

**ARE STRAIGHT AND GAY FRIENDS IN A “PURE”
RELATIONSHIP?**
**HETERONORMATIVITY, MASCULINITY AND EMOTIONAL
INTIMACY**

By
Miroslav Novak

*Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies*

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies.

Supervisor: Professor Erzsébet Barát

Budapest, Hungary
2008

ABSTRACT

According to Anthony Giddens, ‘pure relationship’ is a new democratic form of relationship in late modernity that exists for its own sake and is based on equality between the parties, enjoying each other’s unique qualities and mutual emotional intimacy. I conducted interviews between 21 male cross-sexual friendship dyads to investigate whether close straight and gay friends enact ‘pure relationship’. Significant part of straight and gay friends is still partially upholding hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity (but not homophobia). Although Giddens presupposes that such hegemonic gender and sexual structures and processes shouldn’t structure ‘pure relationships’, similar findings found by feminist researchers raise the question whether ‘pure relationship’ is sometimes an ideological concept that camouflages and even perpetuates gendered and sexualized hierarchies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Erzsébet Barát, whose expertise, understanding, and patience, added considerably to my thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 2 : THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	2
2.1. GIDDENS’S PURE RELATIONSHIP	2
2.2. MICHEL FOUCAULT AND QUEER THEORY.....	4
2.3. R.W. CONNELL AND VICTOR J. SEIDLER: CRITICAL MASCULINITY STUDIES	8
2.4. THEORETICAL ASSUMPTION AND BASIC RESEARCH QUESTION	10
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	12
3.1. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING	12
3.2. CRITICAL RESEARCH.....	13
3.3. SAMPLING.....	13
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS.....	15
4.1. (PROTO) HETERONORMATIVE FRIENDSHIP REPERTOIRE	15
4.1.1. <i>The coming-out episode</i>	15
4.1.2. <i>Emergence of emotional intimacy</i>	19
4.1.3. <i>The trouble with anal sex and erotic tensions between friends</i>	27
4.1.4. <i>(Self)perceptions of sexuality and masculinity among friends</i>	33
4.1.5. <i>What about gay men?</i>	39
4.1.6. <i>Private-public distinction and ‘therapeutic intimacy/masculinity’</i>	42
4.2. (PROTO)QUEER FRIENDSHIP REPERTOIRE	45
4.2.1. <i>How did they become friends?</i>	46
4.2.2. <i>Straight queer masculinities</i>	47
4.2.3. <i>Emotional intimacy among straight men</i>	50
4.2.4. <i>Public-private distinction</i>	53
4.2.5. <i>Sex talk and erotic tensions</i>	54
4.2.6. <i>What about gay men?</i>	56
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION	59
APPENDIX.....	63
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	67

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I studied self-identified *close* male cross-sexual friends and their relationships in contemporary urban Croatia. I conducted separate interviews with 21 straight-gay friendship dyads. I framed my research into Anthony Giddens's theory of 'pure relationship' and accompanied it with two additional theories: queer theory and critical masculinity studies.

According to Giddens, 'pure relationship' is new, democratic type of personal relationship appearing in late modernity, characterized by gendered, sexual and emotional equality between two parties which through mutual and exclusive emotional disclosure has potential to transgresses hegemonic gendered and sexual structures and bring change to larger social order. Although not wholly dismissive of such optimistic theory, I also bring two critical theories of gender and sexuality to my theoretical framework: queer theory and critical masculinity studies. Queer theory aims to deconstruct heterosexual structuring of not just gay and lesbian lives, but society in general, while critical masculinity studies try to expose patriarchal structuring of men and masculinities and consequently entire gender order.

The aim of this dissertation is to interpret my data in terms of the theoretical framework indicated above and to answer following questions: What is the structure and content of close friendships between straight and gay men?; What interpersonal processes are present in such relations?; What is the social organization of masculinity and normative sexuality in such friendships?; Finally, should these friendships be viewed as a paradigmatic example of a "pure relationship" as defined by Giddens's popular yet contested concept?

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Giddens's pure relationship

The term “**pure relationship**” was coined by the British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991; 1992) to signify an ideal type of personal dyadic relationship arguably brought about by late modern cultural transformations¹. It is believed to presuppose gender and emotional equality, involves emotional disclosure and is to be entered or established for its own sake:

It [a pure relationship] refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within. (Giddens, 1992:58)

Key dimension of pure relationship is **emotional intimacy** which presupposes need for emotional disclosure and mutual and exclusive² nature of such disclosure between two persons. Giddens's model of pure relationship is argued to be at the intersection of four important phenomena: plastic sexuality, reflexivity, self-identity and ontological security. **Plastic sexuality** refers to a heightened self-awareness of the plasticity of sexuality, to a sexuality freed from “the rule of the phallus, from the overweening importance of the male sexual experience” (Giddens: 1992:2). Consequently, one might argue that plastic sexuality refers to a reflexive sexuality cleared of its traditional patriarchal and heteronormative structurations. According to Giddens, the process of **reflexivity** as self-awareness of various social structurations doesn't only accompany sexuality, but late modern life in general, most importantly **self-identity**. The latter is said to be constituted as a reflexive project in which the individual is free to build his or hers life narrative, because traditional structures like habit, custom and long established social mores are no longer structuring it. However, according to Giddens, increased reflexivity creates a new kind of

¹ These large scale changes are caused by globalization and involve detraditionalization and increased reflexivity. For detailed account see (Giddens, 1990; 1991;1992;1999).

² Members of pure relationship are opening up exclusively to each other.

psychological vulnerability and propensity for existential crisis and personal risks which threaten the individual's **ontological security**. According to Giddens, in late modernity ontological security is no more secured by tradition but has to be constantly reconstituted through active and reflexive avoidance of personal risks and through open negotiation, trust and mutual disclosure in others, like friends and partners. Finally, Anthony Giddens optimistically believes that intrinsically democratic processes of open negotiation within pure relationships have the potential to lead to the democratization of the entire social order.

Giddens was rightfully criticized by feminist authors like Lynn Jamieson (1998; 1999) for understating continuing gender and sexual hierarchies and inequalities in personal relationships. Jamieson (1998) after her extensive review of literature on personal relationships draws a much more complex, ambivalent and multilayered picture than Giddens, in which premodern (supposedly hierarchical) and modern (supposedly egalitarian) social forces are not clear cut and distinct, but overlapping. She also points out that emotional intimacy can appear *despite* of inequality. For example, heterosexual relationships position women and men asymmetrically: women have to do more emotional work for less interpersonal reward (Fishman, 1983). Interestingly, while the concept of "pure relationship" has been criticized by feminists, it has proven to be highly popular in the literature on same sex relationship and queer sociology (Weeks, 1995; Weeks et al, 1996; Yip, 1997). This is mostly because Giddens has positioned gay men and lesbians as 'the' pioneers of pure relationships. According to him, gay men and lesbians have always been free from traditional relationship norms. Left without any binding norms and traditions, gay men and lesbians were put in the position to build relationships of relative equality in their "everyday experiments" in living (Giddens, 1992: 15).

Although Giddens spends most time discussing heterosexual and homosexual (romantic) couple relationships as examples of pure relationship, he eventually end up finding friendship as the archetypal form of 'pure relationship':

A friend is defined specifically as someone with whom one has a relationship unprompted by anything other than the rewards that that relationship provides. [. . .] Friendship attachments may have their own inertial elements, but in practices as well as in principle one normally stays a friend of another only in so far as sentiments of closeness are reciprocated for their own sake. (1991: 90)

In the social conditions of late modernity, personal relationships like friendships are the key site in which individuals find 'forms of self exploration and moral construction' of their self-identity (Giddens 1991:144).

2.2. Michel Foucault and queer theory

Michel Foucault's views of self-identity, reflexivity and sexuality in late modernity (Foucault, 1981;1997) are in many ways in opposition with Anthony Giddens's model. However, because I believe that the cultural logic of late modernity is not one-dimensional but multi-faced and contradictory, I presuppose that my findings will be something in between, so in the end I hope I will be able to put these two seemingly opposing traditions into a creative and productive dialogue.

Michel Foucault's key idea is that every modern discourse on sexuality, including talking about sex, confiding it, proclaiming one's sexual identity and desire constrains individuals to discursive regimes that control, discipline, regulate and restrict them. By focusing its gaze more and more on sex, especially on tabooed sexual activities, society manages to impose wide range of discourses which further pathologise individuals, especially gay men and lesbians who were,

according to Foucault, in fact constituted ('invented') as coherent and self-contained sex-based selves by discursive regimes of modernity³. Individuals, gay and straight are increasingly engaged in personal and emotional disclosure about sex, obsessed with development of personal identity vis-a-vis sexuality. According to Foucault seemingly liberatory sexual disclosure which is said to reveal "the truth" about our sexual selves, we are actually continually disciplining our's and other people's sexuality and perpetuating oppressive discourses. Reflexivity about this processes is largely absent from Foucault's analysis. This is the reason why Foucault was criticized by thinkers like Anthony Giddens for not believing in individual's capacity for autonomous thought and action, always being unreflexive and trapped in existing discourses and practices.

Foucault's thoughts on sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular were later drawn on to develop a novel theoretical approach called queer theory (Sullivan, 2003). Queer theory seeks to move gay and lesbian studies from homophobia⁴ to heteronormativity as key analytical category, the latter being thought of as hegemonic discourse that privileges and constitutes heterosexual experiences over gay, lesbian bisexuals and all other⁵. Furthermore, queer theory seeks to deconstruct all sexual and gender identities, both socially dominant (men, heterosexuals) and minority ones (women, homosexuals, transgender) as fictions products of modern hegemonic discourse of heteronormativity.

For example, Judith Butler (1990) argues that the division between men and women comes to exist only through the invocation of heterosexuality. She argues that an apparently self-evident and "natural" heterosexuality is in fact based on the internal

³ Homosexual *acts* are said to have existed before modernity, but *homosexual* as specific type of person was constituted by modern discursive regimes of medicine, psychiatry and sexology.

⁴ Irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuals

⁵ Homophobia, the central analytical category of lesbian and gay studies is criticised by queer theorists as individualizing psychological concept which doesn't have the power to encompass *systematic* structuration of heterosexuality, which heteronormativity supposedly has.

coherence of gender categories (1990: 22). As a result the "heterosexual matrix" is central to the gender distinction itself (1990:18). For example, in conventional discourses of heterosexual sexuality, this means that male is always constituted as penetrator, while woman is always constituted as penetree. Homosexuality troubles the coherence of such gender distinctions, at least potentially.

Butler also criticizes idea that heterosexuality should be regarded as the "original" form of sexuality with homosexuality as the "copy". For example, it is often imagined that gay men and lesbians are inferior copies of "real" (read heterosexual) men and women. Butler challenges this idea, arguing that the opposition of "real" and "imitation" gendering is in fact a construct for which there is no "real" original, merely the *idea* of an original. Thus, "gay to straight is *not* as copy is to the original, but, rather, as copy is to copy ... the original [is] nothing other than a parody of the idea of the natural and the original" (Butler: 1990: 31). Although, according to her, all forms of gendering are constructed, some are perceived more authentic than others, and they are extremely culturally privileged. Again, dissident forms of gendering may rework and potentially subvert these relationships.

