotional evaluation when reflecting on the mode of communication discussed.

Interestingly enough, most of the Interviewees refer to this communication only in the context of providing sexual satisfaction. Accordingly, interviewees presented the following narratives:

C.S.¹⁶ spent one year living in New York, USA. After coming back to Serbia, he was again confronted with the cruel reality (related to everyday gay existence). Since there is not much space for maneuvering, he utilizes the chats to “survive” – “While I was living in N.Y I could start a conversation and contact other gays while waiting for the traffic lights to switch on; here I would die if there was no chat rooms and the Internet”.

Similarly, another interviewee states:

M.J. (residing in a small town) offers a short account on the matter: “one has only two options: to go to public toilet room or to “hook” up with someone via the Internet – what is better?!”

I.D attaches an emotional evaluation. He is highly critical regarding possible transcending of coded set of discourses on the chat that is for him a major reason for not utilizing the Internet communication. However, according to his narrative, it seems that he is insightful regarding ongoing matters in the chat room. Different from this, S.S presents “statistical” outlook on the matter stressing the “okay people” narratives. This might be understood a sort of an avoidance to reflect on the role of internet in preserving his alternative, closeted identity. In other words, it seems that S.S lowers the instrumental value of communication.

¹⁶ One of three not directly included into the analysis

Ultimately, it is evident from the presented assertions from the interviews that all respondents when requested to present their views on the communication through the Internet mostly referred to chat rooms.

4.3.3 The fellow sufferers

The virtual chat rooms are junctures attracting various personas to gather. Moreover, they offer abundance of possibilities for establishing contacts in nonstigmatized environment. Moreover, the threshold for entering these chats is low. Along with the anonymity they offer, chat rooms seem as perfect places for exercising bravado maneuvers.

As already presented I.D reflect quite critically regarding coded set of discourses on the chat. His additional reflections on this matter were pointed towards the virtual mimicry among the members of chat. He states, in jest, that there is “a lack of physical beauty among the chatters”.

S.S. continues his narrative on meeting “okay people” thought he admits that there is a fair chance to meet “not that nice’ looking guys there.

However, when reflecting on the fellow chatters, C.S offers interesting account:

“It takes ages to agree with someone there to meet. One has to pass through the whole ritual. You have to bargain...”. C.S asserts that the whole negotiation process follows the “a/p” pattern. (active /passive). C.S presents it as : if “active” meets “active” no way (they not going to do anything...if “active” meets “passive” – bingo!...if “passive” meets “passive” ...that is the worst combination”.

C.S. concludes:

“...this one is, though, most probable since the chat is full with “aunties” pretending to be machos...”

While S.S resumes his “neutral” narrative, I.D criticizes the discourse among participants on the chat. This goes along with his general outlook on the fictionality of this mode of communication.

Still, he has profound insight into the matters on the chat. Put in front/backstaging dimensions, the question can be posed: cant the “expertise” in the chat matters be suggestive to conclude that, although offering critical view, he still have certain expectations regarding the fellow chatters?

As mentioned, the two analyzed narratives are different. I.D tends to distance himself from Internet as a means of communication. His narration is normative and emotional. As opposed to what he presents, (critical attitude, stressing the shallowness of internet communication and fictive character of community) his perceptiveness of various aspects of cyber gay existence draws his backstaged realm into the narrative. Briefly, it appears that I.D lays high expectations in internet-mediated communication with other gays then he actually presents.

Contrary to the I.D’s critical narrative, narrations of other respondents, in various degrees, stipulate the instrumental value of communication examined. Specifically, at certain instances of his Interview, B.S refers to this mode of communication as a “tool” for survival.

As a middle ground, S.S offers his neutral narrative. Although transparent regarding utilizing this mode of communication, it stays unclear how he utilizes this channel and what it actually means to him. In a way, he offers a “take home” version of the story on gay internet usage.

CONCLUSION

As stipulated in the introductory part, the main concern of the study was to outline the properties of internet-mediated communication among the homosexual population in Serbia. For that purpose, the self-selected sample of visitors of the two gay web portals was analyzed. The process of analysis followed the two-fold methodological approach and consequently reached the conclusions to be presented.

The study set from the hypothesis that communication done through the Internet is predominantly utilized as a tool for finding and accelerating sexual encounters.

In that sense, the quantitative part of the research reached to certain conclusions that confirmed the above mentioned assumption. Associating through the Internet for most of these respondents is the departure point of their homosexual career. Nearly three fourths of respondents from the sample did not have any or had few contacts with off – line LGBT people prior to engaging themselves in Internet communication. Due to some contextual props of their everyday existence (co-habitation with relatives) most of respondents are confronted with situation-to-situation management of their alternative sexual identity. For most of them, Internet is the utility that facilitates and simplifies the preservation of such identity.

