"GAY AND CHRISTIAN, IS IT POSSIBLE?"
OVERCOMING DOUBLE DISCRIMINATION IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINE

By

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Gender Studies

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Budapest, Hungary

2011

Abstract

In this thesis I analyze strategies that homosexual Christians in Ukraine resort to in order to negotiate their religious and sexual identities. I examine the origins and consequences of a widespread opinion that homosexuality and Christianity are incompatible. I argue that such beliefs have a profound negative consequence on self-perception of many gay and lesbian believers. In this research I claim that the cause of this conflict lies in "double discrimination" homosexual Christians experience, on one hand, from society and institutionalized church for being homosexual, and, on the other hand, from LGBT community for being a believer. I conclude that establishment of personal system of beliefs based on broad Christian principles, such as equality of all people regardless of their sexuality, and rejection of conservative religious ethics of sexuality are the most important strategies that help homosexual Christians to establish a positive image of their identity.

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Acknowledgments

My first words of gratitude go my supervisor Hadley Z. Renkin, whose enthusiasm and encouragement kept me motivated through the whole research process. I am also very thankful to my professor Andrea Petõ, who gave me very useful advice on how to conduct and analyze interviews.

I want to express my gratitude to all the respondents who were willing to share their intimate stories, and without whom this study could not have been done.

I am also thankful to Mohyla School of Journalism for letting me use their premises and equipment to conduct interviews.

Last but not the least, my family and friends. Thank you for your support and belief in me. Galia, Nikolai, Marina, Dima, Nata, Lena, Anya, thank you all very much.

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Introduction

Background

"Gay and Christian, it is possible?" − this is an advertisement of an American group called Good News, whose main goal is to help people reconcile their homosexual and religious identities (Thumma 1991, 333). However this question is relevant not only for Americans and not only for people who are struggling to be homosexual Christians. There is a myth supported by many people, regardless of their sexuality or religious affiliations, that homosexual identity and Christian beliefs are incompatible. Numerous scholars argue about the origin of this opinion, as well as against it, and I mention some of them in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, having internalized a belief that Christian moral ethics condemns homosexuality, many gays and lesbian Christians experience substantial inner conflict.

In my thesis I demonstrate that the cause of this conflict lies in "double discrimination" homosexual Christians experience, on one hand, from society and institutionalized church for being homosexual, and, on the other hand, from LGBT community for being a believer. Taking into account relationship between post-Soviet Ukrainian religious context and LGBT rights movement this tension becomes obvious.

Just to consider recent examples. In April 2010 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) was voting for a Resolution[1] which addresses discrimination against LGBT people and encourages member states of the Council of Europe, among them Ukraine, to take steps to fight such discrimination. At that time All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations (AUCCRU), which unites members of the biggest religious denominations in Ukraine with an aim to "spiritually revive Ukraine […] and participate in creating legislature concerning regulation of church-state relation"[2], was actively opposing

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[1] Resolution on "Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity"
[2] All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations. Information about board members. http://vrciro.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=12&Itemid=28 (accessed May 3, 2011)

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adoption of the Resolution. They wrote a special letter[3] to the President of Ukraine asking him to recommend Ukrainian delegation in PACE to vote against it, and oppose proposals for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in the future. This letter stated that "under the slogan of combating discrimination and promoting the rights of sexual minorities, in fact is an encroachment on the traditional moral and family values, which are recognized as norm by majority of Ukrainian society"[4].

Moreover, in 2010 there were 18 public demonstrations[5], mainly in Kyiv and Western regions of Ukraine, against "homosexual propaganda", organized by people claiming their patriotic and religious motives, in particular. To this I can also add my personal observation concerning representation of LGBT issues by Ukrainian media. In overwhelming majority of TV programs, news reports and newspaper articles dedicated to homosexuals, comments of a priest and "position of the church" was always represented as an "opposite opinion" arguing immorality of homosexuality. Thus, considering all this it is not surprising that some of my respondents note that in response many LGBT people in Ukraine actively oppose any kind of religious activities.

Besides, religious opposition in recent years sociologists note increase in the level of homophobia in Ukrainian society. According to a survey conducted by TNS Ukraine in 2002 and 2007, the percentage of Ukrainians that support equality of homosexuals and granting LGBT people same rights that other citizens has decreased[6]. Another survey conducted in December 2010 on the topic of "Morality in Ukraine" by Gorshenin Institute demonstrates that 72 % respondent expressed a negative position with regard to "sexual minorities"[7].

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[3] Appeal to the President of Ukraine against immoral initiatives PACE
http://vrciro.org.ua/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=127&Itemid=1 (accessed May 3, 2011)
[4] ibid
[5] Gay-Forum Ukraine, "Brief Overview of Situation of LGBT in Ukraine in 2011," March 31 2011, http://gay-forum.org.ua/news/news_7.html / (accessed April 3, 2011).
[6] Українські гомосексуали і суспільство: взаємне проникнення: Огляд ситуації: суспільство, держава і політики, ЗМІ, правове становище, гей- спільнота / Центр "Наш світ". — К.: Атопол, 2007
[7] Gay-Forum Ukraine, "Brief Overview of Situation of LGBT in Ukraine in 2011," March 31 2011, http://gay-forum.org.ua/news/news_7.html / (accessed April 3, 2011).

On the other hand, over recent years the number of LGBT organizations in Ukraine has also considerably increased. In April 2010 there were 24 officially registered NGOs working with LGBT community[8]. In Ukraine there are also two LGBT Christian organizations: unregistered *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*, and registered in 2011 *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion*. Each of these groups unites around 30 members, but they organize events dealing with sexuality and religion for a vast number of LGBT people. Members of these organizations constitute a majority of my respondents.

Previous studies on (post)socialist context and sexuality they are mainly dedicated to nationalism, and citizenship (e.g Renkin 2007, Waitt 2005), homophobia and identity (e.g Essig 1999; Renkin 2009). Most articles on homosexuality and Christianity are written about countries of Western Europe and the USA (e.g. Yip 1997; Thumma 1991; Mahaffy 1996; Gross 2008). Thought, Wilcox (2003) argues that until recent times many of them emphasized primarily homosexual practices rather than homosexual people and their main focus was drawn to position of "official religion", but not to individual religious practices and beliefs.

Taking into account these shortcomings of previous studies on sexuality in (post)socialist and Western context, in my thesis I unite analysis of religious situation in post-Soviet Ukraine with the study of individual and collective practices of homosexual Christians aiming to overcome conflicts arising from "double discrimination"[9]. I argue that among these practices identification with a category *believer* and establishment of a personal system of beliefs that affirms homosexuality is a key strategy.

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[8] Марценюк Т. ЛГБТ-движение Украины: 10 лет спустя // Гендерные исследования. - № 20-21. – 2010.
[9] "Double discrimination" is a notion used by several of my respondents to describe their experience of being a homosexual Christian

Methodology

Analysis of plurality of meanings that can be ascribed to such notions as sexuality and religion in their different manifestations goes beyond the scope of this research. However, qualitative method used in the research allows moving away from deep theorization of arbitrary terms mentioned above, and lets participants themselves set a framework for their analysis. To achieve a purpose of my research, through in-depth qualitative interviews I studied personal accounts of interviewees on integrating religious and homosexual identities.

In April 2011 I conducted 12 face-to-face semi-structured interviews[10] with people who **self-identify themselves as gays or lesbians** and Christians. To find sufficient number of participants I contacted members of organization *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* in Kyiv. I also distributed an advertisement through social networks and LGBT email groups asking people interested in this project, and who consider themselves as Christian and **homosexual**, to contact me. Once I found a participant, I used snow-ball method and asked him/her to recommend people who might also be willing to participate.

Among participants there were 9 males and only 3 females. Low rate of female participation can be attributed to several reasons, which are in detail described in Chapter 2. To sum up shortly, apparently, gender is a significant factor in defining person's religious affiliations (Wilcox 2003, 353). Patriarchal structure of traditional Ukrainian churches defines woman's role as subordinate, which distracts many women, in particularly those who hold feminist views, from religious affiliation (Webster 1998). Estrangement with religion is quite frequent phenomenon among female feminist activists in LGBT community in Ukraine. Moreover, there is evident division of activities and spaces occupied by gays and lesbians (Corey and Samdahl 2005), and in case of Ukraine LGBT Christianity is a sphere dominated by gay men. Therefore, according to my observations I can assume that less number of female

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[10] The languages of interviews were Ukrainian and Russian depending on a preference expressed by respondents. All the used quotes are translated by me.

participants in this research should not only be perceived as an underrepresentation of women, but as an effect of disproportional gender representation within LGBT Christian groups.

Although sometimes in this research I use such notion as LGBT Christianity, it should be mentioned that I emphasize experience of gay and lesbian believers only. Therefore, most of the times I use notions of "homosexual Christian(s)" and "Christian homosexual(s)". I use them interchangeably, and the word order in these phrases should not be confused with any priority. In a text I am using "gay" to refer only to male homosexuals, except of quotations when this notion can represents both male and female. I do this because in Ukrainian and Russian languages "gay" (укр. "ґей") means exclusively male homosexual. When I refer to both gays and lesbians I am using a notion of "homosexual(s)" (укр. "гомосексуал(и)").

My method does not bid for providing systematic generalization or representation of experience of homosexuals in Ukraine, as it is almost impossible to have a representative study when the key participants are gay men and lesbians (Shallenberger 1998, 275). Moreover, as Shallenberger points out, because of the homophobia and reluctance of homosexuals to participate in researches that deal with sexuality, the ones who nonetheless take part in such studies are more open than the average, and therefore cannot represent the whole LGBT population (Shallenberger 1998, 275). However, in this study I am suggesting and describing the issues and trends Christian homosexuals *may* experience, and results are meaningful for this sample. As Stake puts it, "the purpose of the case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (Stake 2003, 156).

Taking into account homophobia in society it is easy to understand that gays and lesbians are very reluctant to participate in all kinds of studies where they would have to reveal details of their personal life. Also in Ukraine there are very few academic researches on LGBT community. For all of my interviewees it was the first time they participated in this kind of project. In order to establish trustful interpersonal relations with participants, which is

essential to the interviews' success (Fontana and Frey 2003, 59), I think that positioning myself as a researcher was essential. As Oakley (1981) points out, during an interview, there is "no intimacy without reciprocity" (Oakley 1981, 49). In order to achieve a certain level of trust at the beginning of each interview respondents and I signed Informed consent form[11], where they could read about the procedures of the research and my responsibilities as a researcher. They could also choose if they authorize to use their real names or pseudonyms for a publication. However, we talked not only about the procedures and the goals of this research, but I also tried to position myself as an insider. I told that I am a lesbian trying to overcome personal spiritual struggles, and that importance of this research for me should not only be understood in academic terms, but perhaps even more significantly on a personal level. I must admit that revealing some intimate information about myself helped me to gain respondents' trust.

Thesis structure

In Chapter 1, first of all, I present existing literature that describes post-Soviet religious context in Ukraine. I also analyze several historical and anthropological studies on relationship between main Christian denominations and homosexuals. At the end of the Chapter 1 I examine theories which argue about possible ways of negotiating Christian homosexual identities.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 are dedicated to analysis of qualitative data presented by interviews. I analyse interviewees' perception of "double discrimination" from the part of society and church, and within LGBT community. I argue that because of this stigmatization homosexual Christians experience inner conflict when trying to negotiate their dual identity. And in last Chapter 3 I study individual strategies they resort to in order to overcome this

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[11] See in Appendix 3

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inconsistency. In Chapter 3 I also present in detail activities of LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine and analyse their role in helping gay and lesbian believers in Ukraine to establish a positive image of their identity. I argue that establishment personal system of beliefs based on broad Christian principles, such as equality of all people regardless of their sexuality, and rejection of conservative religious ethics condemning homosexuality are the most important strategies to achieve this.