Close friendships and other relations between men are topic of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick work on **homosociality**⁶. In her influential study *Between Men* (1985), Sedgwick argues that in premodernity (and early modernity) existed a continuum of 'homosocial desire' among men, ranging from political ties to non-sexual friendship and love to intimate relationships that included sexual acts. The important point here is that no absolute boundaries are maintained between the different types of relationships. It is, in other words, possible to 'slide' along the

⁶ Homosociality refers to social relations (or preference for such relations) with the same sex of the nonsexual nature.

continuum without being forced to re-define one's identity. Because of changing social organization of masculinity and normative sexuality in late modernity, this homosocial continuum between men by twentieth century was thoroughly ruptured, placing men in impossible position. On the one hand, heterosexual men are required to enter and build exclusive homosocial bonds with other men, bonds that by very definition exclude women: male friendships, mentorships, camaraderie of workplace, male bonding in gender segregated institutions such as armies, sports and 'old boy' clubs and masculine networks in general; this is done to build and to strengthen patriarchal power⁷, but also because too much **heterosociality**⁸ in patriarchal context is often implies homosexuality.⁹ On the other hand and *at the same time*, heterosexual men are also required not to exaggerate in their homosociality, because too much homosociality can also be associated with homosexuality. In other words, although homosociality and homosexuality in late modernity are thought to be radically distinct and separate, they are often strikingly similar. As a consequence, patriarchal heterosexual masculinity in late modernity is structured as contradiction and is constantly threatened by what Sedgwick calls '**homosexual panic**', fear that one will be perceived as homosexual, by either associating with men too much or too little¹⁰. This is the reason why most men must always both privately and publicly, but not always consciously repudiate any association with homosexuality, a taboo which for men in late modern society is analogous to incest.¹¹ Continual repudiation of homosexuality is achieved through verbal insults and/or or through physical violence towards present or imaginary gay men. However, even this is often not enough for annulment of 'homosexual panic'. This is where Sedgwick quite originally states that incorporation of women

⁷ According to Sedgwick, patriarchy involves social relations among men (she connects this to Heidi Hartmann's notion of patriarchy as "relations between men... [which] create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women"); yet the men who most further patriarchy are also (at least publicly/consciously) those who are most homophobic.

⁸ Heterosociality refer to social relations (or preference for such relations) with the opposite sex of the nonsexual nature.

⁹ For example, men who have lot of female friends are often seen as gay.

¹⁰ It must be said that Sedgwick postulates 'homosexual panic' both as man's fear of his own potential for homosexual desire and fear of losing status and recognition among other men.

¹¹ According to Sedgwick, enactment or imaging of enactment of homosexuality in some men can be highly traumatic.

in homosocial relations most effectively neutralizes threat of homosexuality. However, women in male homosocial relations are never active agents, because it would open the door for dismantling of masculine power and privilege. Rather, women in homosocial relations are simply passive objects who in various situations¹² serve as a conduit through which the homosociality can be expressed and masculine power consolidated or even strengthened.

2.3. R.W. Connell and Victor J. Seidler: Critical masculinity studies

Critical masculinity studies have been developed by mostly profeminist sociologists of masculinity who analyze and critique patriarchal structurations of relationships, discourses, institutions and societies. The most acclaimed of these scholars is Raewyn Connell.

According to Connell (1995), every society has a dominant or “**hegemonic**” type of masculinity. Those men who embody masculinity with roles of power exercise social dominance. For example, in most western societies this would mean men who are fiercely rational in public, inexpressive of emotions, strong, decisive, dependable, secure etc. Men who benefit from such masculinity but don’t enact it, enact **complicit** forms of masculinity. Connell’s theory emphasizes hierarchies of men and masculinities. In relation to hegemonic masculinity formation, he introduces **subordinated** forms of masculinity to describe men who are oppressed by practices of hegemonic masculinity, primarily gay men. Interestingly, Connell notes that very few men, if any, are actually hegemonically masculine, but most benefit, to different degrees, from it.

¹² Sedgwick gives an example of love triangle where bonds between the male rivals are just as strong if not stronger than the desire between each rival and the pursued woman.

Another important critical masculinity studies scholar is Victor J. Seidler (1992; 1997; 2007). Seidler writes about emotional impoverishment that pervades modern masculinity, together with the pervasiveness of the public/private binary in sustaining this condition:

Men have grown up to identify with the public world [...]. We have learned to be independent and self-sufficient. We have learned to go it alone and to do without the help of others. [...] Often there is little that it prepares us for relationships, for in learning to be self-sufficient we learn to do without others. Often our very sense of male identity is sustained through our capacity for *not* needing the help of others. (1992:1)

Seidler (1997) argues that contemporary men's identities have been affected by highly gendered discourses of Enlightenment: reason and rationality have been associated by men, while emotion and irrationality have been linked to women. This is why modern masculinity requires that men repress their feelings and are not able to achieve emotional intimacy, only instrumentality. Victor J. Seidler (2007) criticizes Connell's model of hegemonic masculinity for not fully considering importance of men's emotional life. Seidler argues that Connell's structural vision of hegemonic masculinity ignores and depoliticizes men's struggle with emotions and intimacy. In Connell's theory, such struggles are always portrayed as secondary and unimportant as opposed to "the real fight" for institutional deconstruction of male power and privilege. Seidler, on the other hand, has a view that men's personal struggles with intimacy, emotions and patriarchal power can heal the unsustainable disjunction between men's power and their intimacy and emotions.

Although Giddens doesn't extensively (or one might say critically) explore the gendering and power aspects found in personal relationships, one may find some overlap or 'conversion' with Seidler's position in that both hold the view that political change can be accompanied through personal concerns.

2.4. Theoretical assumption and basic research question

The main theoretical assumption of research is that close friendships between straight and gay men constitute Giddens's pure relationship. However, my research rests on two central questions: (1) does self-reflexivity, a constant dynamic of mutual exploration of each other's selves and emotional intimacy that constitute pure relationship, accommodate/reproduce or rearticulate/transform dominant homophobic and heteronormative discourses? If so, how is this achieved? In other words, are sexual and gender identities subjected to power-knowledge regimes or do individuals in pure relationship demonstrate knowledgeable agency in the (re)creation of their identities and relations? (2) How is the dynamics of heterosexual masculinity achieved, contested, managed and/or reconciled in relation to gay masculinities? In other words, do heterosexual friends transform, accommodate or perpetuate hegemonic practices and identities? I am especially interested in men's experiences of emotions and intimacy in this regard.

Although, I am interested in the experiences of both homosexual and heterosexual friends in pure relationship, the main crux of research will be directed to experiences of heterosexual partners in the dyad. This is because I respond to Wayne Brekhus's (1998) invitation for 'a sociology of the unmarked'. Brekhus suggests that:

Sociology has developed a de facto tradition in the *sociology of the marked* that devotes greater epistemological attention to "politically salient" and "ontologically uncommon" features of social life. Although the "unmarked" comprises the vast majority of social life, the "marked" commands a disproportionate share of attention from sociologists. Since the marked already draws more attention within the general culture, social scientists contribute to *re-marking* and the reproduction of common-sense images of social reality. This has important analytic consequences. (1998: 34)

Consequently Brekhus (1998) argues for developing a stronger tradition in sociology *of the unmarked* that explicitly foregrounds "politically unnoticed" and taken-for-granted elements of social reality. In the context of this research this refers to male heterosexuality and its configuration in straight and gay friendships. By focusing on male heterosexuality, my aim is to expose the most unmarked of all unmarked identities and critically situate it within larger crux of the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. In-depth interviewing

According to Irving Seidman (1998: 3), “The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used. . . . At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience”.

Rubin and Rubin (1995:27) distinguish between topical oral histories in which participants are asked to relate how they understood particular historical events such as the Gulf War or the fall of the Berlin Wall, and life histories in which participants are asked to relate their life experiences. For this research, I conducted a hybrid form of interviewing: the topical life history.

The interviews focus on the experiences of close friendship in 21 straight-gay friendship dyads. With its focus on how external events have an impact on one’s lived experience, the topical life history allows me to explore areas that other methods would not. The interviews were conducted in two phases. In the first phase interviewees were interviewed according to specific semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix). Having developed good rapport and feeling surprised by the intense reflexivity of most of my interviews in the first round, I conducted follow up interviews.

3.2. Critical research

Rubin and Rubin (1995: 35) identifies three different types of social research: (1) positivistic research, which strives to be value neutral with respect to both researcher and results; (2) interpretive research, which strives simply to understand and accept the values of individuals, cultures, and societies; and (3) critical research, which strives to expose social flaws and, in so doing, promote actions that would help eliminate those flaws. The research proposed here falls into the third category. By gaining some insight into how heterosexual friends reproduce or rearticulate dominant homophobic and heteronormative discourses, we can begin to understand and expose the processes by which male heterosexuality is naturalized, normalized, and made culturally intelligible. Finally, because sexual prejudice often goes unrecognized, I would hope that, by exposing the relations of power played out on the field of male heterosexuality, this study would help heterosexual people come to recognize the nature and persuasive impact of heteronormativity.

3.3. Sampling

I formed a pool of interviewees in the first place through purposive sampling, by posting an advertisement on www.gay.hr, the biggest LGBT Internet forum in Croatia. My goal was to access a relatively uniform sample of young, college educated or college attending young men in urban Zagreb who form cross-sexual friendships. To avoid casual friendships, I asked specifically for self-identified close friends. All men from my sample are in their 20s, ranging from 20 to 28 years old. This kind of sample is explained by the idea that college and post college times is

period when young men form emotionally intense friendships (Allan, 2001) and according to empirical research of some Croatian sociologist, these men are the most likely to experience and embody social and personal changes associated with late modernity (Tomić-Koludrović and Kunac, 2000). All names have been changed to protect the privacy of my informants.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

4.1. (Proto) heteronormative friendship repertoire

There are eleven straight-gay male friendship dyads out of twenty-one that fall in the narratives that I call the (proto) heteronormative friendship repertoire. The young men in these friendships have several crucial characteristics in common. Almost all of them had been friends before the gay men came out of the closet; both straight and gay men are perceived by themselves and by others as conventionally masculine in their gender presentations; all friendship dyads in this repertoire are based on reductive emotional intimacy and at least some of the dyads are also struggling with continuous erotic tensions. Lastly, both straight and gay men, albeit in different degree and for different reasons, uphold heteronormativity.

Fig. 1. Distribution of (proto) heteronormative straight-gay dyads

NUMBER OF DYAD	STRAIGHT MAN (AGE)	GAY MAN (AGE)
1	Domagoj (25)	Dražen (23)
2	Vedran (24)	Tin (25)
3	Dario (22)	Krešo (22)
4	Stjepan (23)	Petar (21)
5	Tihomir (26)	Lucijan (25)
6	Marin (21)	Goran (20)
7	Danijel (21)	Mario (20)
8	Fran (22)	Kristijan (24)
9	Vinko (21)	Ivan (22)
10	Karlo (28)	Marko(26)
11	Martin (26)	Luka(27)

4.1.1. The coming-out episode

All young men in the (proto) heteronormative repertoire had been longtime neighborhood or school acquaintances up to 8 years. The coming out episode, the gay men's

disclosure of their sexual identity to straight friends proved to be a significant event for these friendships. It occurred between 4 to 6 years prior to the interviews. Most straight men in this repertoire (9/11) said that they gave voice to their surprise at their friends' coming out when it occurred. As it is clear from below, the reason they identified for this surprise was their inability to imagine that their friends might be gay because of their conventional masculine and sometimes hyper masculine gender presentations.

Extract 1: Dyad 2 (Vedran and Tin)

Vedran (24): I couldn't for the life of me imagine that he might be gay.

IWIER: Why?

Vedran (24): Because he is not queeny!

Extract 2: Dyad 5 (Tihomir and Lucijan)

Tihomir (26): There was nothing that could have made me think that he is gay. I mean, he is not effeminate, he plays basketball, he hates chick flicks [...] and he listens to these obscure post-punk bands.

It is clear that, prior to their friend's coming out to them, many straight young men had been correlating male homosexuality with femininity and with behaviors and interests that are stereotypically associated with women. Such idea is widely found in western modernity and according to Foucault it can be partially attributed to late 19th century medicine, psychiatry and sexology whose discourses about sex have had constitutive influence on later scientific, psychoanalytic and mundane theories on (homo) sexuality. Here the idea of homosexuality as inversion has been especially influential, according to which gay men have a male body trapped in a female psyche, that is "a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul"

(Foucault, 1981:43). The ultimate reason for the maintenance of such a perception of homosexuality, I would argue, lies in the modern conception of *heterosexuality* as a rigorous binary “regime” where men and women are not only a priori supposedly different but are even perceived “opposite” in their gender identities and “natures”. Since today heterosexuality still remains the dominant paradigm through which other sexualities are defined, every deviation from this socially and culturally reified “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, 1990: 151) will be perceived as not only anomalous but often unintelligible.

