

**GAY-BASHING AND SLUT-SHAMING ONLINE:
EXAMINING DIGITAL MORAL ACTIVISM OF
‘OCCUPY PEDOPHILIA’ AND ‘CHECK YOU’**

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Abstract

This thesis explores two projects of digital moral activism taking place on the pages of the Russian social network VK, namely, ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’. Both communities are involved in self-identified moral crusades against marginal sexual practices and stigmatize the ‘transgressors’: young women agreeing to engage in casual extramarital heterosexual sex for money, and men arranging a date with male adolescents allegedly to lure them into intergenerational homosexual sex, respectively. I situate these projects within the context of state-led discourses on panicking about homosexuality, pedophilia, cyberspace and other imagined threats to childhood and national security as well as in the context of the current crackdown on civil society and digital oppositional activism in Russia. I analyze the official statements, web pages and videos of the two communities. People crossing the boundaries of accepted erotic conduct are presented by moral activists as threats to societal values. Their wrongdoing is exposed through internet pranks organized by activists, and subsequently punished through the regimes of online exposure where ‘folk devils’ are assigned the affectively charged categories of ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’. This thesis explores the contradictions within the logic of the moral activists, as well as the ways in which both projects evolve around the question of irredeemability of ‘folk devils’, which as I shall argue eventually undermines the whole correctional ethos of this activism. The thesis argues for the importance of analyzing the discourses of sexual difference articulated by moral activists, due to the damaging social effects they have for the stigmatized populations in present day Russia.

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Chapter 1: Situating Moral Activism in the Regulatory Context

*The problem with correct ideas is that
they can all too readily become correctional ideals*
Jeffrey Weeks. *Sexuality and its discontents*, 1985: 217

As Rubin argues in her influential work *Thinking Sex*: ‘disputes over sexual behavior often become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity’ (1984: 267). She notes that despite the fact that sexuality is always political, there are times and periods when it becomes even more contested and more politicized (1984: 267). It seems to me that in recent years Russia has been undergoing through such period of turbulence over the meanings of sexuality. Much has been written on what is called anti-propaganda laws, banning the spread of information on ‘non-traditional’ sexual relations to minors. These laws are sometimes called ‘anti-gay’ legislation¹ among disapproving scholarly and activist audiences². Human rights and LGBTQ organizations in Russia and elsewhere have publicly condemned these changes for violating basic human rights and for having serious consequences for LGBTQ citizens in Russia and violence against them. Over the past year anti-gay activism in Russia has become a focus of intense international attention.

¹ For a nice overview on legal definitions and discourses surrounding them, I recommend reading the subchapter ‘What the Law Says’, including the articles by Healey, Muravyeva, Gorbachev and others in the book ‘At the Crossroads: methodology, theory and practice of LGBT and Queer Studies’ (2014), available in Russian only

² On three interpretative repertoires used to refer to these laws in the Internet see Malysheva and Golynchik (2013)

Before and during the Winter Olympic Games in February 2014 in Sochi, international LGBTQ activists called for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics and to show solidarity with Russian LGBTQ community through various means, from refusing to drink Russian vodka³, to protesting outside Russian embassies worldwide⁴, to singing the Russian anthem at the Olympic Stadium in Stockholm⁵ to the rainbow flag. In blogs, comparisons were often made through the image of Olympic games between Putin's and Hitler's regimes⁶. Boris Dittrich, advocacy director of LGBT rights program in Human Rights Watch, commenting on notorious phrase from the speech of Russian president Vladimir Putin to a group of volunteers in Sochi: "gay sex is not a crime in Russia, so gay people can feel calm, at ease, but leave children in peace, please"⁷ has aptly remarked how this statement actually assumes a linkage between pedophilia and homosexuality⁸. Indeed, the rhetoric of child protection quite often intersects with condemnation of sexual otherness in official discourses in Russia, where linkages are made between sexual otherness, pedophilia, contagion and threat for the youth, which is imagined as innocent. Nikolay Gorbachev (2014) in his overview of 'anti-gay' laws notes that in some regions of Russia the law against 'propaganda of homosexuality' has been enforced simultaneously with a law against 'propaganda of pedophilia' (2014: 91). He also highlights that drawing parallels between pedophilia and homosexuality creates negative connotations for the latter and spreads stereotypes (2014: 91). Similarly, when the 'anti-gay'