Chapter 1: Theories on Christianity and homosexuality

In this chapter I present literature analysis concerning three main topics relevant to my research: religious situation in post-Soviet Ukraine, historical analysis of positions of Christian churches on sexuality, and theories that discuss strategies of integration of homosexual and religious identities.

I analyze specificities of religious context of Ukraine which is needed to problematize how and nowadays different churches respond to homosexuality. I also give a short overview of the history of relations between Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant churches (which are now the biggest churches in Ukraine) and sexuality to show how different historical events resulted in present day homophobia. Lastly, I present theory of cognitive dissonance and its critique to argue that because of the social pressure homosexual Christians feel internal conflict, which causes them to adopt special practices and attitudes in order to minimize it.

1.1 Religious plurality in post-Soviet Ukraine

The policy of state atheism remained one of the major directions in the official ideology in the Soviet Union (Kowalewski 1980). According to Marxist-Leninist ideology adopted in the USSR religion was the "opiate of the people". It was considered dangerous and absurd, and ultimately would disappear (Walters 1993). Millions of Soviet believers suffered and died because of the state policy directed against religion.

However, at different times religious persecution in Soviet Union varied in its manifestations and force. Walters (1993) in detail describes several periods in the history of USSR marked with peculiar policies concerning religion. He and Fletcher (1981) point out that from World War II and onward (1940-1953) was a time marked with truce between church and state. As long as Orthodox church, which united the biggest number of believers

compared to other denominations, supported political matters of the state, it was granted a permission to function as an institution (Fletcher 1981).

Walters (1993) argues that war was defining factor in establishing years of tranquility for Soviet believers. Stalin granted certain freedoms to religious institution expecting in return that priests would keep on encouraging the population to perform their patriotic duties (Walter 1993, 17). Though, after Stalin's death state officials resumed antireligious policies and atheist propaganda starting in 1960s and continuing practically till the very collapse of the Soviet Union.

Nonetheless, scholars (Kowalewski 1980; Walter 1993) argue that despite all attempts of the Soviet government to eradicate religion from the state, it did not manage to turn people away form it:

> Repression of religion is comparable to driving a nail: the harder one hits, the deeper it goes. In its six decades of rule, the regime has proven unsuccessful in severing masses of Soviet citizens from their religious identities. (Kowalewski 1980, 426)

Collapse of the socialist system and independence of Ukraine in 19991 brought drastic transformations of the role of religion in the public sphere and in relation to the state. Although in post-Soviet Ukraine the Constitution proclaims freedom of the conscience and separation of religion and the state, as it was in the Soviet Union, religion became much more visible in the public sphere.

It is often argued that the processes of 'modernization' are inextricably linked with secularization. However, Hann (2006) claims that in postsocialist countries of Eastern Europe the opposite trend is seen. After 1990s in this region there was an increase in people's religious commitment and growth in the number of people regularly attending church services. Also according to Hann this revitalization or religious activity is closely related to the nation-building process:

The politicization of religion under socialism meant that no aspect of religious identity after socialism could be free of the political. Religious revival was intimately connected to the politics of ethnicity and nationalism. (Hann 2006, 6)

In most postsocialist states certain religious identity is more intimately related to national identity than others. When trying to secure the freedom of religion, these states eventually had to grant privileges to the dominant church in the name of 'historical relationship' (Naumescu 2006, 241). Consequently these 'national churches' could create obstacles for the development of religious pluralism.

In this sense Ukraine represents an interesting opposite case. There is no one particular church that identifies with nation. Moreover, state control over religious sphere is very limited. These two peculiarities promoted religious diversity in Ukraine (Naumescu 2006, 242). Casanova (1998) claims that Ukraine's independence created conditions for the development of "the most pluralistic and competitive denominational religious market in all of Eastern Europe" (Casanova 1998, 96). According to Casanova (1998), religious denominationalism in Ukraine approximates American model of a pluralistic religious market.

Yet, Naumescu (2006) argues that Ukrainian religious situation does not represent pluralism as it is usually understood. The religious revival in post-soviet Ukraine was accompanied by emergence of various new religious groups and confrontations within Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Today in Ukraine there are three major Orthodox churches: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church − Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), the Ukrainian Orthodox Church − Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. These churches are competing with one another for the right to be the only legitimate church in entire Ukraine (Casanova 1998, 91). They also fight for other resources such as church

buildings, monasteries, and parishes that were in communal property during the Soviet times (Naumescu 2006, 245).

Besides, there are also Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which is Eastern in rite but is directly subjected to the Pope, and Ukrainian Catholic Church. These five churches are viewed as the largest "traditional" churches in Ukraine. Tense interrelations between these "traditional" churches (Krindatch 2003; Vasin 2010) are even more complicated by their religious rivals − numerous Protestant churches which emerged in independent Ukraine. As Lyubashchenko (2010) argues although the positions of Protestant churches in Ukraine are gradually strengthening, their "western roots" put obstacle in the way of social and cultural integration: "Meanwhile most Ukrainians still see Protestantism as a foreign religion, an aspect of spiritual westernization" (Lyubashchenko 2010, 268).

Such perception of the origin of Protestantism is based on historical and cultural peculiarities of the development of Christianity in Ukraine. Although early Protestant missionaries appeared in Ukraine as far back as in the second half of the 16th century (Lyubashchenko 2010), which is even before the Union of Brest (1595) when Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was formed, Protestantism did not have that many followers in Ukraine when comparing to Orthodoxy and Greek Catholicism. Moreover, during World War II Protestant believers were often suspected of collaboration with German army, and during Soviet times were regarded as "political agents of the international bourgeoisie" (Lyubashchenko 2010, 266). New wave of Protestantism revival happened right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when numerous missionaries from the USA and Western Europe started opening their churches in Ukraine (Wanner, 2004). Due to these reasons, "western" Protestant churches in Ukraine are often opposed to "traditional" Orthodox and Catholic ones.

Taking into consideration complicated interchurch relations and lack of religious tolerance in Ukraine, Vlad Naumescu (2006) concludes that, perhaps, it would be more correct to describe Ukrainian religious atmosphere as "plurality" instead of "pluralism" (Naumescu 2006, 264). Although, sometimes these notions are used as synonyms, in case of Ukrainian religious context pluralism would mean equal possibilities, respect and tolerance of all religious denominations. However, in absence of such conditions plurality (or diversity) describes religious environment in Ukraine better.

Religious plurality in post-Soviet Ukraine has a twofold effect on the cooperation between local LGBT Christian groups and LGBT churches in Western Europe and the USA. On one hand, it allows a possibility to create LGBT church in Ukraine of a protestant type. However, on the other hand it is very likely that this will sharpen several contradictions. First, it might aggravate disagreements with "traditional" churches and other Protestant denominations, which are currently present in Ukraine, on the ground of their non-acceptance of homosexuality. Secondly, potent LGBT church in Ukraine of a protestant type might be not well accepted because of its "western roots", according to opinion of many of my interviewees.

1.2 Religious affiliation of Ukrainians

There are no fully reliable statistics that could show religious affiliation of Ukrainians. This numbers also vary depending on measurements of organizational structure, for example, number of church buildings or priests, or popular identification criteria, i.e. number of people who actually regularly attend churches (Casanova 1998, 94).

According to a survey conducted by Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies in 2006 majority of Ukrainians (62,5%) are unchurched. Among those who affiliate themselves with churches majority are related to Orthodox Churches (UOC-KP − 39,8%;

UOC-MP − 29,4%) and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (14,1%). Quantity of people who consider themselves Protestants is quite low − only 2,4 % . However, such survey measures only nominal popularity of different churches, but not actual religious practice. Moreover, when during this survey people where asked how often they attend church services and meetings, majority responded "1-2 times per year"[12].

The survey shows one important trend. Among the unchurched (62,5%) overwhelming majority consider themselves believers, however, they do not affiliate with any of the churches. This shows importance of the category *believer* for Ukrainians. It becomes even more significant in case of homosexuals, who because of the homophobic position of many churches, hesitate to affiliate themselves with any of them, but nevertheless consider themselves believers. Even within this study several people who identify themselves as believers had a hard time with determining their church affiliation either because they have not attended church for a long time, or because they consider being a believer is much more important than church affiliation. Maryna (26, f) explains this in a following way: "You can be a believer and not go to any church, or vice versa."

1.3 Sexuality and Christianity

Many people consider relations between homosexuality and Christianity antagonistic. In a confirmation of their words they might cite verses from Bible which supposedly condemn homosexuality, or sermons of some priests who assert that it is a sin. This forms a common opinion that Christian churches always did and continue to rise in opposition against homosexual people. Such statements as "church is [and was] a mouthpiece for homophobia" (Maryna (27, f, p)) can be often heard nowadays. However, they should not be taken for

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[12] Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300 (accessed May 17, 2011)

granted because historical and anthropological research demonstrate numerous examples of social and religious acceptance of homosexual practices.

Most literature written on the topic of homosexuality and Christianity is dedicated to Catholic Church. However, scholars do not have consensus in their analysis of how the church treated homosexuality. For example, Greenberg and Bystryn (1982) claim that intolerance towards homosexuality evolved as an indirect consequence of the transformation of the structure of the Catholic Church in the mid to late Middle Ages and establishment of sacerdotal celibacy (Greenberg and Bystryn 1982, 534). They explain that in the 11th-13th centuries Gregorian reforms introduced ecclesiastical celibacy and forbade priestly marriages. Primarily, the church wanted to forbid marriages so that property and priesthood would not be inherited, but remained within the church. The reformers also wanted to draw a line between the priests and the laity by emphasizing on the moral purity of the former, reinforced by celibacy.

Greenberg and Bystryn argue that until the 13th century the Catholic Church treated homosexuality among priesthood no worse that heterosexual relations:

> For political and organizational reasons, they [reformers] gave much higher priority to ending lay investiture, simony, and clerical marriages than to suppression of homosexuality. Thus accusations of homosexuality against church officials were sometimes ignored (Greenberg and Bystryn 1982, 537).

Yet, with the lapse of time elimination of marriage among clergy provoked less tolerant stance on homosexuality. According to Greenberg and Bystryn, this can be understood as a manifestation of an inner conflict among priesthood: prohibition of heterosexual relations fostered homoerotic feelings; however, many priests could not express them due to

suppression of sexuality on institutional level, and therefore they formed opposition towards homosexuality as a defense mechanism[13] (Greenberg and Bystryn 1982, 538).

Although connection between oppressed sexuality and its manifestations including homoerotic attractions among priests is a contested issue (Gonsiorek 2009; Zoll 2011), the most important idea Greenberg and Bystryn express is that Catholic Church did not treat homosexuality the same way in different times, and in fact intolerance towards homosexuality was an indirect consequence of a more general regulations concerning sexuality introduced by the Church for economical and political reasons.

John Boswell in his controversial and influential book *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality* (1980) presents similar view that the Catholic Church did not condemn homosexuality throughout all history of this institution in a same way. Moreover from the early Christian times to the Early Middle Ages, according to Boswell, attitude of the church towards homosexual people was somewhat amicable − church authorities did not impose penalties for homosexual behavior. In his later book *Same-sex Unions in Pre-modern Europe* (1994) Boswell even claims that both eastern and western Christian churches performed rituals that blessed "same-sex unions". Like Greenberg and Bystryn he argues that Middle Ages were a turning point in respect to treatment of homosexuality by the Catholic Church. However, Boswell explains this by growing intolerance and xenophobia in a general sense. For example, Jews, Muslims, moneylenders were also persecuted, not only homosexuals.

> Neither Christian society nor Christian theology as a whole evinced or supported any particular hostility to homosexuality, but both reflected and in the end retained positions adopted by some governments and theologians which could be used to derogate homosexual acts (Boswell 1980, 333).