The second and more mundane reason for the perception of (male) homosexuality as gender inversion lies in the significant public visibility of gender non-conventional gay men. On the other hand, gay men who enact conventional gender behavior in a significant number stay in the closet and pass as straight because of their fear of homophobia and/or conformism. In such a way self-fulfilling prophesy partially reproduces and affirms previous discourses on (male) homosexuality.

Regarding the straight men’s initial reactions to their gay friend’s coming out in this category, a significant number of the reactions (5/11) were of rejection, and sometimes even temporary break down of the friendship. All these straight men reflect now on their initial reaction with regret.

Extract 3: Dyad 10 (Karlo and Marko)

Karlo (28): My whole world collapsed. I am really not exaggerating... I mean I kept thinking in my head: my best friend is a fag! Fa-aag! (Laughs). I was totally angry and furious.... You know, I am a very impulsive person so I immediately told him [Marko] all kinds of shit that I regretted later. At one moment I even punched him because I

thought he had a thing for me. What's worse, not only was I mistaken and stupid but he also beat the hell out of me! We didn't talk for months...

Extract 4: Dyad 3 (Dario and Krešo)

Dario (22): Look, I am not exactly pride by the way I reacted... But, it was a huge shock for me. I even told him he makes me sick. [...] Cause when you find out that one of your oldest friends digs guys, you feel terrible, miserable, betrayed...

Some straight men (4/11) reported that they had reacted ambivalently. Here are Marin and Daniel's recollections for a telling example:

Extract 5: Dyad 6 (Marin and Goran)

Marin (25): I didn't know what to think. I didn't want to reject him or anything, but I wasn't able to welcome him with open arms either. I just didn't have strength or maybe even courage to deal with the whole thing [...] We both ended up unwittingly kind of avoiding each other for a while. We hadn't stopped hanging out, but we had been seeing each other more rarely.

Extract 6: Dyad 7 (Danijel and Mario)

Danijel (21): I mean all the sudden I had a gay friend. And since I hadn't been able to fully accept right away, we mostly didn't talk about it. So for a while we had this elephant in the room situation. [...] I think the biggest problem for me was that I thought he [Mario] was some different person now, that I really don't know him. I was really struggling with that for a while.

Only two straight men, Domagoj and Martin, in this repertoire said to have initially reacted with unquestionable support and acceptance.

Extract 7: Dyad 1 (Domagoj and Dražen)

Domagoj (25): For weeks he [Dražen] was going on about having to tell me something important about himself. When it would come to the point of him having to say it, he'd retreat. That's when I started slowly realizing what this thing could be about, although I was still a bit taken when he finally did admit it...But I told him right away that I'm glad that I was the one he confided in, and that I hope it would make us even better friends.

Domagoj's initial affirmative reaction to his gay friend's coming out proved to be a minority stance since most of the straight young men, when first confronted, did not offer such an unequivocally positive reaction to their friend's homosexual disclosure. However, Domagoj's favorable prediction about the future of their relationship became true not only for them but also for other straight young men in this repertoire, regardless their initial unfavorable reaction. In fact, due to their friend's coming out they would eventually "become even better friends". This research shows that *all* straight young men from my (proto) heteronormative repertoire stated or implied that the coming out of their gay friends proved to be a significant factor that caused a positive qualitative shift in the structure of their friendship, ending homophobia and then directly effecting the emergence of emotional intimacy thereby carving the possibility for the relationship to become what Giddens (1991:89-97;1992:2;58) calls "pure relationship".

4.1.2. Emergence of emotional intimacy

When gay men came out of the closet to their straight friends this had significant consequences on their friendship. As it will be shown, their relationship appears to have changed from mostly instrumental to mostly expressive. That is, their friendship showed a significant degree of emotional intimacy. However, this did not happen immediately or overnight but was

preceded by a rather intense and reflexive process of normalization and routinization of homosexuality.

The normalization/rutinization of homosexuality can initially be defined as a process in which the straight friends' perception of gay men's sexual identity is transformed from a negative or ambivalent understanding into a positive and accepted identity. This process is recalled to vary in duration among the straight young men, ranging from six months up to two years. During this time the straight men said they managed to renegotiate their previous dispositions through spontaneous conversation, sharing stories of their gay friend's experiences of homophobia, and most importantly, through spending time with their gay friends doing mundane and routine activities. All that seems to have helped to overcome their previous attitudes, prejudice and perceptions of homosexuality in general and homosexuality of their friends in particular. The dimension of everyday life is especially important in this process because it showed that everyday routine can have enormous resources for dismantling hegemonic perceptions and dispositions.

Extract 8: Dyad 5 (Tihomir and Lucijan)

Tihomir (26): I guess when I see him every day, when we hang out together, play basketball in the neighborhood almost every afternoon.... It's kind of difficult to think that he is some kind of a freak or something like that, you know....

Extract 9: Dyad 11 (Martin and Luka)

Martin (26): Well, we had been sitting together in the same desk since first grade of high school. So seeing him [Luka] that on a daily basis I soon realized that nothing has really changed. He is the same ordinary guy like me.

Giddens puts great emphasis on ordinary daily routine activities and their transformative power while queer theorists disregard everyday life and underscore transgression and subversion instead. Bidy Martin observes this strategic reluctance in her essay “Extraordinary homosexuals and the fear of being ordinary” (1994) where she states that “[r]adical anti-normativity [of queer theory] throws out a lot of babies with lot of bathwater”, because of its “enormous fear of ordinariness or normality” (Martin, 1994:123) Indeed, what helped many straight men in this group of informants to accept their gay friends were their continuing participation in ordinary, taken for granted activities like day-to-day sports and school routines, inside jokes and appeal to shared histories, which helped them realize that their friends are “ordinary”, “normal” and “just like them”.

What also contributed to the straight men’s acceptance of their friend’s homosexuality in the course of these mundane daily activities were gay men’s conventional masculine and sometimes hyper masculine gender presentations and interests that were not threatening to their straight friends’ expectations of masculinity.

Extract 10: Dyad 10 (Karlo and Marko)

Karlo (28): Oh my god, he [Marko] is like the straightest guy I know. (Laughs)

IWIER: In what sense?

Karlo (28): Well, for one, he always acts as if he wants to pick up a fight with someone. He easily gets angry. [...] and before he came out he had more girlfriends than I did! Of course, I soon realized they were not his girlfriends. (Laughs)

Extract 11: Dyad 7 (Danijel and Mario)

Danijel (21): We both study mechanical engineering, we are both into sports, and we listen to the same music. [...] He [Mario] is just like me. The only difference between us is that he likes guys. That's like the only difference between us.

Parallel to the process of normalization/routinization of homosexuality of young men, was the transformation of friendship into a closer, more intimate relationship. Therefore, all straight men in this repertoire stated that after some potentially larger or minor tensions attributed to coming out, the quality of their friendships with the gay friends men had slowly, but steadily increased, towards greater emotional openness and disclosure, that is, towards emotional intimacy.

In general, all friends reported that they spend a significant amount of their free time with each other and displaying lot of instrumental activities: very often they go out, go to parties, to the cinema, they watch TV together, or play sports, and engage in conversations which range from the everyday and superficial to the more "serious" and heartfelt. These heartfelt conversations served as the very trigger to the exclusiveness¹³ of opening up.

Extract 12: Dyad 1 (Domagoj and Dražen)

Domagoj (26): Oh, we definitely became closer and I often tell him [Dražen] things that I would never tell my straight friends.

IWIER: Like?

Domagoj (26): Well...I had some problems with my girlfriend, you know of sexual nature...I won't go into details (laughs). Anyway, it's not exactly convenient to talk about this sort of things with my straight buddies. I mean, they are not all macho jerks, but still...

¹³ All straight men from my date reported that they tend to open up emotionally exclusively to their gay male friends, and not to their straight friends.

Extract 13: Dyad 4 (Stjepan and Petar)

Stjepan (23): Well, I guess since he [Petar] confined something really important and intimate about himself to me, it was easier for me to open up about some things that had been bothering me. Not too long ago I had a terrible situation at home¹⁴. [...] In fact, if it wasn't for Petar, I don't know how I would've gotten through it. This whole experience has really brought us closer together and there is no way I could be like this with a straight friend.

IWIER: Why not?

Stjepan (23): Well, because you can't. I mean I can open up, up to a level, or sometimes all the way, but I don't think I would feel comfortable at that moment.

Almost all straight men in this group (10/11) also stated that they confine and emotionally open up to the gay friends in a way that they only occasionally or seldom do with their straight friends. This emotional disclosure was especially prominent when it came to honest discussion about sex, which was accounted to be void of stereotypical macho exaggerations found in most (straight) male friendships, not to mention nonexistence of honest discussion about performance anxieties.

Extract 14: Dyad 3 (Dario and Krešo)

IWIER: Can you talk honestly to your straight friends about your sex life?

Dario (22): Honestly? Are you kidding me? I mean, I even wouldn't know how, for God sake!

IWIER: What do you mean?

¹⁴ Stjepan's mother had cancer.

Dario (22): It's like unwritten rule that you have to exaggerate about your sex life when talking to your [straight] guy friends. I mean we often know that we are probably saying bullshit and lying, but we keep doing it because it's the only thing we know how.

IWIER: And with Krešo you don't do that?

Dario (22): No way! He is gay so I don't have to act this sherdade in front of him and I can actually open up if I have an issue or a problem.

Extract 15: Dyad 11 (Martin and Luka)

Martin (26): I often feel that there is this like an act I have to display when talking about sex with my straight friends, or just being [emotionally] vulnerable I guess...You know, when I try to open myself up to them...[...] You know what I mean? I just can't be myself with those guys in these sorts of situations...

Straight men's narratives from this repertoire show what recent sociologically informed queer theory studies have proven: heterosexuality is not self-evident 'natural' given, but social accomplishment that needs to be performed in interaction with others in order to be coherent, intelligible and free from anxiety (Adams,1997; Flood, 2008; Pascoe, 2007; Ingraham,1999, 2004; Epstein et al 1997). Although a significant number of straight men from this group are reflexive and indirectly acknowledge the performative, if not compulsory, character of male heterosexuality in their sex talk narratives and intimacy issues with their straight friends, they don't unequivocally oppose the discursive power of heteronormativity. Why not? I want to argue that one of the reasons for this is straight men's immediate availability of friendships with both gay AND straight men which helps them to reserve potentially transformative effect of emotional intimacy to mostly private realm of emotional disclosure with their gay friends while maintaining mostly public heterosexual, indeed heteronormative displays with their straight friends.

Extract 16: Dyad 11 (Martin and Luka)

(Continuing from extract 15)

IWIER: But if you can't be yourself with your straight friends why do you keep hanging out with them? Why are you still friends with them?

Martin (26): Oh, I can have lot of fun with those guys. You know guy fun. We can go out, pick up girls, full around, drink are asses off...Sure, they probably can't help you when you have some problems and you need support, but hey, that's what Luka is for (laughs).

Extract 17: Dyad 4 (Stjepan and Petar)

Stjepan (23): It would never occur to me to open up or to became, you know "soft" with my straight buddies.

IWIER: Why not?

Stjepan (23): They are different; I do things differently with them...It wouldn't feel right. I find it easier to do that with Petar. With Petar there is no this I guess this masculine barrier that prevents me from being emotional with him.

IWIER: And this masculine barrier only exists with your straight friends?

Stjepan (23): Oh absolutely.