³<http://www.rferl.org/content/lgbt-russia-vodka-boycott-gay-protest/25060328.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁴<http://www.rferl.org/content/protests-russia-gay-rights-washington-new-york-vodka-putin/25062837.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁵<http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/culture-lifestyle/140203/watch-2000-swedes-sing-russian-anthem-for-lgbt-solidarity> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶ See an example from one international blog: <https://medium.com/lgbt-community/7470a851a756> Accessed on 08.06.2014. Similar rhetoric was widespread in Russian LGBTQ communities in VK. Comparisons between Hitler and Putin were also made through the discrimination of homosexuals; and now through the annexation of Crimea, totalitarian speech and propaganda in pro-governmental media

⁷<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20140117/186631856.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁸<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/27/who-speaks-russias-children> Accessed on 08.06.2014

bill was discussed in State Duma special emphasis was put on the alleged propensity of homosexuals to commit sexual violence against minors⁹.

However, ‘anti-gay’ laws are only one part of the larger picture. This picture is important to delineate in order to imagine the overall context of current crackdown on civil society in Russia, as well as the general tightening of moral controls serving as a backdrop for the appearance of grassroots projects of moral regulation which will be examined in the next chapters. Starting from Russian president Vladimir Putin’s ‘reelection’ in 2012, through the course of 2013 and till the moment Russian government and pro-government media seemed to be swept by multiple panics which focused on the alleged threats to national order. The trope of foreign threat or contagion figures prominently in these discourses and new laws, which were implemented through 2012 to 2014 with a serious impact on civil society in Russia, freedom of assembly and expression. From 9 June 2012 amendments were introduced in the Russian federal law regulating public rallies which had toughened the organization of public demonstrations and increased punishments for breaking the law¹⁰, subsequently the punishment was made stricter¹¹. On 13 July 2012 a law recriminalizing the libel was signed¹². The notorious ‘foreign agents’ law signed on 20 July 2012 forced NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as ‘foreign agents’^{13 14}. Not only has it significantly complicated the work

⁹This statement was based on the results of research which alleged that in past recent years there has been a reversal in gender ratio of the victims of child sexual abuse in Russia, now the majority of victims are boys. See the transcript of debates on the bill <http://api.duma.gov.ru/api/transcript/44554-6> Accessed on 08.06.2014. LGBTQ activists Igor Kochetkov in his blog mentioned that such research has never actually existed http://vk.com/petrovi?w=wall220584_8193 Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁰<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/06/08/russia-reject-restrictions-peaceful-assembly> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹¹<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20140603/190318175/Amnesty-International-Blames-Russia-for-Harsh-Protest-Laws.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹²<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/16/russia-criminal-libel-law-blow-free-expression> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹³<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/07/13/russia-reject-proposed-changes-rules-foreign-funded-ngos> Accessed on 08.06.2014