One of the additional findings of quantitative analysis of the research demonstrated that visitors of gay web portals are not homogeneous group. They differ according to the manner they utilize examined modes of internet communication (chats, forums, personal ads, blogs and social networks websites). In accordance to the way internet users configure their communication

through various modes, four different profiles can be distinguished. The four profiles are the active user, the opportunist user, the passive user and the passive - discursive user. The most prominent is the finding that Internet usage of one half of the sample corresponds with opportunist profile. The opportunist profile users utilize the internet exclusively to secure sexual engagements with potential partners. For that purpose, they relay on the gay chats and personal ads. What is more, these examinees are the most promiscuous in both ,on and off line contexts.

As a supplement to the quantitative part of the research, the Interview analysis was conducted. The analysis was based on Goffman's concepts of identity management and a conception of social interaction as a theatre where people perform as actors. By performing roles in front of each other, actors place certain elements in the front light of the stage of interaction and other backstage.

The narratives obtained from interviewees confirmed some vital findings from the quantitative part of the analysis. In that manner, concept of linear homosexual career with a critical moment corresponds to the findings that majority of examinees find a first logging on www as a ground zero of their queer existence. Apart from this, the qualitative analysis pointed out the differences in narratives among the interviewees. More specifically the two narratives were singled out – the instrumental and the critical narrative. While respondents who reflect in the critical manner are reserved regarding the Internet as a substitute for face-to-face communication, the one presenting instrumental tend to conceptualized cyberspace polygon for satisfying sexual needs. It seems that the instrumental narrative fits to description of opportunist user profile.

According the all evidence presented it is wrong to suggest that internet communication in Serbian context has illuminative character. On the contrary, the prevalence of opportunistic users in the sample of respondents and the presence of instrumental narrative in the interviews points that it is rather perceived as utility for accelerating and approximating sexual encounters among cyber users.

Jeffrey Weeks (1985:191) asserts that:

“... (gays) need complex social and political conditions for their emergence – to produce a sense of community experience which makes for collective endeavor. Five conditions seems to be necessary for this: the existence of large numbers in the same situation; geographical concentration; identifiable targets of opposition; sudden events or changes in social position and intellectual leadership with readily understood goals”.

None of these conditions exists in Serbia and it is difficult to say when some of them will be reached. According to all accounts on the issue given, it appears to be that cyberspace is the last place where the sense of community can be experienced.

Appendix

Questionnaire

1. **What is your age?**
 - 15 years and younger
 - 15 to 18
 - 18 to 24
 - 25 to 30
 - 31 to 35
 - More than 40
2. **Your place of residence** (city /town)? _____
3. **Your education?**
 - no education
 - completed elementary school
 - completed high school
 - completed faculty education (3 – 5 years)
 - completed post-graduate education
4. **Your employment status?**
 - employed
 - unemployed
5. **Who do you live with?**
 - alone
 - with my parents/ family
 - with my partner/ spouse
 - with flat mates / collective accommodation
6. **Your marital status?**
 - married
 - divorced
 - widowed
 - single / not married
7. **Your current sexual situation?**
 - steady relationship with a partner- monogamous relationship
 - steady relationship with a partner – open relationship
 - mostly one-night stands
 - no partner

8. **Your previous sexual experiences?**

- exclusively with men
- more men than women
- men and women equally
- more women
- exclusively with women

9. **Some informants have revealed their sexual orientation to others (close friends, colleagues from work, family) – have you done such a thing?**

- yes
- no

10. **Your sexual orientation?**

- homosexual
- heterosexual
- bisexual
- transgender

11. **Are you satisfied with leading the LGBT lifestyle in Serbia?**

- completely satisfied
- partially satisfied
- do not know
- mostly dissatisfied
- completely dissatisfied

12. **Have you revealed your sexual orientation („come out“) to member/s of your family?**

- yes
- no

13. **Have you revealed your sexual orientation („come out“) to your close friends?**

- yes
- no

14. **Have you revealed your sexual orientation („come out“) to a broader circle of people you know?**

- yes
- no

15. **Have you revealed your sexual orientation („come out“) to the members of LGBT community?**

- yes
- no

16. **Are you satisfied with the personal relationships with your close friends and family?**

- satisfied
- partially satisfied
- do not know
- mostly dissatisfied
- dissatisfied

17. **Are you an active member of the LGBT organization?**

- yes
- no

18. **Are there any places in your city/town where the members of LGBT population gather (clubs, bars, pubs, discothèques etc.)?**

- yes
- no

19. **Do you visit the places where the members of LGBT community gather (either in your city/ town or elsewhere)?**

- on a regular basis
- often
- occasionally
- never

20. **Your close friends are mostly:**

- members of LGBT population
- I socialize equally with LGBT people as well as with the „straight“ ones
- „straight“ people

21. **Common „places“ where you mostly meet your potential sexual partners are:**

- official gay places (i.e clubs, discoteques, bars)
- private parties
- the Internet – through chats rooms, personal ads, forums etc.
- through personal ads published in newspapers and magazines
- in public places (toilets, parks, train / bus stations etc.)