These and other narratives show that straight men in this repertoire are emotionally intimate only with their gay friends and not with their straight friends. Opening up and being emotionally intimate with non-gay men is a big challenge for straight men because they still partially uphold hegemonic heteronormative masculinity. Hegemonic heteronormative masculinity prevents

emotional intimacy between straight men, but paradoxically allows emotional disclosure of straight men to their gay friends.

However, just because straight friends are opening up to their gay friends, that does not automatically mean that they are reciprocally satisfied with the idea that their gay friends would equally open up and talk about their own intimate, especially sexual lives. In fact, in this repertoire of narratives we find something we might call unequal emotional division of labor: while straight friends report that they continually and intensely talk about their (hetero)sexual lives and intimacies, straight men in this repertoire have expressed reluctance, resistance and sometimes even outright aversion to talking about specific aspects of intimate lives of their gay friends. The straight men in this repertoire of narratives can more than “take” a conversation and emotional openness of their gay friends on a variety of subjects, including their love life, but only when that love life is radically void of any sexual connotations. In other words, gay love is quite ok but gay sex apparently is not.

Extract 18: Dyad 3 (Dario and Krešo)

(Continuing from extract 14)

IWIER: And the same goes the other way around? If Krešo has a problem or something that ails him, he can talk to you?

Dario (22): Of course he can. In fact, he confides to me all the time.

IWIER: What does he confide to you?

Dario (22): Oh, about everything: his crazy family, boyfriend problems, and the whole homophobia thing. He can definitely rely on me 100 %.

IWIER: And you don't have a problem with Krešo for example talking about his love life?

Dario (22): Why I would have o problem with his love life ? I mean, as long as he doesn't talk about sex too much, I always listen to him and try to support him or help him out.

IWIER: So, you can talk about his love life, but not his sex life?

Dario (22): Yeah! I know it's a bit crazy, especially since we talk about *my* sex life like all the time, but I guess we have this silent understanding that it simply wouldn't feel right.

4.1.3. The trouble with anal sex and erotic tensions between friends

How to explain the paradoxical fact that the same straight men who have reached a rather high level of emotional intimacy with their gay friends and are perfectly comfortable with talking about a whole array of personal subjects from the life of their gay friends, including their love life would abruptly end the conversation when this love life becomes sexualized. Discussing honestly and opening up about sex to their gay friends proved to be highly important for a number of straight men in this repertoire. Why straight men are reluctant to discuss openly about their gay friends' sex life? In other words: what's so problematic about gay sex that it generates such a symbolic barrier and a form of a certain vow of silence with their friends with whom they otherwise share a substantial degree of emotional intimacy?

Extract 19: Dyad 7 (Danijel and Mario)

Danijel (21): "No, we don't talk about that...I guess he [Mario] probably knows that it's uncomfortable for me, so he doesn't bother me with it."

Daniel's and Dario's statement above indicates that silence itself has meaning. According to Foucault (1981) silence is a form of discourse which may have much greater power than speech itself. The reason behind the greater power of silence lies in its unlimited capacity to *implicate* meanings and through them to tacitly establish power and hierarchies between participants in an interaction. In our case, the silence and active avoidance of talking about gay sex serves to strengthen the fear and discomfort of straight men related to gay sex. This, in the end, leads to further mystification and tabooing of gay sex, and indirectly it reiterates the nexus of subtle heteronormativity between two friends.

My data shows that “gay *sexual* disclosure” exists only in the minority of dyads in the heteronormative repertoire. However, the interviews with both straight and gay men have shown that even these conversations are usually marked with casualness and they are commonly superficial and by-the-way, most often in a mutually half-joking tone. Indeed, even though the requisite use of jokes and humor in sensitive subjects like sexuality is often the mechanism to indirectly achieve intimacy between men (Swain, 1991), it still appears that the “intimacy” vanishes as soon as it's stripped of the semantic shield of casualness/humor. This is convincingly demonstrated by the experience of Dražen, a young gay man.

Extract 20: Dyad 1 (Domagoj and Dražen)

Dražen (23): We would joke around all the time about which one of us is “getting” more [sex]. (Laughs) However, when I started having some serious problems with my boyfriend at the time, including pain during anal sex, I spontaneously complained about it to Domagoj. As soon as he figured out that his best friend likes to take it up the ass, and that his boyfriend is even riding him too hard, he totally went pale. Of course, he didn't say anything and he thinks I didn't notice it but I could tell he wasn't comfortable. I

mean, it's not like I was asking him for real advice, I was just feeling really frustrated so I completely spontaneously mentioned it...And then he went silent like a stone...I mean I know that straight men are like uncomfortable when they imagine [anal sex between men], but he's my best friend and if I was able to listen to [his erection problems] with Ana for days, then at least he could've spent 5 minutes listening to me without nearly fainting!

It appears that straight men perceive the real or imagined preference of their gay friends in anal sex as the ultimate “truth” (Foucault,1981: 58-63) about their friends’ identity. Take Domagoj’s paradigmatic reaction to his friend’s *sexual* disclosure:

Extract 21: Dyad 1 (Domagoj and Dražen)

Domagoj (25): When I figured out that Dražen likes to be fucked...uh...I don't know...I started looking at him differently. ...Cause, I didn't know that he is that kind of a guy...

Domagoj is obviously taking the account of the act of penetration as evidence on who his friend ‘really’ is: he is primarily and inherently a person who desires to be fucked/penetrated and to fuck/penetrate another man. Penetration is therefore not only indicative, it is also constitutive of who Dražen is: his preference regarding anal sex in his straight friend’s eyes makes it a basis for his entire identity and one that may be potentially ‘dangerous’ for any other man, including the straight friend. Take also an extract from Vedran’s narrative for whom casual mention of his sex life is heard as “bragging”, that is lengthy uninvited boasting.

Extract 22: Dyad 2 (Vedran and Tin)

Vedran (24): You know it's one thing to be gay, but to openly brag that you enjoys being fucked... I don't know, I didn't know that he (Tin) is like that.

IWIER: What do you mean by 'like that'?

Vedran (24): You know, that he is such a person.

Some gay men in this repertoire, like Dražen, seem to notice their sexual talk produces troublesome essentialising effects, and reiteration of heteronormative notions and meanings of sexuality in their straight friends and thus they avoid such talk. However, as was stated, this silence also tends to produce heteronormative effect and rebuild heteronormative boundaries between friends at the expense of the gay friend. This exposes the dominant, heteronormative rules in interaction. The assumptions governing the conversation intrinsically privilege straight men and there is rarely or never the moment to challenge the access to the discursal privilege of these assumption¹⁵. Whether gay friends do talk about their sex life explicitly or they are self-disciplining themselves through silence, the result is the same: production of heteronormative meanings.

One needs to pose the question: *Why* exactly is male gay sex so disturbing, threatening and shocking that the straight young men react with anxiety, avoidance, and/or silence on the subject? It seems that it is not so much about male gay sex in general, but about a specific sexual practice, practiced by gay men, namely anal sex that invites (self-)disciplinary silencing. Although hegemonic masculinity also stigmatizes and pathologizes oral sex between men, the question of oral sex is surprisingly absent from the data. When asked why straight young men don't discuss

¹⁵ More on the ways in which heterosexuality is routinely deployed as a taken-for-granted resource in daily talk and then produced and reproduced in interaction is available in Kitzinger(2005).

the sex life of their gay friends or why talking about gay sex makes them uncomfortable, none of the “sexually silent” straight men mentioned oral sex. However, most of them named or implied anal sex as the source of discomfort, uneasiness and/or repulsion. Fran and Vinko were most candid:

Extract 23: Dyad 8 (Fran and Kristijan)

Fran (22): Well, of course I was not comfortable. Look, he's my friend and all... The fact that he likes guys is his thing. And I really do accept that. I had met both of his boyfriends, both the ex and the present one, and the sky did not come down. As a matter of fact, both are really great guys...But I really don't need to know everything that he does or has done with them: who does what to whom, how, if they use something for lubrication...uh...

Extract 24: Dyad 9 (Vinko and Ivan)

Vinko (21): Oh I'd give my right arm for him [Ivan]....But fucking ... I don't know how to explain it... I'm just disgusted when two guys are doing it, and especially when he does it...It really turns my stomach...I don't even want to imagine which one is doing who in the ass [...] because when you get it up the ass, you have no more dignity, you have no more pride, it's over.

The reference to these problems emerge in interviews with straight friends whose gay friends prefer or are thought to prefer⁸ the receptive part in anal sex. This sexual preference is obviously quite problematic for a significant number of straight men. Why is that? Leo Bersani (1988:210) provocatively states that “Getting fucked means being effeminated, and that means being wounded, shamed, and powerless. Men cannot be fucked unless they are (made into) women”.

Therefore I argue that for the straight men in the (proto)heteronormative repertoire of narratives to be penetrated in anal sex is seen as the ultimate betrayal of masculinity, dignity (Vinko), that of “proud male subjectivity” (Bersani,1988:211) because for them it represents the act of complete symbolic and corporeal codifying into femininity. Hegemonic masculinity sees penetration exclusively within the Butlerian heterosexual matrix: the man is not only always the penetrator, but masculinity is exclusively defined and constituted through the act of penetration (and consequently femininity as its penetrated other). Everything that differs from this pattern causes a complicated mix of repulsion, discomfort and anxiety. I believe that this pattern of aversion is especially pronounced in (proto)heteronormative dyads because of the reported conventional masculine and hyper masculine gender performances of the gay men. Indeed, what can be more threatening to hegemonic masculinity than the figure of (hyper)masculine man who enjoys being penetrated.

Inspired by Lacanian psychoanalysis, Leo Bersani notes that straight men’s fear of anal sex has to do with the unconscious menace that gay anal sex poses to the borders of 'phallocentrism'. This is because heteronormative masculinity is intrinsically connected with the 'phallus': a fantasized position of power and independence, within which the subject is thought to be completely self-reliant. For Bersani, being penetrated in anal sex is menace to heterosexual man's identification with the phallus because it signifies the complete deficit of power. He writes:

Phallocentrism is . . . not primarily the denial of power to women (although it has obviously also led to that, everywhere and at all times), but above all the denial of the value of powerlessness . . . of a . . . radical disintegration and humiliation of the self. For there is finally, beyond the fantasies of bodily power and subordination. . . a transgressing of that very polarity which, as George Bataille has proposed, may be the profound sense of both certain mystical experiences of human sexuality [. . .] in which the sexual emerges as the jouissance of exploded limits [as the disruptive effect of decoupling the exclusive privilege of penetrator from the male] . (Bersani, 1988: 217)

Bersani's reading of anal sex as threat to heterosexual male identity because of perceived lost of bodily power and control can also be interpreted as threat to ontological security (Giddens, 1991,1994)¹⁶. It seems that existential anxiety of anally penetrated man is so firmly embedded in hegemonic masculinity and heterosexual matrix that it is almost impossible to escape it's discursive power, even for who men who don't fully uphold hegemonic masculinity or even sometimes actively oppose it, like at least some straight men in this repertoire. Bersani's theoretisation of anal sex points out limits to Giddens's highly rational and cognitive theory of reflexivity, sexuality and self-identity: even when there is significant reflexivity and knowledgeability of hegemonic structururations, one can not always escape them because they are partially unconscious and consequently deeply embedded in hegemonic masculinity. It will take more than simple and honest talk to get rid of phallocentric sexuality. Furthermore, it seems that price for heightened emotional intimacy and closeness between cross sexual friends is firm taboo against specific gay sex talk. It might be argued that intense gay sex talk might challenge already weakened relationship boundaries between emotional and sexual intimacy.

4.1.4 (Self)perceptions of sexuality and masculinity among friends

Interestingly enough, despite the formidable problems with discussing anal sex, there are four gay men in this repertoire who claim that their straight friends might hold sexual attraction for them or for men in general. For some gay men this is possible, and for some even highly probable.