of NGOs due to the inspections, but also has contributed towards discrediting the image of human rights organizations as if threatening Russia's statehood. On 23 October 2012, a law on treason was adopted which defines a treason as "providing financial, technical, advisory or other assistance to a foreign state or international organization ...directed at harming Russia's security."¹⁵ Anxieties over terrorists and extremists destabilizing social order led to the enforcement of severe regulations of the Internet and assault on the independent or oppositional media¹⁶. The recent law aimed at regulating popular bloggers¹⁷ in the internet has reinforced government attack on discordant voices¹⁸. It is hard to underestimate the significance of these restrictions for the future of oppositional activism in Russia, which had extensively used social media and blogging to mobilize people for protests and collective action. Internet space has also been vital for the exchange between members of marginal groupings in Russia excluded from mainstream political processes, such as various nationalist groups (Zuev 2014). The rhetoric used by Russian politicians persistently associates opposition with something foreign, financed from the West and promoting Western interests. Thereby any type of dissent is framed as distinctively non-Russian. This trend was most strikingly spelled out during Putin's address to the parliament on 18 March 2014 in his 'Crimean speech'¹⁹, where the trope of 'fifth column' along with the category of 'national traitors' were used to refer to the groups and individuals holding oppositional views.²⁰

¹⁴On the impact of this law for the work of NGOs there is a detailed article based on concrete case studies <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/05/29/russia-foreign-agents-law-hits-hundreds-ngos-updated-may-29-2014> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁵<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/23/russia-new-treason-law-threatens-rights> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁶<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/23/russia-halt-orders-block-online-media>; Accessed on 08.06.2014
<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/13/dispatches-black-thursday-moscow> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁷Bloggers having more than 3000 visits daily will have to register themselves as media outlet: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/07/world/europe/russia-quietly-tightens-reins-on-web-with-bloggers-law.html?_r=1 Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁸<http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/13/dispatches-black-thursday-moscow> Accessed on 08.06.2014

¹⁹<http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²⁰The exact phrasing: 'Some Western politicians are already threatening us with not just sanctions but also the prospect of increasingly serious problems on the domestic front. I would like to know what it is they have in

The narrative of dangerous, enemy-ridden²¹ cyberspace where dissidence of different sorts lurks, threatening Russian integrity is particularly effective when the subject of children comes up. Concern over the future of Russian youth paternalistically perceived by Russian lawmakers as in need of protection from outside dangers led to the veritable hysteria about suicidal instructions, pedophile networks, child porn and ‘harmful’ information about homosexuality available online. The fears of foreign contamination and homosexual recruitment coupled with concern about children have resulted in signing the law on 28th December 2012, which banned USA citizens from adopting Russian children,²² the ban on adoption was extended in 2014 to married homosexual couples from countries where same sex marriage is legally acknowledged²³. One of the key figures orchestrating this regressive moment is chairperson for Russian State Duma committee on family, children and women’s issues Elena Mizulina, known for her anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ stance and legal initiatives. Mizulina shares the position of deep mistrust towards the Internet and has several times accused the opponents of the law protecting children from the ‘harmful’ information²⁴ in the cyberspace as ‘pedophile lobby’²⁵. Mizulina was also a driving force behind the draft project of state family policy²⁶, which has been subjected to a harsh criticism for its far-fetched propositions. This project was designed to tackle the present demographic situation in

mind exactly: action by a fifth column, this disparate bunch of ‘national traitors’, or are they hoping to put us in a worsening social and economic situation so as to provoke public discontent? We consider such statements irresponsible and clearly aggressive in tone, and we will respond to them accordingly’ from <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²¹President Putin has recently referred to the Internet as ‘CIA plot’, from which Russia should be protected <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/vladimir-putin-web-breakup-internet-cia> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²²<http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/12/21/russia-reject-adoption-ban-bill> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²³<http://en.ria.ru/news/20140213/187496779/Russia-Limits-Adoptions-to-Countries-Allowing-Same-Sex-Unions.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²⁴<http://eng.kremlin.ru/acts/4246> Accessed on 08.06.2014. This law allowed Russian Media Oversight Agency to blacklist and block websites with dubious content without notification

²⁵Similar statements were made by other Russian politicians, see here <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/top-investigator-alleges-pro-pedophilia-lobby/480675.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

²⁶<http://xn--80abeamcuufxbhgound0h9cl.xn--p1ai/upload/iblock/5df/5dfade1ae031a7f9959d132b73345ec7.pdf> Accessed on 08.06.2014