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[13] Greenberg and Bystryn also argue than inner conflicts among priests connected with repression of heterosexuality were even greater, and resulted, in particular, in growing misogyny in Middle Ages (Greenberg and Bystryn 1982, 538)

Boswell argues that exact origins of late medieval intolerance are difficult to determine, but it is indissolubly connected with xenophobia which provoked, accompanied and resulted from the crusades (Boswell 1980, 272)

Though, Boswell's theories are contested by numerous scholars. In particular, Johnson, Dynes and Lauritsen (1981) charge Boswell with anachronism and inappropriateness of usage of such terms as "gay" and "gay people" describing events that happened "long ago and far away". Most importantly they argue that in his study Boswell neglects systematic intolerable position of the Catholic Church towards homosexuality, which resulted in numerous crimes against homosexual men in Western culture.

Although, there are numerous scholarly articles presenting different positions on relations between Catholic Church and homosexuality, number of such studies regarding Orthodox tradition is very limited. However, as most of my respondents affiliate themselves with the Orthodox Church, in this study is it important to give an overview of Orthodox teachings on homosexuality. *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World* (2000) by Marry E. Weisner-Hanks is one of the few and most profound books on this matter. There she argues that Eastern Christianity teachings about sex in Early Modernity were in many ways similar to Roman Catholic tradition.

In her analysis of Christian treatment of sexual issues in the 16-18th centuries Wiesner-Hanks argues that Orthodox Church was especially concerned with "proper" gender conduct of laity. For example, if a man shaved off his beard so that he looked like a woman, this was considered a very serious violation, even greater than sodomy. In the 16th century as Wiesner-Hanks explains sodomy was interpreted very widely and included not only homosexual relations, but also masturbation, as well as heterosexual intercourse other than in approved position. It is important to note, that unlike many scholars who primarily concentrate their

attention on relationship of Christianity towards male homosexuality, she also provides some reference relating to treatment of female homosexuality:

> Female homosexual relations […] were generally considered a form of masturbation unless one of the women sat on top of the other as a man was expected to. Occasionally, however, female homosexual activity was linked with pagan rituals which had survived the Christianization of Russia; women who engaged in homosexual activities were called "God-insulting grannies" and charged with praying to evil spirits (Wiesner-Hanks 2000, 128).

Wiesner-Hanks argues that church reforms introduced by Russian Emperor Peter I in 1721, which were intended to modernize and westernize it, brought more freedom in terms of gender conduct. But nonetheless, she concludes that in both Orthodox and Catholic worlds in early modern Europe homosexuality remained a forbidden practice, which consequently resulted in homophobic position of these churches in present days.

Protestants constitute the second biggest group among my respondents. However, to discuss Protestant position towards homosexuality is perhaps the hardest task. As DeRogatis (2003) argues, it is impossible to give a single explanation of Protestant views on sexuality. She argues that starting form 1970x homosexuality became a divisive factor for Protestant denominations, in particular, in the USA. Nowadays within Protestant tradition there are two main orientations: mainline (liberal) and evangelical (conservative). One of the main distinctions between them is that while evangelical Protestants usually believe that Bible is inerrant, mainline Protestants generally hold interpretative view of Scripture.

DeRogatis (2003) claims, that since mid-1970s several opinions concerning homosexuality emerged in different Protestant denominations in the USA. However, she argues that mainline Protestant churches have been the most accepting of homosexual clergy and laity. Some churches, for example Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, which in fact cooperates with Ukrainian LGBT Christian groups, also approve and

support same-sex marriages. According to DeRogatis liberal Protestant churches usually hold a view that homosexuality is based on biology and therefore is not voluntary. Conservative churches, on the other hand, adhere to an opinion that homosexuality is a choice, and consequently is a subject to moral blame (DeRogatis 2003, 248-249).

Unlike Orthodox and Catholic Churches, Protestant denominations treat homosexuality in different ways. DeRogatis argues that currently one of the most debated issues within Protestantism concerns ordination of gays and lesbians. However, unlike diversity of opinions in the USA, situation in Ukraine is quite different. Disregarding their mainline or evangelical orientation, most Protestant churches in Ukraine are opposed to homosexuality. None of the churches is openly welcoming homosexual clergy or laity. Nonetheless, in comparison with Orthodox and Catholic churches, Protestant denominations in Ukraine are perhaps more flexible in their ability to change policies concerning homosexuality.

These scholar debates demonstrate how contested the origins of attitudes of Christian Churches towards homosexuality are. However, when analyzing them a broader historical and cultural context should be taken into account. Boswell (1980) points out close relationship between public mood and church teachings:

> […] hostility to gay people provides singularly revealing examples of the confusion of religious beliefs with popular prejudice. Apprehension of this confusion is fundamental to understanding many kinds of intolerance but it is not usually possible until either the prejudice or the religious beliefs have become so attenuated that it is difficult to imagine there was ever any integral connection between them. As long as the religious beliefs which support a particular prejudice are generally held by a population, it is virtually impossible to separate the two; once the beliefs are abandoned, the separation may be so complete that the original connection becomes all but incomprehensible (Boswell 1980, 5-6).

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1.4 Integration of Christian and homosexual identities

Thumma (1991), Mahaffy (1996) and Gross (2008) use theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) to explain tensions between homosexual and Christian identities. According to this theory, people experience inner confrontation if they hold beliefs or opinions about their environment, about themselves, or about their behavior that are inconsistent: "Two elements are in a dissonant relation if, considering these two, the obverse of one element would follow from the other" (Festinger 1957, 13).

Implementation of cognitive theory assumes that Christianity and homosexuality are necessarily opposed. However, this should not be understood as an innate conflict. As I mentioned previously, there are numerous scholars, who argue that relations between Christianity and homosexuality were not always antagonistic. For example, Boswell (1980) argues that from the beginning of Christianity till the Early Middle Ages attitude of Catholic Church did not persecute homosexuals. Moreover, both eastern and western Christian even performed rituals that blessed "same-sex unions" (Boswell 1994).

In addition, both Christianity and homosexuality are not constant timeless categories. People often tend to perceive sexuality as given, as if sexuality in its contemporary understanding always existed in the same way. However, many scholars warn against such approach. Padgug (1979), for instance, argues that if sexuality is taken as predetermined universal category, the real history with its complexity of socioeconomic and class realities disappears (Padgug 1979, 5-7). Same refers to Christianity. *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* (Latin for "the church must always be reforming") − the principle of Reformation movement − defines development of teachings and practices of all Christian churches.

Considering variability of categories of homosexuality, and Christianity, and relations between them, theory of cognitive dissonance should be implemented with cautious. Inconsistency between homosexual and Christian identities is a social construct, and not an

innate paradigm. Taking into account social origin of conflict, I will further use theory of cognitive dissonance to explain ways of overcoming the conflict.

Festinger (1957) argues that individuals strive to consistency within themselves, and when they experience cognitive dissonance, they try to reduce it or avoid situations when it could be increased. He defines several strategies individuals resort to in order to achieve this.

First solution is to change a behavioral cognitive element. In case of Christian homosexuals this means rejecting either of their dual identity (Gross 2008). Rejecting religious identity can be achieved by leaving the Christian church and becoming atheists, or getting involved in alternative religious practices that don't condemn same-sex relations. For example, Wilcox (2003) mentions Dianic Witchcraft as an example of such movement. It was founded in 1970s in Los Angeles by feminist and lesbian Zsuzsanna Budapest; Dianic Witchcraft offers women-only rituals, attracting primarily lesbians and bisexual women to participation (Wilcox 2003, 344-347). As far as I know in Ukraine there are no similar alternative religious groups serving LGBT people.

Rejecting homosexual identity can be accomplished by sexual abstinence of through reparative or Christian "conversion" therapy (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000). It is worth mentioning that in Ukraine there are no specific Christian institutions that offer reparative programs for homosexuals. However, some of my respondents mentioned that they were trying to "cure" themselves on their own by restraining from sexual activities or even thoughts of sexual activities with same-sex partner.

Second solution is to change the social environment that causes the dissonance. Yip (2000) argues that if a homosexual person leaves a church, this removes him/her from an environment that causes tension. This is a contested matter because religious views condemning homosexuality are expressed not solely in churches, as they pervade society to wide extent. Yip (2000) also claims that leaving a church does not mean that a person rejects

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Christian identity. On the contrary, many non-heterosexual Christians still maintain their religious identity; some of them even associate themselves with churches, and most would like to relate to a church, if it was accepting non-heterosexuals. Yet, in a situation when churches maintain homophobic positions, leaving the church may help homosexual Christian keep their beliefs integral (Yip, 2000). Nonetheless, Mahaffy (1996) in her research among lesbian Christians suggests that leaving the church is the least likely strategy her sample group resorted to in order to minimize tension between religious and homosexual identities.

Another strategy that helps to manage dissonance involves adding new knowledge concerning supposedly inconsistence identities (Festinger 1957). In her analysis Gross (2008) provides several examples of beliefs people often resort to in order to minimize inner confrontations of being Christian homosexual:

> Creating a new definition of God. One can reframe God as embracing everyone, including those who deviate from the normative. God could be said to represent every gender, every race, sexual orientation, and every possible social status. Gays and lesbians, therefore, are reflections of God.

> Reinterpreting problematic Bible verses, so that homosexuality is no longer a transgression that should make one feel guilty, but a sexuality created by God. This interpretation reduces the condemnation that some find in specific biblical passages by calling into question their relevance for a modern world. An elaborate exegesis can be made of these passages to show, for instance, that the Greek words translated as "homosexual" are either indefinable or refer to pederasty.

> Emphasizing biblical principles, such as love and acceptance of all persons, to counter the discriminatory attitudes of the church toward gays.

Focusing on the image of God as Creator. Thus, gays and lesbians are God's creations. God does not exclude anyone from his love, and thus loves gays and lesbians, who are his children.

All sexualities are created by God; GLBT people are said to be creations of God, and this obviates the need for "healing" strategies to rid the person of GLBT tendencies.

(Gross 2008, 89)

Apparently, this is not a complete list of possible strategies homosexual Christians implement to negotiate their dual identity. Moreover, it varies depending on the cultural and religious background of homosexual Christians. However, all of these and many other practices that tend to achieve same results can be united in what Melissa Wilcox (2003) calls *religious individualism.*

Wilcox argues that religious individualism can help in establishing unity between religious and sexual identities for homosexuals. The troubles LGBT people experience when facing religious views that condemn non-heterosexual relations can be solved by implementing the following strategy: "rather than being a rule book, religion has become a resource, to be utilized when it is expedient and ignored or rewritten when it is not" (Wilcox 2002, 501).

Yip (2002) also points out increased individuality within the religious sphere in his analysis of affirmative practices of nonheterosexual Christians in Great Britain. He explores Yamane's (1997) notion of neosecularization − "the declining sphere of influence of *religious authority structures*" (Yip 2002, 200, emphasis original) − to explain a modern shift of religion from a public to a more private domain. This does not simply mean that nonheterosexual Christians tend to leave their religious institutions because of the lack of acceptance. Although this is true for many LGBT people, there is also another trend when people stay within their religious communities to engage in reinterpretation of religious

doctrines and practices (Yip 2002). Yip argues that the lack of influence of religious authorities typical to late modern societies places the personal experience as primary. This makes it possible for nonheterosexual Christians to adapt their religious beliefs and practices according to their personal life situations, however this does not necessarily mean that homosexual Christians are inclined to leave institutional Christianity (Yip 2002, 210).

Hervieu-Léger (2001) also argues that individualization of religious practices in contemporary times does not contradict the search for community where people can validate their spiritual experience:

> The dissemination of belief […] gives rise to a completely contrary movement of the proliferation of communities. […] For individuals to stabilize the meanings they produce to give significance to their daily experience, they must find outside of themselves a confirmation of the validity of these meanings (Hervieu-Léger 2001, 167).