¹⁶ However, when Giddens discusses existential anxieties that disrupt ontological security, he doesn't take into account that these anxieties might have gendered and sexualized dimensions, or bodily ones for that matter. Here we can see that Giddens was rightfully criticized for neglecting bodily and gendered dimensions in his theory (Turner and Rojek, 2001).

Extract 25: Dyad 6 (Marin and Goran)

Goran (20): I think might be bi [bisexual]. It's just a feeling, I can never be shore, but sometimes I sense this sexual vibe from him... And this is not some kind of wishful thinking on my part, you know. (Laughs) I am not into him.

IWIER: Why do you think he might be bi?

Goran (20): Well, for once, things he sometimes says and the way he behaves in certain situations...I don't know how to put it in words, but I simply have a feeling about these things... [...]. But, more importantly, I've seen him checking out other guys. Lot's of times...Of course, that doesn't have to mean anything, but still....

Extract 26: Dyad 10 (Karlo and Marko)

IWIER: How can you be so certain?

Marko (26): Well at one point he [Karlo] is uncomfortable with talking to me about my sex life, and then at another he wants to know all the details. He is sometimes almost like obsessed... I mean, I know straight guys are curious, but the thing is I often felt some sexual tension on his part

IWIER: You felt sexual tension on his part?

Marko (26): Yes.

IWIER: Have you talked to him about this?

Marko (26): Oh, God no. I know him. He wouldn't be able to handle it. When he is ready, he will tell me.

When casually asked during the interviews, almost all straight men in this group said that they never felt sexual attraction to their gay friends or other men. Their answers and bodily demeanor implied varied degrees of uncomforted with the question. However, they all stoically endured

this and tried to hide or minimize embarrassment. However, when I asked Marko's friend Karlo if he ever felt sexual attracted to his gay friend, he raised his voice and somewhat angrily said:

Extract 27: Dyad 10 (Karlo and Marko)

Karlo (28): Look, I am not gay!

After explaining to him that this is standard question that had to be asked, I apologized for making him uncomfortable. Then he himself apologized and asked me not to tell his gay friend about the incident. (I didn't .)

If Karlo or any other straight identified young men feels sexually attracted to their gay friend, perhaps one of the reasons they avoid to talk about gay sex is because they are sexually aroused by it. On the other hand, all gay men said that they are generally *not* sexually attracted to their straight friends, and all straight friends stated they don't think their gay friends have sexual feelings towards them.

Although almost all self-identified straight friends in this repertoire (contrary to my expectations) were surprisingly open and talkative respondents, almost all of them (10/11) continued to stress and some almost insist during interviews that they are straight. This mostly occurred in situations during interviews when sensitive topics like sex and emotional intimacy were discussed, but also sometimes when more mundane questions were asked. The following two extracts exemplify both of these situations.

Extract 28: Dyad 5 (Tihomir and Lucijan)

IWIER: So you freely discuss your personal problems with Lucijan?

Tihomir (26): Oh, yes. Lucijan is basically the only person who I can seriously talk to about that and most of all trust.

IWIER: Trust?

Tihomir (26): Oh, yes. Trust is a big issue for me, because before I can trust someone, I have to let go like all my fears and inhibitions and be prepared to reveal my innermost feelings and weakness.... But, hey, I am not gay (laughs), I am straight.

Extract 29: Dyad 8 (Fran and Kristijan)

IWIER: And what kind of things do you do together?

Fran (22): Pretty much everything I usually do with my other friends: we play football, play station, we go out together, chase hotties... I chase girls of course because I am straight (laughs).

Although it was established at the beginning of interview that Fran is straight, he nevertheless felt the need to stress that by hotties he means female hotties (i.e. girls). This need for continual performance and insisting of one's heterosexuality was found in different degrees with almost all straight men in this repertoire. It was clearly caused by the fact that straight men wanted to make sure that I knew that their emotionally close friendship with their gay friends is purely platonic and not sexual. However, it seems that continual need for interactional performance of heterosexuality is not exclusively reserved for me as an interviewer, but also for others. Significant number of gay men in this repertoire (8/11) revealed to me that their straight friends often indirectly need to show to other straight men that they are and continue to be straight despite of close association with gay friends. This is done in variety of ways.

Extract 30: Dyad 6 (Marin and Goran)

IWIER: Have you ever noticed Marin behaving differently with his friends because of you?

Goran (20): Certainly, but less now than before. For example, we used to have this ritual of going to the movies every Monday night. After I came out to him and after everybody else found out that I am gay, suddenly we couldn't go out alone: he had to bring his girlfriend to the movies! I guess he didn't want that somebody thinks that we are on a date or something. I was pissed, but I guess at the time I was so grateful that he was ok with me [being gay], that I didn't make a big fuss about it. Eventually, he broke up with girlfriend and things came back to normal again.

IWIER: And he doesn't do thing like that anymore?

Goran (20): No, but every now and then he has to show his straight buddies that he is a big man and brag about his sexual conquests. Of course, I am like the only person who knows he is flat -out lying. You see, all Marin's buddies know that Marin and I are close so I guess he sometimes still needs to prove to them and maybe to himself that he is straight.

Talking about one's imaginary or actual (hetero)sexual conquests proved to be a highly important instance of performance of heterosexuality for many straight men in this repertoire of narratives.

Extract 31: Dyad 9 (Vinko and Ivan)

Ivan (22): Almost every time we're in some straight company has the need to say things like "I boned her on the table yesterday (mimics and turns his eyes)... [...] And also uses

the word “cunt” (Croatian: pička) almost as a synonym for girls. Look, I know him, and I know he’s not like that. But when he is the pack with these hetero apes, it’s like he turns into another person...

It is important to mention that Ivan distinguishes between sexually explicit confiding of his straight friend which he characterizes as honest, authentic and exclusive¹⁷, and the sexually explicit exaggeration which he characterizes as dishonest, vulgar and performed for the straight audience.

Other gay men in this repertoire also mentioned this phenomenon, although it seems that it appears to a lesser extent. According to these gay friends, even though it is not as prominent, their straight friends sometimes use sexist and misogynist speech. It appears exclusively when the straight young men are in the company of their straight friends.

Extract 32: Dyad 8 (Fran and Kristijan)

Kristijan (24): Every now and then when I’m in his straight crowd, Fran is all the time coming up with these lame and pathetic sexual remarks about girls. [...] It really gets on my nerves.

It is clear that straight men must perform their heterosexuality because they are under pressure to still be perceived as homosexual since they socialize and are close friends with gay men. What is fascinating is that the straight men never go for the milder or “banal” *homophobic* speech to perform their heterosexuality, but rather they do it through open, and often quite

¹⁷ It seems that a significant number of straight men are very honest in confiding their sexual practices and problems to their gay friends. More straight men confide to their gay friends on how sometimes they are unable to satisfy their sex partner, that is, to get her to reach orgasm. Straight men almost never have these types of conversation with their straight friends.

subtle *misogynist* speech utterances. In other words, the threat to male heterosexual identity is not averted by homophobic speech, but rather misogynist. In this way the imaginary or real ‘fucked’ women become a mere conduit through which the homosociality/male friendship can be secured and neutralized from still dangerous ‘homosexual panic’ (Sedgwick, 1985).

This shows that most of straight men in this repertoire (over)perform heteropatriarchal masculinity to be free of any erotic suspicion for their close friendship with gay men. I want to argue that making distinctions to solidify one’s heterosexual identity is caused not only by the straight men’s close emotional involvement with their gay friends, but also by the straight men’s perceived gender presentation of their gay friends: normatively masculine, or even hyper masculine gay men are too similar to straight men themselves to just be left unproblematicized by heteronormative markings. However, this heteronormative marking is not accomplished by any kind of display of homophobia toward gay men, but rather through misogynist speech and actions toward female bodies, achieving heteronormative distinctions and meanings indirectly. Although, as previously stated (in extracts 14 and 15), straight men are often reflexive on the performative dimensions of their misogynist speech acts, they are not willing to acknowledge to me as an interviewer that they use these speech acts in order to make heteronormative distinctions. However, all their gay friends are quite perceptive of the performative nature of these heteronormative distinctions.

4.1.5. What about gay men?

Although the focus of this thesis is more on experiences of friendship in straight men’s narratives, something needs to be said more explicitly and with more details about gay men. Almost all gay men in this group (10/11) are not fully publicly out. They are only out to their straight friends and to a selected number of other friends or family members. Their reasoning

for not coming out fully in public differ, from fear of parental affectionate and financial rejection to job discrimination and social ostracism. More than half of the gay men in this repertoire (6/11) are certain that they will never come out fully. Among them is Ivan.

Extract 33: Dyad 9 (Vinko and Ivan)

Ivan (22): I will never be out completely. I don't see the point. What's anybody's business what do I do in bed?

IWIER: Hmmm....You don't think that public visibility of openly gay men reduces homophobia?

Ivan (22): Oh, please! Public visibility?! I just don't want to parade my sex life in public.

Although I acknowledge queer theories sophisticated critiques of coming *out* as possible process of perpetuating heteronormativity (see Butler, 1991), as well as the view that coming out is not always and everywhere appropriate individual strategy, I nevertheless feel that examples such as Luka's indicate the ways staying *in* the closet in fact perpetuates heteronormativity. Reasoning not dissimilar to Luka's were expressed by significant number of gay men in this repertoire.

Another important finding for gay men in this repertoire is that although all gay men describe their friendship with straight men as close, more than half of them (7/11) report they feel emotionally closer to their gay friends than to their straight friend.

Extract 34: Dyad 11 (Martin and Luka)

Luka (27): I can't relate to Martin about certain things because he simply doesn't understand what it like is to be [closeted] gay guy in Croatia. You know, everyday stuff....lying, hiding, pretending... not to mention the insults you hear on every corner.

IWIER: But, what do you get from his friendship then?

Luka (27): Well, funnily enough when I am with him, I don't feel like I am always a gay guy, I am just a guy. There are no labels. The same goes when I with some of my other straight friends. I really need that sort of thing.

IWIER: What exactly do you mean?

Luka (27): You know... be just one of the guys: they know that I am gay, they accept me completely, and then we can do all the regular guy things. And I love it. I feel I am part of the mainstream.... Of course, as I said all of this has it's limits, but I guess I was naive enough to think that I can relate to Martin in things I relate to some of my gay friends.

Extract 35: Dyad 4 (Stjepan and Petar)

Petar (21): Stjepan is great for hanging out and I like him a lot but sometimes I think he lives in a dream world.

IWIER: In what sense?

Petar (21): Well, for example he thinks it's the easiest thing in the world for me to find a boyfriend. He doesn't get at all that the [Zagreb gay] scene is filled with these screaming queens that only gossip and fuck all day. [...] That's sort of things really frustrates me.

Only four gay men (4/11) reported that they are emotionally as close to their straight friend as to their gay friends. Why do they *all* continue to identify their friendship with straight men as close then? It is clear that in most cases gay men don't relate to straight men in the same way as straight men to do them, simply because they are differently positioned within heteronormative discourses of this friendship repertoire: straight friends "simply don't understand" to a full degree their gay friends oppressed status and associated issues and problems. To top that, gay men can't expect that their straight friends will talk to their gay friends about their sex life because it tends to produce heteronormative meanings. Although partially frustrated by such developments, I would argue that gay men come to be compensated

for this by receiving other things from their friendship with straight men: (masculine) recognition/status and a feeling of belonging to mainstream society (see extract 34).

Something else needs to be noted about gay men in this repertoire. Other than enacting masculine and sometimes hyper masculine gender presentations, almost all of them (10/11) are also highly critical of effeminate gay men. Petar from the previous extract is just such an example. This explicit dis-identification with so-called effeminate gay men in this repertoire¹⁸ point out that although not homophobic, these gay men tend to enact heteronormativity, albeit differently and less severely than their straight friends. Paradoxically, this means that straight and gay men in (proto)heteronormative repertoire are more similar than they are willing to acknowledge.