Russia²⁷ and explicitly delineates its goals: to increase the number of families with three and more children, to reduce divorce and abortion rates, to increase birth rates (p. 54-55). ‘Propaganda of family welfare and traditional family values’ is one of the primary goals of new family policy. (p.33) Traditional family values are conceptualized as ‘heterosexual marriage for the sake of procreation and childrearing of three and more children’. (p.12). When Russian media oversight agency²⁸ in the end of 2013 has published a document elaborating upon the potentially harmful content for children, it included long-awaited clarifications on what constitutes “gay propaganda”²⁹. According to the newly developed criteria, ‘harmful’ content includes the critique of traditional family relations as outdated, spreading propaganda of alternative forms of family relationships (for example, by using positive images of homosexual couples, or portraying heterosexual couples in an unattractive way), information about alternative modes of family relationships (including life-stories of people in non-traditional relationships), information about alternative modes of identification (for example, presenting famous LGBTQ people as role models).

Marianna Muravyeva in her analysis of ‘anti-gay’ laws in Russia comments that the usage of ‘non-traditional’ wording highlights that homosexual relations are framed as something foreign to Russian identity, something which is not endemic to Russia, but rather, brought from the outside, which of course ignores the long history of existence of homosexual relations in Russia (2014: 79-80). Healey argues in a similar fashion that homophobic politics of Russian government acquires a nationalistic dimension through its linkage with Russian Orthodox Church, allowing Russia to mark itself in contradistinction to

²⁷ Perceived as dangerous

²⁸ Roskomnadzor in Russian

²⁹ http://rkn.gov.ru/docs/Razdel_6.pdf Accessed on 08.06.2014

European Union with its LGBTQ friendliness (2014: 64). Construction of homosexuality as foreign and Western to advance state nationalist agendas juxtaposing ‘traditional values’ with immorality of the West is something not unique to Russia (Kulpa 2011; Mizielinska 2011 on Poland). In his discussion of ‘traditional sexual relations’ Healey, suggesting to look at it in the context of post-soviet nostalgia, eloquently speaks about Russian myth of sexual innocence existing before 1917 and advanced by Stalin’s ideologues to promote a theory of naturalness of peasants’ and workers’ heterosexuality (Healey 2014: 56).

Laurie Essig, commenting on the current situation, has noted that the rhetoric of ‘traditional values’ in Russia promotes not only the idea of homosexuality as foreign pollution, but also of LGBTQ activism, feminism, gender studies as dangerous foreign imports³⁰. Indeed there is an ongoing persecution of public figures in Russia, mostly, teachers or university professors displaying their sympathies to LGBTQ movement. Several have lost their jobs due to the efforts of anti-gay activists³¹. The notorious community Wolf-homophobe³² on the pages of Russian social network VK has published an album with the photos of professors teaching gender studies, sociology and psychology from several universities in St.Petersburg with the title ‘University professors engaged in the propaganda of sodomy’³³

³⁰ http://chronicle.com/article/Queer-Russia/144523/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en Accessed on 08.06.2014

³¹ One of the most recent examples: <http://lgbtnet.ru/en/content/activism-reason-dismissal-educators-northern-arctic-federal-university-are-asked-leave-their> Accessed on 08.06.2014. First instance of firing teachers for their homosexuality or sympathies towards LGBTQ movement is the notorious case of the school teacher of geography from Khabarovsk, Alexandr Ermoshkin <http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/02/05/bigotry/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