Hervieu-Léger calls this process of emerging communalities in the era of individualized religiosity as *mutual validation of faith*. Although he uses this term primarily to describe "New Age" networks in Western Europe and North America, I will argue that it can also characterize proliferation of LGBT Christian groups and LGBT inclusive churches in many countries as well as in Ukraine.

Studies mentioned above, that focus on France, England and the USA, demonstrate different strategies Christian gays and lesbians in these countries resort to in order to minimize dissonance of their double identity. Respondents who participated in this project named many of them. However they also mentioned specificities of Ukrainian context. For example, unlike countries in Western Europe and North America, in Ukraine there are no Christian churches that publicly welcome homosexuals (though, there are also no institutions that offer reparative therapies). Therefore homosexual Christians have a very limited choice of religious places where they can go and be absolutely open about their sexuality. I will in

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detail analyze the ways Ukrainian homosexual Christians manage to integrate their religious and sexual identities in Chapter 3.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that collapse of the Soviet Union and independence of Ukraine (1991) was marked by revival of religion and church. Underground religious practices during Soviet times became public again. Not only "traditional" Orthodox and Catholic churches got more freedom, but also Protestant missionaries enthusiastically started their activities in Ukraine. The proliferation of religious life resulted in development of "the most pluralistic and competitive denominational religious market in all of Eastern Europe" (Casanova 1998, 96).

I also present historical analysis of several scholars that discuss origins of religious intolerance of homosexuals. I demonstrate that Christian churches at different times had various attitudes towards homosexuality ranging from full affirmation, including blessing of "same-sex unions" in Early Middle Ages (Boswell, 1994) and similar practices in several modern Protestant churches (however, they are not presented in Ukraine), up to persecution by Inquisition in Late Middle Ages. Because anthropological and historacal studies demonstrate numerous cases of religious acceptance of homosexuality, I argue against a common belief that main Christian denominations inevitably must reject(ed) homosexuals. However, it is impossible to completely neglect this widespread view that homosexuality and religion are necessary antagonistic, because it itself in fact results in inner conflict for many homosexual Christians. Theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) shows that when people experience such feelings they strive to minimize this conflict through different practices. In Chapter 3 I will in detail analyze such strategies used by homosexual Christians in Ukraine.

Chapter 2: "Double Discrimination"

"Double discrimination" − this is how some of respondents describe their experience of being Christian homosexual. On one hand, they experience homophobia in a society and on the part of the institutionalized church. On the other hand, because of their religious beliefs Christian homosexuals often have a feeling of non-belonging in LGBT community.

The reasons that stand behind homophobic position of the institutionalized church are quite complex and go back to the early days of Christianity (for more information on this, see Boswell 1980; Greenberg and Bystryn 1982; Cavendish 2003). I have briefly discussed some of them previously, and the purpose of this chapter is to analyse how Christian homosexuals in Ukraine perceive it and respond to it. Here I also aim to show that religious issues cause conflicts and division within LGBT community.

When talking about lesbian Christians there is also a gender dimension that adds another layer to the "double discrimination", and explains extremely low number of female members of LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine. I also analyse specific experience of lesbian Christians in Ukrainian context.

I argue that Christian homosexuals feel multiple stigmatizations from different sources (society, church, nonreligious LGBT organizations) which result in profound negative consequences, and leads to cognitive dissonance when trying to construct a positive self image of being homosexual and Christian.

2.1 Homophobia in church

Weinberg and Williams (1975) argue that religious gays and lesbians, in contrast to their non-religious counterparts, are more likely to feel shame and anxiety about revealing their homosexuality, because often they have internalized conservative Christian moral ethics which does not affirm same-sex relations. According to Weinberg and Williams, they also

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have disposition to depression and lower self-esteem. Yip (1998) claims that a Christian gays experience "colossal pressure" in their lives. He argues that lack of acceptance in their religious communities leads to internalized homophobia and negative perception of their sexuality and lifestyle (Yip 1998, 42). Mahaffy (1996) in her study showed similar results. She concludes that Christian lesbians experience internal conflict between their religious beliefs and homosexuality (Mahaffy 1996, 400).

This literature review corresponds to a shared feeling of non-acceptance of oneself and one's sexuality at some point expressed by most of my respondents. Some of their narratives describe memories of very dramatic experience of how their religious believes provoked internalized homophobia and desire to change, or 'cure', themselves.

> I feel that I am gay. And when I'm reading the Bible I have this feeling that something in my chest is beating wildly. I feel that I am making a big mistake, I feel that I sin. I have this feeling that something inside me is turning upside down. […] There was a time when I felt that I would go to hell, because I am gay. I could not feel anything else. Now I realize that I cannot escape it [homosexuality], and I cannot change it. I did not choose to be gay. I am gay and that's it. If I go to hell, this is how it will be. […] Jumping off the window or cutting wrists is not a solution. I need to keep a hold on myself. (Andriy, 25, m, o)

> I asked God to save me from this [homosexuality]. And when I was baptized at age 16 in the Baptist church, I believed that God would heal me. But when I plunged into the water, I realized that I had not got rid of these feelings and I'd have to somehow live with them. […] I tried to cure myself by abstinence and self-conviction. I tried to think about women [laugh], at least somehow to think about them as of sexual objects. Plus, complete abstinence, even in thoughts. I tried to not even look at guys. But I gave in during my trip to Vienna − I went to a gay club there. (Maksym, 26, m, p)

Many respondents mentioned that at some point of their life they thought of homosexuality as of a "sin" or something that one should "cure" or "change". For some of them this is still an issue. This especially concerns younger interviewees. Studies show that for young adults who identify themselves as Christians and who are in the process of meaning-making of their same-sex attractions, in a sense that they have not yet formed a positive image of their homosexuality, religion plays an important role as it can suggest perception of homosexuality as a "moral concern" (Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, and Tan 2005, 359).

An overwhelming majority of interviewees felt non-belonging in a church because of their homosexuality. This was manifested in different ways. For example, some respondents mentioned having heard or felt disapproval of homosexuality from the priests or church community:

Several brothers in our church called from the church rostrum to fight against gays. (Maksym, 26, m, p)

Roman, on the other hand, experienced direct discrimination because of his homosexuality, regardless of his high status in church hierarchy and active participation in the life of church:

One former member [of the church] told the president of our parish that I am gay. The president called me and said there was a serious conversation. They gathered the disciplinary committee, so to speak, to discuss this with me. Next Sunday, when I was supposed to bless the sacrament, they would not allow me do this, even though we didn't have a discussion yet. They also removed me from teaching a Bible class. [...] They kicked me away. (Roman, 38, m, p)

It is worth mentioning that these cases of direct homophobia happened with respondents in Protestants churches, and all of them stop going to these churches. Other interviewees, who

attend(ed) Orthodox churches told that they personally did not hear priests ever talking about homosexuality, even sexuality, at all. Nonetheless, they consider the institutionalized church to be homophobic. According to some of my respondents another manifestation of homophobia in the church was silencing of issues related to homosexuality and inability of priests to discuss them:

> I tried to tell this [that I am a lesbian] to a priest during a confession several times. But he would not listen to me. It is not that I thought that it is a sin, I just needed an advice. After some time I stopped trying. […] I even thought that maybe I should tell this to a priest in a different way: that I have an adolescent son who is gay, and I need an advice. May be he would have listened to me, if I have said that, but I never did (Larysa, 37, f, o).

This represents not so much ignorance of a priest but power of institutionalized church to taboo homosexuality as illicit. Foucault (1988) argues that the "logic of censorship" is one of the main principal characteristics that describe relations of power with sex. According to Foucault such censorship can be manifested in three ways: "affirming that such a thing is not permitted, preventing it from being said, denying that it exists" (Foucault 1988, 84). Maryna told about similar "silencing" she experienced:

> The last time I came to a church, and by that time everyone knew that I was lesbian, some people whom I knew for many years did not even greet me. As if I did not even exist. For me it was very traumatic and unexpected experience. […] Even my sister, who had great relationship with almost everyone in the church, some people did not even say hello to her. Everybody just sat and stared at me (Maryna, 28, f, p).

Foucault argues that silence and secrecy, on one hand, render homosexuality inexistent, tabooed and inexpressible, but on the other hand they also give a possibility for a reverse discourse to emerge (Foucault 1988, 100). If in Maryna's case some people expressed their disapproval by silence, others could possibly form opposite position. Yip (2002) suggests that

in many cases Christian gays and lesbians decide to stay in their hostile religious communities to challenge homophobia and introduce new perspectives into doctrinal interpretations disapproving of homosexuality.

Vitaliy, as opposed to Maryna and Larysa, reported that he never had direct negative experience related to the church, however the perception of homophobia itself was enough to create great pressure and a feeling of guilt, and shame:

> There is a traditional system of expectations on the part of my parents: family, wife, kids. It is very much connected with religion. I should get marry in the church, baptize my children in the church. Make sure that everybody is Christian. […] I had problems with my identity. I believe that in general the church is against this [homosexuality]. It was impossible to ask God if I could date men. He said that is it forbidden. I though so, and I did not know any person in a church with whom I can talk about this (Vitaliy, 26, m, o).

When respondents where trying to explain such attitudes towards homosexuality in their churches, they stated several reasons. Some of them who are still struggling with integration of their religious and homosexual identities referred to the Bible which according to them condemns homosexuality. Majority of respondents, who more or less have a positive perception of their sexuality, believe that the institutionalized church represents overall position of the society on this question, and it cannot permit itself to oppose this position, because this might result in negative consequences for the church. Perhaps, this especially applies for "traditional" churches which unite majority of Ukrainian religious population.

> It is because we have a religious confrontation. It's like a political struggle between political parties. If some candidate says that he supports LGBT community − "Oh! Another pederast is trying to get into the parliament" − that's it, his election campaign will fail. If some denomination among those that are now presented in Ukraine suddenly starts to demonstrate loyalty towards gays, it is doomed to loosing the parish, loosing the followers,

and of course money. Nobody wants to stick their neck out. And nobody wants to touch this topic because it is very slippery (Athanasiy, 30, m, o).

Indeed, in post-Soviet Ukrainian society with increasing level of homophobia public proclamations which welcome homosexuals might worsen positions of churches. Ukrainian religious context described by constant confrontations between "traditional" Ukrainian Orthodox churches and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (Krindatch 2003; Vasin 2010), which all are very close in religious rite, makes church authorities either to condemn homosexuality, thus expressing attitude of the majority of population, or silence this issue in order not to loose their followers and parishes to religious rivals. This situation confirms Boswell's (1980) argument about great impact of public mood on religious teachings.

Yet, it would be wrong to impose complete responsibility on society for homophobia in churches. There are cases when church leaders themselves by their conduct provoke homophobia among priests. Athanasiy (30, m, o) who studied in Orthodox theological seminary told an example that confirms this issue, although it is very rarely discussed:

> I have several friends who studied in seminary. They are not homosexual. They like girls, some of them are now married and all that. But while they were in the seminary, they experienced a very tough sexual harassment by priests. They were forced into such relations. I know people who have been broken down because of this. They left the seminary. And they have formulated the idea that gays are unable to control themselves, that they are quick-tempered and violent persons. They don't dare to speak against the church hierarchy. But they think very badly about all the other gays, because they formulated such image of gays from their experience. […] This is a very serious problem.

Disregarding the source of homophobia in institutionalized church and the reasons that stand behind it, lack of affirmation in religious communities experienced by homosexual Christians leads to a negative impact on them. Among them lower degree of self-esteem,

anxiety of exposure their sexuality, feeling of alienation and non-belonging (Yip 1998). Moreover, it results in cognitive dissonance homosexual Christians experience trying to negotiate their dual identity.