4.1.6 Private-public distinction and ‘therapeutic intimacy/masculinity’

Most of straight men from this group don’t have to deal with public reactions of their friendship with gay men because almost all gay men in this repertoire are not fully publicly out. However, most straight men (9/11) stated that they are not always comfortable with openly and actively proclaiming resistance to homophobia.

Extract 36: Dyad 3 (Dario and Krešo):

IWIER: Do you speak up when somebody says something homophobic?

Dario (22): Hmm, if Krešo is present, definitely. But otherwise...It depends

IWIER: On what?

Dario (22): On situation in hand, I suppose...Look, I mostly do speak up in public [against homophobia], but I don’t make a big fuss about it.

¹⁸ I mean on unwillingness to ever fully publicly come out and on uncritical desire for masculine and mainstream recognition.

Extract 37: Dyad 9 (Vinko and Ivan)

IWIER: Can you imagine yourself attending a Gay Pride?

Vinko (21): Definitely not!

IWIER: Why not?

Vinko (21): First of all I am not gay. Secondly, I don't support it. It's a freak-show and I think it's the whole thing is provocation. Gays should find other ways to fight for their rights.

Young men like Vinko are not necessarily homophobic, but they must be definitely considered heteronormative. Heteronormativity in different forms is found within practically all narratives of straight men in this repertoire. For example, although almost all men have some mutual straight friends, most of straight men don't associate with gay men's gay friends. (However, all straight men know or they had known their gay friend's boyfriends.) Finally, most straight men in this repertoire are at best just partially embedded in their gay friend's lives and are reluctant to actively fight against homophobia. Nevertheless, they refer to their relationships with gay men as close friendships and are emotionally intimate with them in a way they are never or seldom with their straight friends. How to explain this seeming paradox?

I would argue that straight men's relationship with gay men can be described as 'therapeutic': they open up emotionally only to their gay friends because they perceive them as nonjudgmental and non-threatening to their masculinity. At the same time, they are reluctant to talk about their gay friends' sex lives because they hold heteronormative notions about gay sexuality and see it as a potential threat for their self-perceived normative male identity. Although not homophobic per se, they are reluctant to publicly fight homophobia, let alone heteronormativity which they fully enact. In short, although straight men in this repertoire seem to accept their gay friends, this support is at best partial and it doesn't seriously challenge

hegemonic structures of gender and sexuality. This means that straight men in this repertoire don't embody hegemonic homophobic masculinity (Connell,1995), but they do enact a specific form of complicit heteronormative masculinity that might be called therapeutic masculinity. Non-transformative consequences of therapeutic masculinity go well with Connell's reluctance to believe that male personal disclosure *per se* can have a political effect if it is not accompanied by active resistance to patriarchy (1995:206-211).

In sum, "pure relationship" in the (proto)heteronormative repertoire of narratives doesn't appear. According to Giddens (1991; 1994) for emotional intimacy in personal relationship like friendship to constitute 'pure relationship', it needs to be deprived/purged from hegemonic structures of gender and sexuality. However, as feminist critics like Jamieson (1999) have pointed out, emotional intimacy can appear *despite* of inequality. Reductive emotional intimacy that I called therapeutic exists between straight and gay men in this repertoire *despite* or perhaps *because* of continual heteronormative inequalities and heteronormative discourses between them. This goes well with previous feminist research that demonstrated that today's heterosexual relationships and interactions position women and men unequally in a sense that women have to do more emotional work for less interpersonal award (Fishman,1983). In this study, (proto)heteronormative repertoire of friendship between straight and gay men privileges straight men's intimacy: straight men express significant degree of emotional disclosure to their gay friends, while gay men's emotional disclosure is significantly limited because of workings of heteronormativity (when they discuss gay sexuality) or because of positioning within heteronormativity (when they discuss specific gay problems and sensibilities). All this points out that emotional intimacy as Giddens perceives it might have inbuilt ideological traps: although Giddens presupposes equality for 'pure relationship' to appear, material reality shows that most personal relationships still have inbuilt inequalities and hierarchies. Why then continually insist

on ‘pure relationship’ as *the* answer for further transformations of gendered and sexualized hierarchies without also insisting on parallel direct and open resistance to such structures?

4.2. (Proto)queer friendship repertoire

Nine out of twenty one straight-gay male friendships produced a narrative that constitute what I call (proto)queer friendship repertoire. They have several crucial characteristics in common. Four of them had been friends before the gay men came out but five of the dyads became friends already knowing about each other’s sexual identities; a significant part of both straight and gay men are not perceived by themselves and others as conventionally masculine; they both fully enact emotional intimacy and according to both straight and gay men, this had transformative effect on their sense of self. Erotic tensions and desires have existed in some of these friendships but they have been resolved through honest and open discussions, and sometimes through sexual activity. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity don’t structure these friendships at all.

Fig.2. Distribution of (proto)queer straight-gay repertoire

NUMBER OF DYAD	STRAIGHT MAN (AGE)	GAY MAN (AGE)	QUEER MASCULINITY OF STRAIGHT MAN
1	Željko (26)	Dario (25)	JUSTICE
2	Jakov (21)	Nikola (21)	SISSY
3	Andrija (26)	Ozren (24)	JUSTICE
4	Tomislav (25)	Robert (24)	JUSTICE
5	Filip (21)	Ante (23)	SISSY
6	Leon (25)	Ranko (23)	JUSTICE
7	Antonio (22)	Borna (21)	SISSY
8	David (23)	Zoran (25)	SISSY
9	Lovro (22)	Arsen (24)	JUSTICE

4.2.1. How did they become friends?

Some of the men (4/9) in this group had been friends before the gay men's sexual disclosure. They had been friends up to 3 years before that. When the gay men came out, the straight men were not surprised and they accepted their gay friends' coming out without any reservations. If they had problems at all, it was concerned with the timing of the event.

Exact 38: Dyad 4 (Tomislav and Robert)

Tomislav (25): No, I was not surprised, I saw it coming [...] But I still think he should have told me sooner. It's not as if I ever gave him an impression that I was a homophobe or something.... I don't know, I guess he wasn't ready.

Extract 39: Dyad 6 (Leon and Ranko)

Leon (25): I was like, finally! I congratulated him, and hugged him and everything. I think he was really taken by that. (Laughs)

Five straight men out of nine knew that the young men were gay at the very beginning because the gay men didn't hide their sexual identity.

Extract 40: Dyad 1 (Željko and Dario)

Željko (26): He was my ex girlfriend's buddy, so three of us would always used to hang out together. After I broke up with Natalija, Dario and I stayed friends... But, I guess we became real friends only after the break up...

Extract 41: Dyad 9 (Lovro and Arsen)

Lovro (26): I had met him while we were both volunteering for [an environmental NGO] in Zagreb.

IWIER: Did you know he was gay?

Lovro (26): Oh, yeah...He was completely open about it.

IWIER: OK, can you describe a little bit how you did actually become friends.

Lovro (26): Hmmm....I guess it just came naturally. We just clicked on so many levels. We have lots of things in common. For example, we are both huge movie buffs and we both have to watch every possible film release in the theaters, from the worst Hollywood trash to the most pretensions art cinema (laughs). So we always have a blast.

Although many young men share similar interest, their basic common characteristic is that they both enact their masculinity in ways that are not complicit with hegemonic masculinity. In other words, both gay and straight men in this repertoire enact what Connell calls subordinate masculinity, although different forms. Robert Heasley (2005) calls such enactments straight queer masculinities.

4.2.2. Straight queer masculinities

Robert Haesley (2005: 110) defines straight queer masculinities as “ways of being masculine outside heteronormative constructions of masculinity that disrupt or have the potential to disrupt traditional images of the hegemonic heterosexual masculine.” He develops six nonlinear and nonhierarchical categories of queer masculinities performed by straight men: straight sissy-boys, social justice straight queers, elective straight queers, committed straight queers, stylistic straight queers and males living in the shadow of masculinity. The nine straight men’s narratives in this repertoire embody the straight sissy boy and the social justice straight queer, respectively. Four falls in the sissy boy category and five in the justice straight queer one.

Straight sissy boys are “straight males who just cannot “do” masculinity” (Haesley,2005:116), that is they unwillingly enact non-conventional masculinity. Although they are perceived by others as gay, this is neither their intention nor their identity. According to Haesley, straight sissy boys can sometimes be actively opposed to engaging in gay male friendships and networks, however this is not the case in my group.

Jakov and Antonio are among those whose narrative account can be described as “straight sissy boys”.

Extract 42: Dyad 2 (Jakov and Nikola)

Jakov (21): I am not interested in things most guys are: I hate sports, I am kind of a nerd and I guess I am pretty emotional.[...] Throughout elementary school and especially high school I was bullied and called a fag [Croatian: peder], a faggot [Croatian: pederčina], a sissy [Croatian: curica], you name it. This sort of thing can really get to you no matter how strong you try to fight it.

Extract 43: Dyad 7 (Antonio and Borna)

Antonio (22): I guess I just don't fit into what society expects men to be: most of my friends are women, I am quiet, slim [...]. And everybody thinks I am gay because of the way I talk.

The five straight men in this repertoire (5/9) that can be described as Haesley's “social justice straight queers”, are men who actively and consciously oppose hegemonic masculinity, either verbally or through action (2005: 118). They usually produce conventional gender

presentations.¹⁹ Andrija and Lovro's stories are among the social justice straight queers in this repertoire.

Extract 44: Dyad 3 (Andrija and Ozren)

Andrija (26): I was brought up by a feminist single mum and she has always taught me to be open and sensitive about things. [...] Even before I met him [Ozren], I had gay friends. And I was always oddly looked for associating with them. When I would respond against homophobic remarks, people would just assume that I was gay. After I while, I got tired of explaining, and I just let people think what they what to.

Extract 45: Dyad 9 (Lovro and Arsen)

Lovro (26): Throughout my college years I volunteered in various NGOs, so I thought I knew the human rights side of the [gay] issue. But, when I told my parents that don't want to go the army after graduation and that I want to volunteer for a gay NGO instead²⁰, they went ballistic! They were like: Are you faggot?, How can you do this to us?, What will the neighbors think? and all that jazz. At one point they even threatened that they won't give me grandma's apartment after I graduate as planned. Well, I didn't listen.

All straight men in this repertoire (both "social justice straight queers" and "straight sissy boys") described themselves as "not typical guys", "non-traditional", "not macho" and two men are even self-identified feminists. Although the straight men that I identify here on the basis of their narratives as "social justice straight queers" are perceived by their gay friends as conventionally masculine. What is crucial here to me is that these straight men's non-

¹⁹ This shows that conventional gender presentation does not necessarily follow enactment of hegemonic gender (hegemonic masculinity): for example, conventionally masculine men can both oppose and uphold hegemonic masculinity.

²⁰ Until 2008, male citizens in Croatia were subject to compulsory military service. However, as an alternative, they had the option to do civil service in NGOs and state agencies.

heteronormative masculinities have made it possible for them to become close friends with gay men with relative ease. Straight men in this group found they could relate socially and more importantly emotionally to gay men in ways they mostly couldn't with straight men. As it will be shown, through emotional disclosure and sharing experiences of being marginalized or rejected by hegemonic masculinity, they found their friendship with gay men to be transformative in their sense of self. These processes apply for *all* men in this repertoire, but more so for "straight sissy boys".

4.2.3. Emotional intimacy among straight men

Extract 46: Dyad 5 (Filip and Ante)

Filip (21): When you are one of those guys that everyone used to make fun at gym class because you couldn't even make 5 push-ups or you are called a sissy as long as you remember, it's not easy not to be affected by that, especially when you are in puberty. I mean I could have told myself thousand of times that guys around me are all macho assholes and I am better than them, but then you realize that deep down you want to be like them and that you'll do everything to achieve that. However, being a friend with Ante suddenly puts things in perspective. I mean here is the gay who is out to his parents since he was 15, he doesn't take shit from anyone, he is flamboyant as hell, he is beaten up at least two times per year ...But he doesn't care, he goes on, he makes constant jokes about himself... I mean if he can do that and he is gay, then my god I guess I can try that too.