³² http://vk.com/volk_gomofob Accessed on 08.06.2014

³³ http://vk.com/album-47267385_181446603 Accessed on 08.06.2014

There have been numerous interpretations regarding the ‘true’ purposes of Kremlin behind ‘anti-gay’ legislation and present regressive moment in Russia. One of the widely shared versions among some groups within Russian opposition is interpreting it as an attempt of Russian government to create internal Other, using relative invisibility and marginality of homosexuals in Russia, in order to distract attention from more critical social issues such as suppression of civil and political freedoms, corruption or economic problems. This view is exemplified in the book *The stories of love. Propaganda of homosexuality in Russia*³⁴, the preface to which was written by the prominent figure within Russian opposition Garry Kasparov³⁵. He notes that one of the shared features of authoritarian regimes is displacement of positive agenda with construction of internal and external enemies from which in turn population can be ‘protected’ by the regime (2014: 9). To Kasparov, the most natural strategy for the enemy search is to capitalize on Cold War legacy and its anti-Americanism, or to target already marginalized social groups such as homosexuals or Central Asian migrants (2014:9) Another example of this opinion is suggested by Maria Gessen in an interview on American channel MSNBC : ‘Russia felt, that it was one minority that it could use as a scapegoat, which Putin could use to mobilize its constituency in a nationalist xenophobic fervor and get away with it’³⁶.

³⁴ The book itself is a compilation of love stories of LGBTQ folks in Russia and is edited by Maria Gessen and Joseph Huff-Hannon and distributed freely through the internet. Maria Gessen is prominent Russian-American LGBTQ activist, journalist and author of several books about Vladimir Putin and Pussy Riot, out lesbian and mother of three children who moved back to USA in 2013 for the safety of her family. Of course, the rhetoric of love used in book title to justify homosexuality is problematic, but is not focus of the current thesis.

³⁵ His website with news and socio-political analysis <http://www.kasparov.ru/> has been blocked since 14.03.2014 on the territory of Russia by Federal Agency regulating communications Roskomnadzor, along with other oppositional websites such as grani.ru and ej.ru

³⁶<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swd6Z-FIPXs> Accessed on 08.06.2014. However in the same interview when asked about Occupy Pedophilia she states that their activity is instigated by Kremlin.

This thesis looks at the intricate ways in which a moralizing branch of grassroots digital activism focusing on marginal sexual practices has arisen in the context of the struggles over morality and sexuality which I mapped out above in modern day Russia. Consequently, I am not interested in the search for causal explanations looking for the hidden state agendas. I look at two online communities which existed/ exist on the pages of the Russian social network VK³⁷: the slut-shaming community ‘Check You’³⁸ and the gay bashing ‘Occupy Pedophilia’³⁹. Both communities engage in moral crusades against non-normative sexual practices and stigmatize wrongdoers: young women engaging in casual sex-for-money exchange in the first and ‘pedophiles’ threatening male adolescents in the second case. Social media are used to organize traps for victims and execute public punishment through regimes of online exposure and shaming. In the both cases such activities are presented as moral crusades, justified through references to the ‘social mission’ of the enterprise in the context of societal decay. This activism defines itself as oppositional to the Russian state or does not claim any political allegiances, but in its essence it is inherently resisting democracy. Its workings and its effects are in many ways complicit with state concern over normalization of sexuality. Thus by reviewing the literature on moral panics and sexuality, I will provide insights into both state-led anti-gay and cyber-paed panics and outline the way of framing digital moral activism of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ and ‘Check You’.

³⁷ VK abbreviation stands for ‘V kontakte’ which is translated from Russian as ‘in touch’

³⁸ Was active till spring 2013, later banned on VK, however I base this thesis on the materials of website <http://www.i-check-you.ru/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