2.2 "Christianophobia" in LGBT community

In a short electronic brochure *Brief Overview of Situation of LGBT in Ukraine in 2010*[14] presented by *Gay-Forum of Ukraine* several pages are dedicated towards the attitude of Ukrainian churches and religious organisations towards LGBT. They basically consists of quotes (and links to media where these quotes were presented) of different spiritual leaders of the most influential religious denominations in Ukraine expressing only negative position towards homosexuality and civil rights of LGBT. For example, there is a quote of Marcian Trofimyak, responsible for external relations of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine, who stated in May 2010: "I believe that these people are very unhappy because they do not realize that this is not normal, it's not the norm"[15]. Other statements contain mainly condemnation of same-sex marriages. For example, the chairman of the informational and educational department of Ukrainian Orthodox Churh archpriest Georgiy Kovalenko in January 2010 stated that "attempts to give same-sex sexual relationships the same status as marriage between a man and a woman, is a distortion of public morality and yet another attempt to legalize a sin"[16].

When I asked my interviewees to comment on these quotations, some of them, in particular the ones who are actively involved in LGBT Christian movement in Ukraine, told that they believe there is no single exact position of Ukrainian churches or its leaders towards

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[14] Gay-Forum Ukraine, "Brief Overview of Situation of LGBT in Ukraine in 2011," March 31 2011, http://gay-forum.org.ua/news/news_7.html (accessed April 3, 2011)
[15] Ibid, p. 9
[16] Ibid, p. 8

issues of homosexuality, and that among priests they know personally there are people who treat homosexuality in a different way. Moreover, Boris (35, m, o) adds:

> I don't know why they [Gay-Forum] chose these quotes. I think they could have done it on purpose to even more turn LGBT people against the church. When homosexuals read this, it only worsens their disapproval of religion.

Besides looking at the statements of religious leaders on homosexuality, it is also important to analyse how they are framed by non-religious LGBT organisations. In case of the mentioned above publication of *Gay-Forum*, it is clear that all major churches in Ukraine are unambiguously portrayed as enemy of LGBT. As most of interviewees mentioned there is fierce rejection of religion among many gays and lesbians in Ukraine:

> When there was a meeting with LGBT leaders in November last year, we also talked about LGBT Christian movement. Many of them said that they had very difficult experience connected with Christianity: rejection in a family, in a church, among their acquaintances. Rejection causes rejection in response. I see this very often in LGBT community. Many LGBT people are clearly expressing Christianophobia…Even among LGBT Christians there are negative sentiments towards Christianity (Athanasiy, 30, m, o).

Yip (1997) calls this strategy "attacking the stigmatizer" in his study of individual stigma management practices of homosexuals. The goal of this strategy is to minimize credibility of the church as in institution and its leaders as moral authorities, especially what concerns questions of homosexuality (Yip 1997, 120-121). This study was based on interviews with gay Christians who were able to overcome the perceived dissonance between homosexual and religious identities. However, the desire to "attack a stigmatizer" is valid for a broader scope of homosexual people. One of the consequences of such practice is a common belief among LGBT community that homosexuality and religion (or faith) are incompatible:

[T]here are pressures from the secular gay and lesbian and feminist communities […] which share an assumption that there is something a little odd, if not masochistic, about a Christian affiliation, however ambiguous and of whatever kind (Webster 1998, 29).

Alison Webster (1998) points out that because of such confusion around relationship between religion and homosexuality many lesbians (and gays) with Christian believes face the "'should I stay or should I go' question − or, put it slightly less delicately, the 'if Christianity's so awful, why don't you just leave' question" (Webster 1998, 28). These doubts are caused not only directly by homophobic position of a church, but also by opposite "Christianophobic" (as was mentioned by Athanasiy (30, m, o)) attitudes within LGBT community.

Many of my respondents told that they have very few LGBT friends (who are not members of LGBT Christian groups) with whom they can share their spiritual feelings or talk openly about questions of faith:

Nobody is interested in discussing these topics. Yes, I wanted to argue that it is possible to be homosexual and Christian, but these discussions were very difficult. Sometimes I just don't want to look like a religious fanatic […] I had this problem in intimate relations. My faith was always questioned and ridiculed. And this was done by my partner and most of the people around me. […] For a majority of LGBT people church and faith are automatically associated with rejection of homosexuality. And for those who are more or less sure of their homosexuality this means rejection of faith and religion in any manifestation. And it's very difficult to talk about it (Maryna, 27, f, p).

However, considering that most Ukrainians are "unchurched"[17] and that different Christian denominations in Ukraine often conflict among themselves, Maryna's opinion expresses not only attitude towards questions of religion by many LGBT people. It also partly

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[17] Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300 (accessed May 17, 2011)

demonstrates a tendency of devaluation of religion among Ukrainians. Vitaliy (26, m, o) argues that secular sentiments, potent in Ukrainian society in general, are especially visible in LGBT community.

> In Ukrainian society in general, especially among young people, somehow it is not popular, not prestigious to be a believer. Often it causes only negative feedback: "Oh! So you parents go to some sect, or what?" And I understand why this is happening. Because this situation with the churches that we have, it has nothing to do with piety, it does not glorify you among others if you go to a church. Also, Protestants played an important role, when they were knocking at every doorbell, and bothered people on the streets. It is in general like this, but among LGBT it's even worse. Don't even try to mention being a Christian!

It is important to mention that not all of my respondents felt being marginalized in LGBT community because of their religious affiliations. Some of them said that they felt absolutely no obstacles related to this, and could freely discuss questions of faith with their gay and lesbian friends. One example of such positive attitude is especially worth mentioning. Roman (36, m, p) the leader of *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion* told me that after registering and officially opening this organisation he received many encouraging and congratulating feedbacks from his colleagues who work in different Ukrainian LGBT organisations.

Nonetheless, numerous cases indicated by my respondents and literature analysis show that Christian gays and lesbians experience stigmatization in LGBT community. Moreover, it has become a common story, at least in the Western context, when people say that it is easier to come out as a homosexual in a church than to come out as a Christian in LGBT community (Webster 1998, 30). Therefore, when talking about LGBT Christianity it is important to acknowledge this "double discrimination" − a feeling of not belonging to a church for being

homosexual, and being rejected in LGBT community for having religious believes − that Christian gays and lesbians often experience.

However, homosexual Christians can also answer back non-believers in LGBT-community. Several of my respondent told that they think there is a significant difference between LGBT Christians and "other" LGBT − moral values. For example, Volodymyr (34, male, gc) emphasized consumerism within LGBT-community:

> LGBT-community can be characterized by consumerism: frequent change of partners, love of expensive glamorous things. This consumerism has nothing to do with Christianity, because Christian is really a modest person who practices a certain austerity in life, and tries to help others. And not the person who buys expensive watches to show off, which you can often see in the LGBT-community. […] We really do not notice, but it is a very important factor that distinguishes LGBT Christians and "other" LGBT. […] If only LGBT Christians could help LGBT community to get rid of this culture of consumption, perhaps then we would be more close to some moral qualities which LGBT really need.

> Vitaliy (26, m, o) also mentions absence of value of a family among LGBT community: Sex is in the first place. Very rarely there can be relationships that are formed not by sex, but by desire to create a family, or spend time together, create common home, live till together till old age.

Thumma (1991) claims, that often homosexual Christians hold stronger moralistic views on sexuality and relationships than secular homosexuals (Thumma 1991, 344). Apparently, particular views expressed by Volodymyr and Vitaliy are subjective and they unjustly overgeneralize moral qualities and values of all LGBT people who do not consider themselves believers. Nonetheless, stigmatization of homosexual Christians in LGBT community and their response stated by such opinions, confirm that religion (and faith) is divisive factor for LGBT community. As well as gender is.

2.3 Lesbian Christian invisibility

When asked about almost absolute absence of lesbians in *LGBT Christians in Ukraine* group, most male interviewees could not find explanation of this phenomenon. Though, Boris, a leader of Kyiv LGBT religious group tried to provide the following justification:

I really don't know why there are fewer lesbian believers. Probably there is no exact answer, but I can assume. It is considered that generally women are more religious. Perhaps, for gays and lesbians this changes. Gays become more religious. If you come to any church, it's only women you'll see, men − more seldom, only the priests. But in MCC, for example, it's vice versa. I can't think of any other explanation (Boris, 35, m, o).

Darren E. Sherkat (2002), who has published numerous articles on sociology of religion in the USA, argues that there is a correlation between gender of a homosexual person and her/his religious commitment in quite similar way. In his empirical examination of this relation based on data from 1991-2000 General Social Surveys[18] he draws a conclusion that "gay men are more avid religious participants [than lesbians], and are similar to female heterosexuals in their rates of religious participation" (Sherkat 2002, 320).

To support these findings Sherkat bases his argumentation on a theory of relation between gender and risk preferences developed by Alan Miller and John Hoffman (Miller and Hoffman 1995). They claim that risk preferences, i.e. willingness to participate in actions that might have negative consequences, mediate gender differences in religiosity: males are generally more risk-taking and, presumably, therefore less religious, then females (Miller and Hoffman 1995, 69). Sherkat concludes that masculinity, which closely relates to risk accepting behaviour, is associated with lesbianism, and, perhaps, therefore lesbians are less involved in religious participation (Sherkat 2002, 321).

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[18] The General Social Survey is a sociological survey used to collect data on demographic characteristics and attitudes of residents of the United States

Although this argumentation does seem to be intriguing I find it rather problematic. First of all, statistical surveys are not a reliable and adequate source for measuring issues related to sexuality (Brown and Boyle, 2000). Secondly, Miller and Hoffman base their analysis on gender, and not sexuality. Their findings are based on essentialist assumptions which are vigorously critiqued by feminists starting from Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949) and continuing by Judith Bulter's (1990) performative theory of gender.

Moreover, conclusions that Sherkat makes about connection between masculinity and lesbianism or femininity and gay men are overgeneralized and simplistic. According to Boswell (1980) such assumptions result not from empirical observations but antipathy towards homosexuals:

> The universal expectation in cultures intolerant of gay people that males will be erotically affected only by what the culture regards as feminine, and females only by culturally defined masculinity, leads inevitably to the anticipation that males who wish to attract other males will be "feminine" and females erotically interested in females will be "masculine" (Bowsell 1980, 24).

I think there are at least three other main reasons that can explain invisibility of lesbians in LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine. First, lesbians share common difficulties with other women, not necessarily homosexual, in patriarchal Christian churches. Second, in questions related to religion, as well as in broader context of society, female homosexual experience is often silenced. Third, within LGBT community there is a division between gay and lesbian practices and spaces.

One of my respondents Maryna (27, f), who is a feminist activist, explained that she left her protestant church not only because of issues related to homosexuality, but even more because of the sexist views of most of the pastors and other members of the church:

We had a split in our church. There was a very interesting pastor from the USA, and before he left he said that women should also preach. At that time there were many active girls in our church. And part of the parish said that it is against all traditions, it's wrong, and women should basically keep silence in church. […]Eventually boys got promoted.

Most of all I was annoyed by androcentrism of the church. All the time everything is in male gender. All songs are in male gender. Male part is always the first in songs, women are only echo. […] Women are always displayed either as asexual, or as temptresses that try all the time to seduce poor men that cannot control their sexuality…And you can never disagree or dispute anything (Maryna, 27, f, p).

Maryna brings up a very important issue of subordination and inferior status that describe general experience of women in patriarchal Christian context. It is also important to take into account that Maryna attended protestant church, which in its views and policies is more modernized and progressive in comparison with Ukrainian traditional churches − Orthodox, and Catholic − where the question of whether women could or should be priests would not be even discussed.

This distinction between Protestant and Catholic churches is described by Hans Küng (2001) in his book *Women in Christianity.* There, Küng explains treatment of women by the church from the Earliest to Postmodern Christianity, and, in particular, comes to conclusion that unlike some Protest churches, Orthodox and Catholic churches have not progressed much in questions of ordination of women (Küng 2001, 96).