Extract 47: Dyad 8 (David and Zoran)

David (23): Look I am not exactly your typical guy and I was never really a close friend with most guys, because simply I wouldn't know what to tell them. I mean, I don't want to talk about cars all day or tell fairytales about my sex life... Still, most of the time you

are like almost compelled to have some kind of contact with them and even imitate them, because otherwise you are considered “suspicious”.

IWIER: And things with Zoran are different?

David (23): Oh, to put it mildly! I mean I can confine to Zoran about everything, I can even cry if necessary, it doesn't matter. Having such a friend you finally understand that its far easier to be yourself and not to pursue some meaningless and non existent male ideal.

Butler (1990) observed that heterosexuality is often regarded as the "original" form of sexuality while homosexuality is viewed as the "copy". In stead she argues that all sexualities are in fact constructs for which there are no "real" originals, merely ideas of originals. Interestingly, this idea echoes Connell's thesis on hegemonic masculinity, which is said not to correspond to the actual activities of most men, but rather should be viewed as a “cultural ideal” that is constantly promoted by dominant culture and it is maintained as such through most men's positioning themselves in a relationship of complicity with it with only few men successfully embodying it.

The experiences recounted by the straight sissy boys in my group demonstrate that some straight men can become fully reflexive of these hegemonic structures and processes *and* resist them, consequently reworking and subverting them. The medium that makes this transformation possible is emotional intimacy: opening up and sharing emotions.

On the other hand, social justice straight queers like Leon had already been actively opposing hegemonic structures before the actual development of emotional intimacy with gay men, but emotional intimacy had also made them even more reflexive of these hegemonic structurations *and* helped them to pursue opposition to them even more vigorously.

Extract 48: Dyad 6 (Leon and Ranko)

Leon (25): It's simply easier to talk to Ranko about more intimate things.

IWIER: Why? Can you elaborate?

Leon (25): Hmmm...For example, when my ex girlfriend dumped me, I was totally fucked up. She literary pulled the heart out of my body, man....I was a total mess. And all I got from my straight buddies was like: Don't be such a bitch and stop whining. I mean excuse me I was with this girl for 7 years of my life. We lost virginity to each other and survived all kinds of shit... I was really taken by such behavior and the whole experience made me realize that I can't rely on my guy friends, or should I say straight guy friends in really important matters.

IWIER: And Ranko was different?

Leon (25): Boy, was he different! He completely saved me that time, and many times after that!

IWIER: Do you think the fact he is gay is a factor in all this?

Leon (25): Well, yes and no. I guess at first it definitely was a factor. I found it easier to expose my weaknesses and wounds and open myself to someone who won't judge me or laugh at my tears... You now, there was no this manhood threat looming over. But then I realized that precisely this idea of manhood was preventing my straight friends to truly help me, comfort me and or just hag me, for God sake... I mean I know these guys... I've grown up with them. They are not incapable of showing emotions, but they are just afraid how this look like will. So they put on this masculine show, to persuade others and maybe even themselves that they don't need this. I know this, I've been there.

It seems that in order for straight men to became truly reflexive of hegemonic processes and structures and their influences on emotional intimacy, they have to be already be either some fallen men in the eyes of hegemonic masculinity (straight sissy boys) or already had developed

preexisting distance from hegemonic masculinity (social justice straight queers). As demonstrated in previous section on (proto)heteronormative friendship repertoire, those “more mainstream guys” do have potential to be reflexive, but even when this potential is realized, the end result is only partial reflexivity which has at best only minor effect on gender order, and at worst it uphold it.

4.2.4. Public-private distinction

Unlike straight men from the (proto)heteronormative group, straight men from this group claim that they actively and publicly support their gay friends, that they are embedded in their lives, know and spend time with their gay friends and their boyfriends, often go out with them to gay venues. All men show that their private concerns are also their public issues.

Extract 49: Dyad 1 (Željko and Dario)

IWIER: Dario told me that last year you went to Gay Pride with him.

Željko (26): Yeah, what experience that was²¹. We were lucky enough that we went to hang out in a nearby cake-shop with his friends soon after the Pride was over. If we had gone in the other direction, we would have been seriously beaten up. But still, it was great, especially the concert. I am definitely going this year too.

Extract 50: Dyad 4 (Tomislav and Robert)

IWIER: And have you been to Global²²?

Tomislav (25): Oh shore.

IWIER: How did you like it?

Tomislav (25): Well, when I was there for the first time Robert had to hold my hand (laughs). I had this idea that someone was just going to jump or something (laughs). But

²¹ On Zagreb Pride 2007 more than dozen Pride participants were attacked, while group of younger people, minors among them, attempted to throw Molotov cocktails and tear gas at the participants. The attacks were covered extensively by Croatian media.

²² The only gay bar in Zagreb

seriously, I always have a great time there, especially with his friends. They are constantly trying to convert me (laughs).

4.2.5. Sex talk and erotic tensions

Unlike straight men's narratives from the (proto)heteronormative repertoire, according to the straight men's narratives from the (proto)queer repertoire, they don't have any problems discussing or dealing with sex lives of their gay friends.

Extract 51: Dyad 3 (Andrija and Ozren)

IWIER: Does Ozren ever talks to you about his sex life?

Andrija (26): Oh, Jesus. Sometimes that's all he talks about. (laughs). He is such a slut.

IWIER: Are you always comfortable when he talks about his sex life?

Andrija (26): Am I comfortable? Man, we moved beyond that long time ago. Besides, I should be uncomfortable in front of him, because am not getting nearly as much as he is. (laughs).

In their accounts of their friendships, all gay men confirm that they can talk with ease to their straight friends about their sex life. Interestingly, when asked, no gay man told me that he ever expressed strong sexual desire for their straight friend, while two straight men (both social justice straight queers) said they had wanted to sexually experiment with their gay friends. One of the straight men told his girlfriend about this and suggested a threesome. She agreed but the gay man declined the suggestion.

Extract 52: Dyad 9 (Lovro and Arsen)

Lovro (22): Yeah, when he refused me that was kind of a blow for my ego.

IWIER: Why?

Lovro (22): Well, I was just curious and he said no. No big deal, right? But when I asked him why, he told me that he doesn't find me sexually attractive. I mean what's up with that? (laughs) I was kind of down because of that.. But I got over it.

IWIER: Have you ever been sexually attracted to other men, besides Arsen?

Lovro (22): Not really. But I don't think that I was attracted per se to Arsen either. My girlfriend and I are very open about our sexuality and we like to try new things. But I am sure that I would want to have sex with some other guy or a girl without my girlfriend.

IWIER: Why not?

Lovro (22): I don't know, I can't imagine it. We are close.

The other straight man expressed desire to be penetrated in anal sex with his friend and his friend agreed.

Extract 53: Dyad 1 (Željko and Dario)

Željko (26): I wanted to know what's it like, you know...to be fucked (laughs).

IWIER: And how did you like it?

Željko (26): Oh, it was really something else. I never felt so vulnerable in my life... I mean we did talk about it a lot before, but I guess nothing prepares you for that moment when you have to let go all and I mean let go all of your inhibitions.... That's hard.

IWIER: Have you ever wanted to do it again?

Željko (26):Hmmm, sometimes I think maybe I would do it again, but I guess I find other ways to experience similar sensations with my girlfriend.

I believe it would be a case of misrepresentation to regard any of these men as either latent homosexuals or bisexuals. They speak frankly and openly about their same-sex desires and

experiences and claim not to be generally sexually attracted to men. Their gay friends also think that their friends are neither “gay” or “bi”.

Extract 54: Extract 9 (Lovro and Arsen)

Arsen (24): Look, I know him pretty well. We’ve been through all kinds of stuff together. He is not gay. He is not even bi. [...] Besides, I have the best gaydar in Zagreb (laughs).

Extract 55: Dyad 1 (Željko and Dario)

Dario (25): I don’t think he is gay, no. He is just a straight gay who is comfortable with his sexuality and is willing to experiment. I think that’s great.

It is clear that Lovro and Željko fully defy not only gendered but also sexual structurations of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity, while remaining straight identified. In that sense they might be considered truly queer. All other men, both straight and gay report that they don’t hold sexual desires for their friends nor have they ever felt sexual attraction or sexual tensions between them.

4.2.6. What about gay men?

Although again the focus of this thesis is more on straight men’s experiences of friendship with gay men, something needs to be said more explicitly about the experiences of gay men in this repertoire. Most gay men’s gender presentations in these narratives are not conventional. Some of them are perceived as typical effeminate gay men and they are said to be often verbally and sometimes physically harassed. All gay men in this repertoire name their straight friends among the most important and among the closest persons in their life.

Extract 56: Dyad 6 (Leon and Ranko)

Ranko (23): I knew that Leon was something else from the moment I met him. But I guess what really showed me what a friend he is when my parents thrown me out of the house. He managed to persuade his parents that I move until things settle down! I stayed there more than a year!

Unlike in the (proto)heteronormative repertoire, gay men in (proto)queer narratives feel they can talk to their friends about everything from sex to relating emotionally and most importantly, including the possibility of feeling “different”.

Extract 57: Dyad 2 (Jakov and Nikola)

Nikola (21): Jakov is such a dear. I can count on him on everything. When I am on one of my own self-pity trips, he either joins me, or snaps me out of it. (laughs).[...] I guess because we are both like “different” , that we are so good together. ...

Extract 58 : Dyad 3 (Andrija and Ozren)

Ozren (24): ...and I can open up to him about everything.

IWIER: Including sex?

Ozren (24): Oh, sure... But that's not so important. What really matters is that I can really relate to him about the things that bother me as a gay men living in this country: all the problems, issues, the everyday stuff...I mean he sometimes understands me better than some of my gay friends.

IWIER: Hmm. Why do you think that is?

Ozren (24): I guess because he is not your typical straight guy and he can see beyond that.

Unlike gay men in the (proto)heteronormative group, all gay men in this group report full emotional relatedness to their straight friends. This should be explained by the fact that straight and gay men in the (proto)queer repertoire are said to be similarly positioned within the gender order (both gay and straight men are subordinated to hegemonic masculinity). Consequently, it is easier for them to form both emotional relatedness and emotional disclosure and thus to do “pure relationship”.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Not all straight and gay friends are enacting what Anthony Giddens calls ‘pure relationship’. The new democratic form of relationship in late modernity that exists for its own sake and is based on equality between the parties, enjoying each other’s unique qualities and sustaining trust through mutual emotional intimacy is not enacted by a significant part of straight and gay men in my data. Significant part of straight and gay friends are still partially upholding hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity (but not homophobia). Although Giddens presupposes that such hegemonic gender and sexual structures and processes shouldn’t structure pure relationships, the research reviewed by Jamieson (1998) indicates that the majority of personal relationships today are not free from gendered and sexualized hierarchies. My findings confirm this in a group of self-identified close friends that enact what I consequently call (proto)heteronormative friendship repertoire. The analysis of their narratives reveals that although (reductive) emotional intimacy does exist, it is constituted in such a way that it intrinsically privileges straight men and their experiences of emotional intimacy. This reinforces similar findings found by feminist researchers reviewed in Jamieson(1998) who investigated heterosexual couples’ relationship. According to these feminist studies, these relationships privilege men’s experiences over women’s and therefore the question is raised whether pure relationship is sometimes just an ideological concept that hides and even perpetuates gendered and sexualized hierarchies.

Nevertheless, my research did find that the (proto)queer friendship narratives from my sample do constitute ‘pure relationship’. These friendships are characterized by mutual and egalitarian emotional intimacy. All men in these friendships (both queer straight and gay)

completely reject hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Moreover, emotional intimacy in these friendships has transformative effects on both straight and gay men's sense of self.