22. **I have used the Internet actively over the past:**

- 1 year
- 3 years
- 5 years
- 10 years or more

23. **Mostly, I visit LGBT gay orientated sites from:**

- home
- wWork
- internet cafés
- friend's place

24. **On average, per day, how many hours would you guess you spend on-line (browsing sites, sending e-mails, chatting through messengers, chats etc)?**
- less than an hour
 - 1 to 3 hours
 - 3 to 5 hours
 - 5 to 8 hours
 - more than 8 hours
25. **On average, per day, how many hours would you guess you spend chatting on gay chats, posting gay personal ads, posting entries on gay forums - communicating with other members of LGBT community?**
- less than an hour
 - 1-3
 - 3 to 5
 - 5 to 8
 - more than 8 hours
26. **Before the Internet, have you had any acquaintances among LGBT people?**
- no acquaintances among LGBT people
 - a few acquaintances (up to 2)
 - contact with many of them
 - even before I started using the Internet I was acquainted exclusively with LGBT people
27. **Do you know any LGBT people only through the Internet that you consider your friends?**
- yes
 - no
28. **Have you ever personally met anyone with whom you communicate through the Internet?**
- yes
 - no
29. **Generally, do you use the Internet in order to make new acquaintances with other LGBT people?**
- yes
 - no
30. **Generally, do you use the Internet in order to get in contact with potential sexual partners?**
- yes
 - no
31. **Internet communication with other members of LGBT population has contributed to me accepting my own sexual orientation:**
- not at all
 - slightly
 - do not know
 - considerably
 - completely

32. **Internet communication with other members of LGBT population has contributed to me revealing my sexual orientation to others:**

- not at all
- slightly
- do not know
- considerably
- completely

33. **When I have a problem related to my „queer“ existence, I will share it with:**

- no one
- the member/s of my family
- close friend/s
- with on-line friends

34. **Are you satisfied with the relationships with other on-line members of the LGBT community?**

- satisfied
- partially satisfied
- do not know
- mostly dissatisfied
- dissatisfied

35. **In your opinion, what is the significance of gay FORUMS in MAKING NEW ACQUAINTANCIES with other members of the LGBT population?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

36. **In your opinion, how important are gay CHAT ROOMS in MAKING NEW ACQUAINTANCIES with other members of the LGBT population?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

37. **In your opinion, how important are gay PERSONAL ADS in MAKING NEW ACQUAINTANCIES with other members of LGBT population?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

38. **In your opinion, how important are the gay PERSONAL BLOGS in MAKING NEW ACQUAINTANCIES with other members of the LGBT population?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

39. **According to you, how important are social networking websites such as „Facebook“, „My space“ in MAKING NEW ACQUAINTANCIES with other members of the LGBT population?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

40. **In your opinion, how important are gay FORUMS in finding POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

41. **In your opinion, how important are gay CHAT ROOMS in finding POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

42. **In your opinion, how important are gay PERSONAL ADS in finding POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

43. **In your opinion, how important are gay PERSONAL BLOGS in finding POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

44. **In your opinion, how important are SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES (My space, Facebook etc) in finding POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS?**

- unimportant
- slightly important
- do not know
- considerably important
- important

45. **What is the number of sexual partners you have met on-line in the last 6 months?**

- 0
- 1
- 2-5
- 6- 10
- More then 10

46. **What is the number of sexual partners in the same period that you have met outside the Internet context?**

- 0
- 1
- 2-5
- 6- 10
- More than 10

47. **Approximately, how many times a day do you visit gay chat rooms?**

- I do not visit them on the daily basis
- once
- twice
- up to 5 times
- I am always on the chat

48. **Do you think that presenting one's name on gay chats/personal ads could harm one in any way?**

- yes
- no

49. **Do you present your name on gay chats/ in personal ads?**

- yes
- no

50. **Do you think that presenting one's picture on gay chats/ personal ads could harm one in any way?**

- yes
- no

51. **Do you present your picture on gay chats/ in gay personal ads?**

- yes
- no

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