However even besides impossibility to be ordained, the role of women in Orthodox and Catholic churches is very limited by the doctrine of gender complementarity − the idea that men and women are essentially different and incomplete, and only in their unity can wholiness be achieved (McClintock Fulkerson 2006). Aline H. Kalbian (2005) argues that the

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main purpose of this teaching is to reinforce and maintain "proper order" that can exist between sexes (Kalbian 2005, 94).

This androcentric position of Catholic church, which is still applicable nowadays (Küng 2001, Kalbian 2005), is what Alison Webster calls "the theological version of 'compulsory heterosexuality'" (Webster 1998, 28). According to the church doctrine the role of women is limited to "a wife and mother and companion" of a man. Besides assigning lower status to women, it challenges position of lesbians, who cannot fulfil this role in relation to a man. Although all women are marginalized in patriarchal culture, lesbian experience is doubly denied, and therefore it is not a surprise that lesbians constitute "more hidden population" than gay men (Rich 1980, 200).

If to talk about lesbian-specific issues in Christianity as well as in a broader context, this is where Judith Butler's category of "unnameable" drives the centre:

> It [is] important to recognize that oppression works not only merely through acts of overt prohibition but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects - abjects, we might call them - who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law. Here oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkability and unnameability. Lesbianism is not explicitly prohibited in part because it has not even made its way into the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable (Butler 1991, 18).

In Christian context lesbian experience is brought up extremely rarely. Several of my interviewees mentioned that according to their understanding Bible contains verses that talk exclusively about male homosexuality. And in cases when they heard priests talking about homosexuality they referred mainly to men.

The third reason that can explain low participation of lesbians in LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine is the absence of unity in LGBT-community, and reciprocal misogyny and misandry of gays and lesbians correspondingly. Although male respondents who are leaders of *LGBT Christians in Ukraine* use the rhetoric of "everyone is welcome" when trying to address question of absence of women in their group, some of them argue that, in fact, gays and lesbians constitute two separate worlds:

> For some reasons in our LGBT-Christian movement at this moment I know practically only gays. Women are very rare. It happened so that our LGBT-Christianity became practically gay Christianity. I cannot say that lesbians are not interested in this. But our roads never cross. I often feel that although we always write "LGBT", this does not concern only LGBT Christianity, there is a lesbian world and a gay world, which do not overlap (Athanasiy, 30, m, o).

This idea of "lesbian world" and "gay world" corresponds to the notion of spaces separated by sexuality and gender (Corey and Samdahl 2005). Corey and Samdahl in their ethnographical study of conflicts that emerged in country-western gay bar in the USA between gays and lesbians argue that leisure spaces foster commonality, on one hand, and inequality, on the other hand. Gay spaces create environment where alternatives to heteronormative discourses are created. However, besides common for gays and lesbians practice of keeping a distance from it, gay men reaffirm heteronormative discourse of privileging men over women in order to protect their male-dominated space :

> Gay men and lesbians are implicated in each other's lives and brought together through shared discrimination that stems from normative heterosexuality. Gay bars have often been portrayed as contexts where gay men and lesbians can distance themselves from heterosexual discourses that Other them. However, assuming that shared discrimination

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brings gay men and lesbians together into a unified community is too simplistic. (Corey and Samdahl 2005, 346)

Esther Newton (1993) in her ethnographic study of one of the oldest homosexual community on Cherry Grove resort (NY, USA) notes similar dissonance between gays and lesbians − "the 'boys' set the tone and resented any challenge to their predominance" (Newton 1993, 217). Newton describes that on Cherry Grove men dominated not only through possession of leisure space but also by monopoly over private property. For the same dwelling women had to pay much higher prices than men, if at all they were persistent and lucky enough to convince an owner to sell them a house (Newton 1993, 222-228).

Findings of these studies that focus, in particular, on conflicts among LGBT community concerning division of public and private spaces can be extrapolated to the broader context of dominantly gay or lesbian organizations and groups such as LGBT Christians in Ukraine. The very notion of LGBT "community" is a contested matter. Iris Young (1995) criticizes this utopian notion because in her view it means that subjects can fully understand each other, which as a consequence leads to devaluation and denial of difference among them (Young 2005, 234). Thus, taking into account differences in experiences of gays and lesbians and misogynistic practices of Ukrainian gay leaders and organizations, as reported by my informants, it is not surprising that there are practically no lesbians in Ukrainian LGBT Christian groups.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I demonstrate the causes of cognitive dissonance homosexual Christian experience negotiating their dual identity. These reasons are socially constructed, and they follow from "double discrimination" of homosexual believers: from the part of society and institutionalized church, on one hand, and from LGBT community, on the other hand.

An overwhelming majority of interviewees felt rejection from the part of the church because of their homosexuality. Different reasons were named to illustrate this. Some felt direct discrimination, and were obliged to leave their churches. While others told they have never even heard any discussion of homosexuality in their religious community. Nonetheless pressure from social norms and a widespread belief that religious teachings necessarily reject homosexuals, made their stay in a church sometimes uncomfortable at the least.

When discussing attitudes of churches in Ukraine towards homosexuals I analyse differences in response between "traditional" Orthodox, and Protestant denominations. Relying on interviewees' narratives I conclude that generally Protestant churches tend to have more open discussions of sexuality, while in Orthodox churches this topic is often silenced.

Non-affirming policies and practices towards homosexuals from institutionalized churches very often cause a corresponding rejection of religious beliefs among LGBT community. And this, in its turn provokes feeling of non-belonging in LGBT community often experienced by homosexual Christians. I demonstrate that religious beliefs become, thus, a divisive factor for Ukrainian LGBT community.

Also in this chapter I explain possible reasons that stand behind low participation of lesbians in LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine. I argue that this is connected to patriarchal structure of church hierarchy which significantly limits role of a woman in institutionalized religion, neglecting of lesbian experience in comparison with male homosexuality, and conflicts within LGBT community based on gender distinction.

To sum up, different cases of stigmatization in religious and LGBT communities cause different responses from the part of homosexual Christians to reduce cognitive dissonance, which I will in detail analyse in next chapter.

Chapter 3: Homosexual Christian Identity Negotiation

As I argue in previous chapters "double discrimination" and widespread perception of incompatibility of homosexuality with Christian beliefs results in inner conflict among homosexual Christians. In this chapter I analyse individual and collective practices of homosexuals Christians in Ukraine aiming to overcome this conflict.

Firstly, I discuss that avoiding church is an important strategy, especially for people are questioning their homosexuality and/or their Christian beliefs, and helps them not to confront directly this painful topic. Secondly, I argue that distinction between concepts of "faith" and "religion" is principal for many homosexual Christians. And lastly I analyze the role of LGBT Christian organizations in Ukraine in helping gay and lesbian believers to overcome conflict related with establishing a positive image of their dual identity.

3.1 Avoiding church

According to the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), which was in detail described in Chapter 1, when a person is in a process of making sense of two of his/her contradictory opinions or believes, he/she will attempt to avoid situations when the dissonance between them is increased. Several respondents admitted that due to their religious beliefs they don't feel comfortable being homosexual, and, vice versa, because of their homosexuality they started doubting their personal beliefs as well as teachings of their churches on homosexuality. As Yip (1997) describes it, individuals who are trying to develop a positive personal identity as homosexual Christian are in a state of *becoming* rather than *being* homosexual Christian (Yip 1997, 114). These respondents avoid going to church, in order not to put themselves in situation where the dissonance between their religious and sexual identities would increase.

I stopped going to church two years ago. Sometimes I think to just go to some church and pray, I miss several things I had in my church. […] But no, I didn't try to find another parish because it is like trying to find something that just meets my requirements. I don't like this idea of looking for a place that would justify something [homosexuality] that was condemned in another place. I just think that first you should decide for yourself, whether you think it is right or not. Perhaps, I have decided that I do not know yet, and therefore I don't seek (Kateryna 27, f, p).

Maksym (28, m, p), who stopped going to a church after unsuccessful attempts to "cure" himself of homosexuality, also told that his decision to leave a church is connected with his doubts concerning possibility to unite Christian and homosexual identities. These cases demonstrate that respondents are questioning both their homosexuality and their beliefs, and in order not to confront this painful topic, they decided to avoid going to church. It is important to note that for many highly religious people, who realized that they are homosexuals much later than they started going to a church, this conflict is extremely difficult to overcome (Mahaffy 1996, 400). They would rather question their homosexuality than their beliefs or teaching of a church they go to. For example, Maksym (28, m, p) told that, nonetheless that he left the church, for him his relationship with God remains the most important thing. Maryna (28, f, p) also told a story about her friend for whom, because of the strong religious convictions, homosexuality is a perceived as a sinful practice: "She always thinks of her sexuality and sexuality of others as of a sin. Here lesbianism is rather called in question, and not Christianity."

Although, some respondents have stopped going to church, this does not mean that they abandon religious practices or feelings completely. Personal prayer and study of religious text remain important for many respondents who do not go to church regularly regardless of which religious tradition they affiliate themselves with (Orthodox or Protestant). This is also

relevant for respondents who left their churches or attend them very rare not because of the doubts concerning their sexuality, but because they reject the institution and its teachings; yet, they still consider themselves believers. For these people distinction between faith and religion is crucial.

3.2 Faith/Religion Distinction

Previously I have already mentioned importance of the category *believer* for Ukrainians. Survey conducted by Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies in 2006 showed that majority of Ukrainians is unchurched[19]. However, among these people most consider themselves believers. This means that for them Christian teachings are important, nonetheless, they don't necessarily affiliate themselves with any of the churches.

Many respondents within this study also told that being a believer signifies drawing a line between faith and religion, between their inner experience and teachings of an institutional church. This was mentioned by people who actually affiliate themselves with some church as well as by those who had difficulties defining this affiliation.

> Why did I make a long pause when you asked me which denomination I affiliate myself with [smiles]? Actually this is not such a hard question for me. I am Greek Catholic. But I think that denomination is not a good notion. It should identify something, but faith is so universal, I think that faith is non-confessional. I am Greek Catholic, but I also feel myself well as a Roman Catholic. Although, Greek Catholic rite is very close to Orthodox rite, so I am not that far from Orthodoxy either. So phenomenon of non-confessionalism is totally acceptable for me. (Volodymyr, 34, m, gc)

> I was baptized in Orthodox church when I was just a little kid. I had no alternatives. Nobody ever asked me which religion I want to be. But I do not know, I think I like

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[19] Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300 (accessed May 17, 2011)

Catholicism more. Probably I go to a Catholic church even more often than to an Orthodox church. Though, in general, I don't go to a church very often. If I believe in Christ, what's the difference which church I go to? (Vitaliy, 27, m, o)

Although Volodymyr and Vitaliy found it somewhat confusing to name their religious affiliation, they had no problems defining the meaning of faith for them:

For me, faith is one of the most important priorities in life. I believe in life after death, and resurrection. I believe that God loves me the way I am. (Volodymyr, 34, m, gc)

Faith is certainly something that is inside me. This is what I don't doubt. I believe in Jesus Christ. I believe that if I turn to him, I can get help or answer regardless of place, time, or mood. This faith gives me a frame of life which I cannot transgress. It's a moral and ethical construct. Christian is the person who treats others with goodwill, who is always ready to help and support others. (Vitaliy, 27, m, o)

Here Vitaliy and Volodymyr mention several specificities concerning religious context of Ukraine. First of all, it is important to mention that they both come from the Western region of Ukraine. According to sociological surveys there is regional religious heterogeneity in Ukraine. The "West" stands out as a "religious leader" for the diversity of categories that define religiosity (Паращевін 2009). For example, statistically there are more religious organizations in the Western region compared to any other region, and much more people there trust religious institutions and affiliate themselves to some church than in any other part of Ukraine (Паращевін 2009).