Emotional intimacy seems to be a complex phenomenon. On the one hand, all men from this research aspire to it, but not all may achieve it. Presumably surpassed hegemonic structures, primarily straight men's heteronormativity, come to haunt emotional intimacy and they transform it into 'emotional therapy', one-sided and reductive form of emotional disclosure that privileges heterosexual experiences. One of the indicators that show that 'emotional therapy' is a truly depoliticizing phenomenon is the fact that the men who practice it (the straight men from the (proto)heteronormative group) are mostly reluctant to publicly oppose homophobia, most likely because of the fear that they might be perceived as gay. Such assumption is intrinsically heteronormative. Heteronormative assumptions are also present in these straight men's perceptions of gay male sexuality, specifically in their gay friends' preferences in anal sex. These heteronormative sexual assumptions serve not only as the ultimate limit to their shared intimacy, but also to full acceptance of their friends' homosexuality.

Straight men from the (proto)queer group on the other hand fully accept all aspects their gay friend's identity and they develop a mutual emotional intimacy that has transformative effects on their sense of self. Their friendship indeed constitutes 'pure relationship'.

Although a greater emphasis has been placed in this research on experiences of straight men in friendships, gay men, especially the narratives by gay men from the (proto)heteronormative repertoire have provided important insights to ways of straight-gay male friendships. Gay men from (proto)heteronormative group, although somewhat frustrated by their overall experiences in friendship with gay men, nevertheless compensate for their frustration by receiving other things from this friendship: (masculine) recognition/status and a

feeling of belonging to mainstream society. This finding, together with most gay men's unwillingness to ever fully publicly come out *and* their highly critical views of "effeminate" gay men, indicate that gay men's narratives from (proto)heteronormative repertoire should also be considered heteronormative, albeit differently and less severely than those by their straight friends.

Gay men's narratives from the (proto)queer repertoire on the other hand didn't show any signs of heteronormativity and were reported to be able to achieve full emotional intimacy and relatedness with their straight friends. The reason for this achievement might be identified in straight and gay men's somewhat similar marginalized experience and position within the gender order. On the other hand, gay men from the (proto)heteronormative group were not able to achieve full emotional intimacy and relatedness with their straight friends because, among other things, they didn't have similar experiences of marginalization and oppression. In other words, position in the gender order of normalcy proved to be an important dimension for the imp/possibility of pure relationship.

Both straight and gay men in the (proto)queer group reject hegemonic masculinity, while straight men and, to a lesser extent, gay men in the (proto)heteronormative group are somewhat complicit to it. Straight and gay men in each repertoire also share similar gender presentations. All straight and gay men in the (proto)heteronormative repertoire narratives have conventional gender presentations, while most gay men and a significant number of 'straight' men from the (proto)queer repertoire have unconventional gender presentations.

The disposition of straight men to the issue of gay sexuality is also an important dimension of each friendship narrative. All straight men from the (hetero)normative group hold highly heteronormative perceptions of certain gay sexual practices which ultimately prevent them

from being fully emotionally intimate with their gay friends. Nevertheless, some of them seem to be harboring latent or not so latent homoerotic desires, which might cause erotic tensions between friends. On the other hand, all straight men from the (proto)queer group, reject all heteronormative notions of gay sexuality, and some of them are willing to sexually experiment with their gay friends, consequently fully enacting Giddens's plastic sexuality.

The most important result of this research is that some straight and gay men indeed can form pure relationships: close friendships that are deprived of heteronormativity, are deeply emotionally intimate and have transformative effects. However, the men who practice it are far from mainstream of both straight and gay worlds, thus with little transformative potential on the social order.

APPENDIX

A Interview questions for straight men

Initial questions:

- 1 Tell me about yourself-age, where you grew up, age, education.
- 2 What do your parents do?
- 3 Tell me about your friendship with X. How long have you been friends? When/How did you meet?
- 4 Tell me about time when X told you that he is gay. When was this? How did he tell you? How did you react? How did you feel? Were you surprised? Why? Did X's coming out changed your friendship in any way? If yes, how did this change occur?
- 5 Why would you say that X is your close friend? What kind of things do you do together? Do you go out together? Where?
- 6 Do you ever talk with X about things going on in your life (family, school, work, relationships, problems)? Is there anything that you won't discuss with X? Why not? Does X talk with you about what is going on in his life?
- 7 Have you ever met any of X's boyfriends? If not, why not? Has X ever been out with you AND his boyfriend? How did you react? Have you ever seen X express affection for another men (hand holding, arm around him, kiss). If you haven't seen this, how do you think you would react if you did?
- 8 Do you have any other close friendships with other gay or straight men? How different are these friendships from friendship you have with X? Does X associates with these men?
- 9 Do your straight friends know that you have a gay friend? How did they react?

Follow up questions:

- 1 Do you think X is conventionally masculine?
- 2 Do you consider yourself conventionally masculine?
- 3 Were you ever homophobic?
- 4 Do you confide in X about things you never talk to your straight friends? Why is that? What kind of things do you confide in X?
- 5 Do you ever talk to X about your sex life? Do you talk to your straight friends about your sex life? What is the difference?
- 6 Does X ever talk about his sex life? Are you comfortable with that?
- 7 Although you identify as straight, have you ever been sexually attracted to some guy? Have you ever found X sexually attractive? Do you think X was ever sexually attracted to you?
- 8 Do you speak up when somebody says something homophobic?
- 9 Can you imagine yourself attending a Gay Pride?

B Interview questions for gay men

Initial questions:

- 1 Tell me about yourself-age, where you grew up, age, education.
- 2 What do your parents do?
- 3 Who was the first person you told that you are gay? When was this? How did it go?
- 4 Tell me about your friendship with Y. How long have you been friends? When/How did you meet?
- 5 Tell me about time you told Y that you are gay. When was this? How did you tell him? How did he react? How did you feel? Why did you tell him?

6 Why would you say that Y is your close friend? What kind of things do you do together? Do you go out together? Where?

7 Do you ever talk with Y about things going on in your life (family, school, work, relationships, problems? Is there anything that you won't discuss with Y? Why not? Does Y talk with you about what is going on in his life?

8 Has Y ever met any of your boyfriends? If not, why not? Has Y ever been out with you AND your boyfriend? If not, why not? If so, did you act any differently because Y was there? Did you express affection for your boyfriend in front of Y (hand holding, arm around him, a kiss)? If not, why not? If so, how did Y react?

9 Do you have any other close friendships with other gay or straight men? How different are these friendships from friendship you have with Y? Does Y associates with these men?

Follow up questions:

1 Do you think Y is conventionally masculine?

2 Do you consider yourself conventionally masculine?

3 Do you confine to X about things you never talk to your straight friends? Why is that? What kind of things do you confine to X? Can you fully relate to X about things that bother you? How is that different than with your gay friends? What do you get out of friendship with Y?

5 Do you ever talk to Y about your sex life? Is Y comfortable with that?

6 Does Y ever talks about his sex life?

7 Have you ever found X sexually attractive? Do you think X was ever sexually attracted to you or other men?

8 Have you ever noticed that X behaves differently with other people because of you?

9 Would you consider yourself to be out of the closet? Who doesn't know that you are gay? Do you think publicly coming out as a gay man is important or not? Why?

According to Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001), an interview situation is both an opportunity for signifying masculinity and a peculiar type of encounter in which masculinity is threatened. It is opportunity inasmuch as men can portray themselves as powerful, autonomous and rational. It is a threat inasmuch as an interviewer controls the interaction, asks questions that put these elements of manly self-performance into doubt, and does not affirm a man's masculinity presentations.

To resolve problems associated with this, I used several strategies:

- 1) concerning possible struggle for control of interviewees- I allowed symbolic expressions of control (for example, I gave them the opportunity to ask me whatever they wanted about the research, I told that we can conduct the interview wherever they want as long as we won't be interrupted etc.)
- 2) Concerning nondisclosure of intimacy- I did not probe emotionally loaded questions right away, since I wanted to establish a rapport first. If some men were reluctant to talk about certain topics, I did not use direct questions; rather I asked them to tell me stories about their friendship.
- 3) I conducted semi-informal interviewing. This was greatly beneficial since again hierarchies between me and my interviewees were minimized, yet I still had control over course of the interview.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, M. L. 1997. *The trouble with normal: Postwar youth and the making of heterosexuality*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Bersani, L. 1988. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in Crimp, D. (Ed.) *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Brekhus, W. 1998. "Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus." *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 34-51.

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, New York.

Butler, J. 1991 "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." In Fuss, D. (Ed.) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge.

Connell, R. W. 1995 *Masculinities*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Fishman, P. 1983. "Interaction: The work women do." In Thorne, B., Kramarae, C. & Henley, N. (Eds.), *Language, gender and society*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Flood, M. 2008. "Men, Sex, and Homosociality: How bonds between men shape their sexual relations with women." *Men and Masculinities*, 10(3): 339-359.

Foucault, M. 1981. *The history of sexuality Vol.1, An introduction*; translated from the French by Robert Hurley. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, M. 1997. *Ethics: subjectivity and truth*; edited by Paul Rabinow; translated by Robert Hurley and others. New York: New Press.

Giddens, A. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love & Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. 1999. *Runaway World: How globalization is reshaping our lives*. London: Profile.

Goffman, E. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

Graham, A. 2001. "Personal relationships in late modernity." *Personal Relationships* 8 (3):325-339.

Heasley, R. 2005 "Crossing the Borders of Gendered Sexuality: Queer Masculinities of Straight Men" In (Ed.) Ingraham, C. *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise, and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*. New York and London: Routledge.

Holland J, Ramanzoglou C, Sharpe S, Thomson R. 1997. *The male in the head: young people, heterosexuality and power*. London: Tufnell Press.

Ingraham, C. 1999. *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. New York and London: Routledge.

- Ingraham, C. 2005. *Thinking Straight: The Power, the Promise, and the Paradox of Heterosexuality*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Jamieson, L. 1998 *Intimacy: Personal Relationships in Modern Societies*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jamieson, L. 1999. "Intimacy transformed: a critical look at the pure relationship" *Sociology*, 33: 477-494.
- Kitzinger, C. 2005. "Speaking as a heterosexual: (How) does sexuality matter for talk-in-interaction", *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 38(3): 221-265.
- Martin, B. 1994. "Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary" *differences* 6.2-3: 100-125.
- Pascoe, C.J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. S. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Schwalbe, M. L., Mason-Shrock, D. 1996. "Identity Work as Group Process." *Advances in Group Processes* 13 (1): 113-47.
- Schwalbe, M. and Wolkomir, M. 2001. "The Masculine Self as Problem and Resource in Interview Studies of Men." *Men and Masculinities*, 4(1): 90-103.
- Sedgwick, E. K. 1985. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Seidler, V.J. 1992. *Men, Sex and Relationships: Writings from Achilles Heel*. (Ed.) London: Routledge.
- Seidler, V.J. 1997. *Man Enough: Embodying Masculinities*. London: Sage.
- Seidler, V.J. 2007. *Masculinities, Bodies, and Emotional Life*. *Men and Masculinities*. 10 (1): 9-21.
- Seidman, I. 1998. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 2nd Ed. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sullivan, N. 2003. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Swain, S. 1991. "Covert Intimacy: Closeness in men's friendships." In Risman, B. J. and Schwartz, P. (Eds). *Gender in Intimate Relationships*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Tomić -Koludrović, I and S. Kunac 2000: *Rizici modernizacije, žene u Hrvatskoj devedesetih*, Split: U. G. Stope nade.

Turner, B. S. and Rojek, C. 2001. *Society and Culture: Principles of Scarcity and Solidarity*. London: Sage.

Weeks, J. 1995. *Invented Moralities: Sexual Values in an Age of Uncertainty*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Weeks, J., Donovan, C. and Heaphy, B. 2001. *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments*, London: Routledge.

West, C. and Zimmerman, D. 1987. "Doing Gender". *Gender and Society*, 1(1): 125-151.

Yip, A.K.T. 1997. "Gay male Christian couples and sexual exclusivity." *Sociology*, 31(2): 289-306.