Unlike other respondents from Central and Eastern Ukraine, that often noted that their parents and acquaintances were atheists, Vitaliy and Volodymyr point out deep commitment to church traditions in their families. Volodymyr also mentioned that his parents almost secretly baptized him in an "underground at those times" Greek Catholic church, and that priest who performed this ritual just came back from an exile in Siberia.

Apart from regional differences there is also denominational distinction between respondents. Taking into account interviewees' responses I assume that for Ukrainians it is somewhat easier to claim affiliation with Protestant churches. The main reason is that many Protestant churches are quite new in Ukraine. After fierce persecution during Soviet times (Lyubashchenko 2010) they started to reemerge only when Ukraine became an independent state in 1991, and missionaries from Western countries could freely open their churches in Ukraine (Wanner, 2004). Therefore for the most part Ukrainians don't consider Protestant church as "traditional", and it is not so connected with family traditions of Ukrainians as Orthodox or Greek Catholic churches. Consequently, if individuals claim that they are Protestants, it means that this is their personal conscious choice, which was not prearranged by the fact that they were baptized by parents at a very young age in a certain church. Among respondents who consider themselves Protestants none had fluctuations when defining their church affiliation.

However, regardless of denomination or frequency of attending church meetings most respondents stressed importance of distinction between faith and religion. This difference can not be explained simply by religious upbringing in families.

Several surveys (Паращевін 2009; Razumkov Centre[20]) show, that Ukrainians' level of trust towards religious institutions is relatively high. For example, approximately 30% of Ukrainians completely trust the Church. These figures are very high if to compare them to the level of trust towards other institutions (e.g. only 3-5% of Ukrainians completely trust the Parliament and the Court System in Ukraine). Moreover, a priest together with a teacher is among the most trustworthy professions.

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[20] Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=83 (accessed May 17, 2011) and Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=254 (accessed May 17, 2011)

Nonetheless, many respondents admitted that they are disappointed with churches and priests in Ukraine. They argue that churches are corrupt institutions that only try to earn as much money as possible, and many priests are hypocritical in their teachings and conduct.

> I think that in Ukraine religion, as a church, and faith are absolutely far from each other. Because looking at this trend that they build churches in Kyiv almost near every mall. […] Well, for me the church is a totally business structure. It earns money for providing services like confession, marriage. […] This situation just goes farther and fares worse. The church has less and less connection to the truth of faith. (Vitaliy, 27, m, o)

> I find many things in church just wild. I don't get it, what they preach. How is this possible that struggle for power is connected to a church? They [church leaders] tell you to vote for a certain political candidate. Or the fact that they are always involved in conflicts for land ownership. How is this possible? […] Church per se does not exist for me. I'd rather stay at home and read scriptures or talk to people. Church is like a pub for me because of these political issues. […] I believe that there is one God, although he is of many faces. My faith is my faith in God. (Larysa, 37, f, o)

Accusatory statements of this kind talking about political involvement of religious institutions are for the most part directed against Orthodox churches in Ukraine. These accusations are not groundless. As an institution Orthodox Church, having the biggest affiliation among Ukrainians, is an important political figure. Its role was especially notable during the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) in Ukraine, when it openly supported one of the candidates for president (Bourdeaux 2005). Also Orthodox churches in Ukraine are well known for their constant fights over resources such as church buildings, monasteries, and parishes (Naumescu 2006; Krindatch 2003; Vasin 2010).

However, the main reproach against churches, no matter of what tradition, expressed by respondents is lack of understanding, rejection and incompetence in terms of Christian teachings:

> My boyfriend and I, we wanted to come together to a church, and we did. Then I started to think. For my part, I do everything right: I have a relationship, I love this person, I never cheat. Why can't church accept me just because I have such [homosexual] relations? At that moment I realized that, perhaps, it is not me, but the church that must change. At least I came to you. And God said that if you come to me, we will love you. I came to you – love me! (Vitaliy, 26, m, o)

Many respondents emphasized equality of all people in the presence of God, and love and acceptance of all individuals no matter of their sexuality as the most important principles of Christianity which churches do not always follow.

Although, it must be mentioned that some respondents argue that even if officially high-ranking bishops of Orthodox churches speak against homosexuality, on a local level priests might be quite sympathetic towards homosexual people. For example, Boris (35, m, o), member of *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*, told that he establishes and constantly revises the "network of LGBT-friendly priests". And if a homosexual person needs help or advice from a priest, he can recommend asking one of these LGBT-friendly priests.

All of these specificities, including religious upbringing and its consequences, lack of trust towards churches expressed by interviewees, discontent of active participation of the Orthodox Church, in particular, in political sphere of Ukraine, and disappointment in attitude of certain churches to homosexuals result in undermining churches' authority as moral institutions.

"Attacking the stigmatizer" – this is how Yip (1997) explains stigma management practice of gay Christians directed to dismiss credibility of the Church. He claims that by

pointing out incompatibilities of Christian values and actual practices of churches, homosexual Christians, thereby, reject the Church from being their moral arbiter. Instead, several respondents in this research argue that regardless of religious teachings their own moral values are the key principles for them:

We have been taught that religion implies that there are certain rules and regulations, "a list of sins", and we must follow these rules. Sin is when you deliberately offend God. And it makes sense to go to confession when you feel sorry. And you have to promise that you will never do this again. […] How can I confess that I have sexual inclination to anyone? I can not do this because in my understanding I do everything right. If someone thinks that he should confess it, that he did something wrong and wants to fix it, it is his personal matter. I do not see such a need (Volodymyr, 34, m, gc).

God is in the heart of every person − it is our consciousness (Larysa, 37, f, o).

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) argue that compartmentalization is another strategy that gays and lesbians can resort to in order to resolve conflict between their homosexual and religious identities. Compartmentalization is based on constant compromising between these identities, and it is achieved when a person is able to separate his/her religious and homosexual practices, and live double life (Rodriguez and Ouellette 2000, 335). However, I think that in many cases homosexual Christians are compartmentalizing not their identities, but the church. They do this by neglecting institutional homophobic doctrines of the Church, and emphasizing things that are important for them in practicing their faith, be it loyalty to broad Christian principles, participation in a service as a family tradition, temple atmosphere, or feeling of a unity with spiritual powers.

I go to church because I have an inner feeling that I want to do this. I have a gay friend who used to go to church, but now he says he would never go there again. He says all these terrible things about the church. […] I think this is all a personal matter for everyone.

Nobody is telling you how you should pray or how you should cross yourself. Your true faith should not be spoiled. When I go to church I do not care what looks people there are throwing at me, or what they say about me. I go there only at the call of the soul, if I want to go. […] I can't go to every church, in some churches it's even hard for me to breathe. But in other places I feel this Energy (this is how I call God), I feel grace. And when I go out of temple, I feel like that I want to live again, I want to do good things. It gives me strength for some time to forget bad thoughts. […] So where is religion here? It is only my faith. (Denys 29, m, o)

Therefore, distinction between faith and religion which is done through building up a system of personal beliefs and neglecting some of the teachings of the church, especially the ones that are proclaiming homophobia, is an important way for homosexual Christians to integrate their dual identity.

3.3 LGBT Christian Organizations

In Ukraine there are two LGBT Christian organizations: *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* (Kyiv; exists for about 2 years) and *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion* (Makiivka, Donetsk region; was opened in February 2011).

LGBT Christians of Ukraine unites approximately 30 people. Among them there are many people who frequently attend church. According to responses of interviewees, they go there for different reasons: they like spiritual atmosphere that can be felt in church, they are used to go to a church since childhood and this tradition is important for them, some even want to become priests. Religion and church are perhaps too important for these people to reject them completely.

Apparently, in their churches they cannot always be open about their sexuality; and LGBT Christian group became a place where they can freely discuss both sexuality and faith.

Members of the group *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* more or less regularly meet to have such discussions. Usually they have a spiritual lesson, sometimes it can also be held by people who actually studied in theological seminaries. They also watch religious movies and discuss them. For example, Athanasiy (30, m, o) mentioned watching "Prayers for Bobby"[21]. Usually not very many people attend such meetings; approximately ten persons come each time.

However, significant number of people participates in other activities that are organized by *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*. For example, email and social networks' groups dedicated to the topic of sexuality and faith. Many people even non-members of *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* as well as people outside Ukraine lead and follow frequent discussions on these groups. They share books, articles they find interesting and their own thoughts about LGBT and Christianity.

Weston (1995) in her study of coming-out narratives argues that portrayals of homosexuals in print and electronic media often are the first source that helps gays and lesbians to realize that they are not "the only one[s] in the world" (Weston 1995, 257). Perhaps, same conclusions could be made in case of homosexual Christians − access to media and communication with other gays and lesbians Christians plays a key role for them in understanding their identity.

Volodymyr (34, m, gc), one of the most active members of *LGBT Christians of Ukraine,* told that for him the most important are conferences and discussions they organize with members of LGBT priesthood from other countries. For example in September 2010 *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* for the first time organized a conference LGBT Christian Forum in Kyiv. Among numerous participants from Ukraine and several post-Soviet countries, also priests from gay-positive churches in Germany, Norway, Poland, and USA were invited. Importance of such events is in the fact that many people can attend them, and hear sermons

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[21] "True story of Mary Griffith, gay rights crusader, whose teenage son committed suicide due to her religious intolerance. Based on the book of the same title by Leroy Aarons". Source: Internet Movie Database http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1073510/

of priests who are themselves gays or lesbians. Their example, which can not be openly seen in Ukrainian churches, visually demonstrates the way to unite religious and homosexual identities. Roman (38, m, p) who founded of *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion* and started to conduct services directly for LGBT people told that his main inspiration to do this was exactly LGBT Christian Forum.

The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion (the Centre) was officially opened on 20th of February, 2011. Unlike *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*, who not very regularly meet for discussions, members the Centre hold servings every Sunday. I had an opportunity to participate in their meeting on Easter in 2011.

Not many people came that day to the Centre. Besides me, there were Roman (38, m, p), who is the leader and a priest of this religious group, and four other men. Roman explained that usually there are about ten people each Sunday there, but that day because it was Easter many people chose to spend it with their families. So we started the service. At first we read several passages from the Bible that tell the story of the Last Supper and Crucifixion. Then Roman blessed bread and wine, and shared it with us. For that he read prayers from the Book of Mormon (Roman is a former member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and he was excommunicated for being gay). The service lasted for about 30 minutes. Roman told that usually after the service they have a spiritual discussion. That time we talked about life of a Saint Cornelius the Centurion, who is considered by Christians to be the first Gentile to convert to the faith. But more interestingly he is also believed, according to Roman, to be what we now might call homosexual. Therefore, it is no wonder why when Roman registered organisation to serve religious needs of LGBT community he called it *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion*.

The Centre does not own its own building. Sunday meetings are held in a room of an NGO dealing with sex workers which cordially lets use their premises for the need of the

Centre for free. Before that members of the Centre had meetings in another HIV/AIDS NGO. But according to Roman leaders of this organisation were "not very happy about discussions of homosexuality and Christianity in their building" and prohibited him to continue their meeting there.

Besides being rejected by that NGO the Centre also faces criticism in the person of many members of *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*, because of the incident that happened at the opening of the Centre. On that day during the service several young people in black clothes and masks broke into the room and threw petards shouting insulting and nationalist slogans. Luckily, according to Roman, there were journalists with cameras who were filming all this, and intruders probably got scared of publicity and disappeared quickly. So no one got hurt, only the furniture was slightly damaged by petards. This incident and its media coverage including national TV channel provoked a fierce reaction from *LGBT Christians of Ukraine*. Many of them during the interviews argued that inviting journalists led to unnecessary publicity and aggression which only increase homophobic views in society. Roman, on the other hand argues that perhaps *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* are simply jealous that he was the first to legally register an organization that serves spiritual needs of LGBT people, while *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* still remain unregistered.

However, besides tensions between these two LGBT Christian groups, there are also tensions within the Centre related to difference in religious traditions of the people attending the meetings. The question of converging different Christian tradition in one LGBT-affirming church is a rather daunting problem. Roman (38, m) who is the leader of *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion* in Makiivka tells that once they had a conflict during their Sunday service because of the icon which was standing on the table in the room where they meet. There is a woman that attends these meetings in the Centre. She is protestant and according to her religious views icons should not be present in the church because it is idolatry, and is

sinful. However, for other people present in a meeting which come from Orthodox background icons are one of the most important religious symbols. Roman says that he was able to negotiate this conflict pointing out that they all should respect religious feelings of each other, and eventually icon was kept on its place.

Nonetheless, this incident represents perhaps the most important question for LGBT Christian groups and churches − is it possible to unite people that come from different religious traditions in one group relying only on the fact they all are homosexuals?

In case of the USA, for example, where majority of population is Protestant it is perhaps somewhat easier to solve this dilemma. For example, Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) that openly welcomes LGBT people among their clergy and laity was able to unite many Americans precisely because it is a Protestant denomination. But I think that in Ukraine with dominant Orthodoxy it is quite difficult to imagine how Protestant church like MCC, which in fact closely cooperates with Ukrainian LGBT Christian organisations, or some other church like the Centre, with its simultaneous use of the Book of Mormon, rainbow flag, and Orthodox icons, can satisfy religious and symbolic needs of big number of gays and lesbians.

Rodriquez and Ouellette (2000), in their study of members of Metropolitan Community Church of New York argue that for these people MCC played very important role in integrating sexual and religious identities. I think that activities performed by both *LGBT Christians of Ukraine* and *The Centre of Saint Cornelius the Centurion* are no less important for homosexual Christians in Ukraine to achieving a positive image of their dual identity. As Gross (2008) suggests that participation in inclusive Christian groups can "transform a religion into a personal resource for self-actualization" (Gross 2008, 97).

However, I agree with Wilcox (2003) who argues that it is impossible to find universal panacea to satisfy all needs of homosexual Christians:

There is no single religion, religious group, or even a set of beliefs that can fill the needs of all LGBT people; instead, each person makes individual choices about what to believe, what to practice, where and with whom to practice, and whether to believe at all (Wilcox 2003, 350).

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I analyzed strategies homosexual Christians resort to in order to overcome conflict related with culturally constructed antagonism between religion and sexuality. I argue that decision to avoid attending a church in order to not aggravate this conflict is often made by people who have doubts concerning both their sexuality and religious beliefs.

Distinction between faith and religion is perhaps the most important strategy for many homosexual Christian that hold a positive image of their sexuality. In contrast to religious teachings that condemn same-sex practices, they establish their own system of beliefs. They practically compartmentalize church by adhering to broad Christian principles, such as equal treatment of all people, and rejecting negative peculiarities of churches, such as disapproval of homosexuality as well as political confrontations among denominations.

In this chapter I also discuss how Ukrainian LGBT Christian groups help homosexual Christian to come to terms with their dual identity. Emphasizing misunderstandings between and within these groups I argue that there is no single solution that can satisfy all diversity of religious backgrounds, experience and needs of all homosexual Christians, and this dilemma remains a personal issue.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have analysed accounts of homosexual Christians in post-Soviet Ukraine that reflect the ways they negotiate their dual identity. When the key participants are gay men and lesbians, it is practically impossible to have a representative study (Shallenberger 1998). Therefore my analysis does not bid for providing generalization of experience of homosexual believers in Ukraine. However, conclusion that I present here is relevant for a sample of my respondents, and I think it can also suggest issues that other homosexual Christians may experience.

Most of participants in this study started practicing religion before they realized that they are homosexuals. Mahaffy (2001) argues that in this case homosexual Christians are most likely to struggle with their religious beliefs and sexual identity. My analysis also suggests that these respondents have internalized conservative Christian ethics rejecting homosexuality. As a result at some point of their life they all have experienced conflict between their sexual and religious identities.

I argue that besides prejudice from the part of society and institutionalized church gay and lesbian believers often have a feeling of non-belonging in LGBT community for their religious beliefs. "Double discrimination" − this is how several respondents described their experience of being homosexual Christian. However, I argue that gender adds another layer to this multiple stigmatization. In my thesis I explain possible reasons that stand behind almost absolute absence of lesbians in LGBT Christian groups in Ukraine and as an effect low number of female participants in this research. Firstly, I claim that this is result of general submissive position of women in patriarchal Christian churches, which is especially relevant for dominant Orthodox tradition in Ukraine. Secondly, in Christianity as well as in a broader context female homosexual experience, as opposed to male's, is more often silenced and invisible. Lastly, as within LGBT community in general there is a division between gay and

lesbian practices and spaces (Newton 1993; Corey and Samdahl 2005), same separation is relevant for LGBT Christian groups.

In my thesis I debunk a widespread opinion that homosexuality and Christianity are necessarily opposed. To do this I give an overview of anthropological and historical studies concerning relations between Christian churches and its homosexual laity and clergy, which show that these relations were not always antagonistic (Boswell 1980; Boswell 1994; Greenberg and Bystryn 1982). However, participants of this research and many other homosexual Christians are, perhaps, the most vivid evidence proving a possibility to unite these two identities.

Nonetheless, within Ukrainian post-Soviet religious context it is impossible to neglect official position of dominant Christian churches condemning homosexual relations. Among recent examples of activities supporting this position is an official letter that All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations wrote to the President of Ukraine in April 2010 demanding him to recommend Ukrainian delegation in PACE to vote against Resolution on "Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity" and oppose any proposals for legal recognition of same-sex partnerships in the future. Therefore, it is not surprising that numerous similar cases when institutionalized church disputes homosexuality lead to opposed response of many LGBT people who are rejecting religion.

Situation in Ukraine characterized by often oppositions between religious and LGBT groups and absence of any Christian church which openly welcomes homosexuals aggravates the conflict gay and lesbian Christians try to overcome when managing their dual identity. Numerous scholars (Thumma 1991; Mahaffy 1996; Gross 2008) use theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957) to analyze conflicts between homosexual and religious identities. According to this theory people experience inner confrontation if they hold beliefs or opinions about themselves or their behavior that are inconsistent. I argue that in case of Christianity

and homosexuality this inconsistency should not be perceived as innate but rather as socially constructed. Taking this into account, I argue that theory of cognitive dissonance can be implemented to study strategies homosexual believers resort to negotiate their dual identity.

Among my respondents I identify two main groups. The first group consists of individuals with strongly marked inner conflict. They doubt both their religious beliefs and homosexual identity. It is important to note that these people are the youngest among respondents. According to the theory of cognitive dissonance when a person is in a process of making sense of two of his/her contradictory beliefs, he/she will attempt to avoid situations when the dissonance between them is increased (Festinger 1957). All of respondents from this first group stopped going to church, in order not to put themselves in *direct* situation where the dissonance between their religious and sexual identities would increase. However, apparently, church avoidance still does not liberate them from general social mood that imposes an opinion that Christianity is necessarily condemning same-sex relations.

The second group, which constitutes majority of respondents in this study, consists of people who hold a positive self-image of being homosexual and Christian. Their main strategy that helped them to negotiate their dual identity is distinction between faith and religion. The concept of *believer* is very closely related to faith and not religion, as Maryna (26, f, p) explains it: "You can be a believer and not go to any church, or vice versa". Earlier I mention that in general for Ukrainians being a believer is very important[22]. I argue that it is even more significant for homosexual Christians, who because of the homophobic position of many churches, hesitate to affiliate themselves with any of them, but nevertheless consider themselves believers.

Distinction between faith and religion for homosexual Christians in this study means establishment of a personal system of beliefs. This system is based on adhering to broad

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[22]Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies, http://www.uceps.org/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300 (accessed May 17, 2011)

Christian principles, such as equality of all people and importance of love and goodwill to everybody, and rejecting other religious teaching, in particular the ones disapproving homosexuality.

I also argue that in Ukrainian religious context some churches actually promote such trend by their own activities. This refers not only to churches' opposition to LGBT rights. Many respondents reproach Christian churches, especially Orthodox ones, for their frequent inner confrontations, competition for land ownership and political domination, in particular. Yip (1997) argues that accusatory statements of this kind directed against the Church and priests, help homosexual Christians in managing their dual identity by rejecting the Church from being their moral arbiter.

Among the second group of respondents there are people who attend church regularly, there are also individuals who go to a church only once or twice per year on major Christian holidays, as well as people who don't go to church. Again, being a believer does not imply any regularity of church attendance.

In my analysis I also point out importance of LGBT Christian groups and their activities, such as meetings, discussions they organize, and support, both emotional and informational, they provide for homosexual Christians in Ukraine. According to accounts of my respondents I assume that all this is very helpful for gay and lesbian believers in negotiating their dual identity. However, emphasizing diversity of religious backgrounds and needs of my respondents, my main argument is that no single religious group or a set of beliefs can fit all homosexual Christians, and each individual should decide for him-/herself what to believe in and how.

I personally think that regarding present religious situation in Ukraine it is quite unlikely that in near future major Christian denominations will start affirming homosexuals. The main reasons in my opinion is that out of fear to loose followers and consequently

financial resources Ukrainian Christian churches, that are already competing amongst each other, will not revise their homophobic positions, which are supported by majority of Ukrainians[23]. However, I believe it is possible to minimize the second component of "double discrimination". I argue that LGBT organizations in Ukraine should include discussion of religious questions in their activities and policies, so that believers within LGBT community would not feel alienated, and it would be easier for them to negotiate their identity.

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[23] For more information on studies about homophobia in Ukrainian society see Introduction

Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Note: It should be taken into account that in order not to reveal interviewees I present only their approximate age and religious affiliation. I use pseudonyms or real names of respondents depending on their wish.

Andriy: 25 years old, male, Orthodox

Athanasiy: 30 years old, male, Orthodox

Boris: 35 years old, male, Orthodox

Denys: 29 years old, male, Orthodox

Ivan: 34 years old, male, Protestant

Kateryna: 27 years old, female, Protestant

Larysa: 37 years old, female, Orthodox

Maksym: 28 years old, male, Protestant

Maryna: 28 years old female, Protestant,

Roman: 38 years old, male, Protestant

Vitaliy: 27 years old, male, Orthodox

Volodymyr: 34 years old, male, Greek Catholic

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

Project: LGBT Christians in post-Soviet Ukraine
Informed Consent Form[24]

1. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Nobody, except of the interviewer will have access to audio record. After the interview is transcribed and anonymised with appropriate pseudonym chosen by an interviewee the audio record will be destroyed. Anonymised transcript will be used in a future for research presentations and publications.

   I agree to be quoted directly by the interviewer: _____

   OR

   I agree to be quoted anonymously by the interviewer: _____

2. The interview will take approximately 1,5-2 hours. There are no anticipated risks to participation in this interview. However, you can withdraw from the interview at any time. During the interview you may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how you wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that you choose to withdraw during the interview, any tape made of the interview will be destroyed, and no transcript will be made of the interview.

3. If you will have further questions about the research project or procedures, you can contact Svitlana Shymko, the interviewer, by phone number: +38-097-11-69-667, or email: shymko_sviltana@student.ceu.hu

INTERVIEWER:

If you accept to be interviewed, I, _____ *Svitlana Shymko* _____,

promise to respect the sensitivity of your experience and the terms of this consent form.

Signature:_____

Date ___/___/_____

INTERVIEWEE:

I, _____ (name)

agree to participate in this interview under conditions mentioned above. It is understood that I am free to withdraw from the interview at any moment or to not respond to certain questions.

Signature:_____

Date ___/___/_____

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[24] Informed Consent Form was presented to interviewees in Ukrainian

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