³⁹ Major VK page <http://vk.com/okkypay> with 197400 followers on 02.06.05

Chapter 2: Framing Moral Panics and Moral Crusades

The notion of *moral panic* originates from the classical work in the sociology of deviance by Stanley Cohen 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics' (1972). In this work Cohen discusses the moment for the moral panics to arise as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons [who] become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by mass media" (Cohen, 2002: 1). *Folk devils* are social groups which embody the threat and serve as 'visible reminder of what we should not be' (Cohen 2002: 2). Thompson in his overview of the concept introduces a number of features, characterizing *moral panics*: they take the form of social campaigns or put otherwise, moral crusades, which are sustained through a period in time; they are lead by a group of people concerned with fragmentation of social order; they legitimize the necessity of taking action against the constructed threat; they usually do not touch upon the real causes of the events (1998: 8). Delusional character and exaggeration of threat are considered to be an important aspect of moral panics (Goode and Ben-Yahuda 2009: 2). This element of moral panic theory is criticized by some authors for implied negative normative judgment contained in the claims of panics' irrationality (Hunt 1999: 19). This chapter will further trace theoretical insights and will engage with some literature conceptualizing moral panics as a mode of representation and helping to understand the role of sexuality in it. It will also show why sexual scapegoats serve as a convenient target for the projects of moral regulation.

Since the appearance of Cohen's work the concept has been used widely in various fields of inquiry from sociology to gender studies, has entered the vocabulary of journalism, moreover, moral panics have become a technique used by business and politicians to attract

attention to certain issues, products or events (McRobbie and Thornton 1995; Hier 2002). McRobbie and Thornton (1995: 560) argue that the significance of the concept lies in the attention given to the social control and social order as well as the ideological role of the media and representation in stirring moral panics. Hunt remains critical of the reifying tendencies of moral panics scholarship using such ‘disembodied and impersonal entities’ such as ‘society’ or ‘social control’ (Hunt 1999:19). This thesis overcomes Hunt’s critique through the focus on clearly identified agents of moral regulation – digital vigilantes reliant on the usage of social media such as VK. VK serves both as a space for organizing internet pranks and for producing (and reproducing) the meanings about sexual difference through the format of spectacular exposure playing the role of punishment for wrongdoers. As Goode and Ben-Yahuda (2009: 17) aptly remark: moral panics are not about certain activities or social categories but rather what these activities or categories represent to particular groups within society that provokes emotions such as fear, threat or concern. Herdt argues that moral panics provoke cultural anger in the service of moral regulation targeting marginalized groups (Herdt 2009: 2). This emotion-inducing aspect of representation is important for both cases I look at, since this activism is highly reliant on feelings of indignation or disgust fuelled by using affectively charged categories of ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’; it also necessitates the detailed analysis of representation.

In the fourth chapter I will analyze the representation of sexual difference entertained by both communities through constructionist approach to representation advanced by Hall (1997). I will demonstrate how activists of both communities persistently misrepresent and stigmatize sexual transgressors as ‘folk devils’ by associating pedophilia with homosexuality and foregrounding the trope of innate female corruptness. Rubin regards the effort to counter the negative representation of marginal sexualities as crucial in counteracting popular

prejudices, stigma and official sexual ideologies (Rubin 1984: 295). Similarly, as Herdt (2009: 18) in his critique of Cohen's original use of the concept points out, Cohen disregards the fact that moral panics are shaped by structural violence, such as racism, heterosexism or homophobia. Herdt argues for the importance of analysing this dimension, since sexual panics are the key mechanism of reproduction of structural violence, inequality and exclusion (2009: 18). Herdt's and Rubin's positions are relevant for my analysis on how specific regimes of visibility and representation of sexual difference advanced by activists of both communities serve as means of informal social control: they reproduce gender and sexual inequality and justify violence against folk devils. Taking into consideration the context mapped out in the first chapter, I regard my research as a project of counter-reaction to the negative portrayal of sexual others.

According to Ben-Yahuda and Goode, to have a deeper understanding of moral panic and to break with totalizing tendencies of its analysis it is important to trace the social and temporal context in which they emerge (Goode and Ben-Yahuda 2009: 3). Lancaster argues that displacement in a Freudian sense constitutes a crucial feature of moral panics, since they often express broader social anxieties (2011:24) which are not explicitly articulated. In a similar vein, Cohen argues (2002: xxx) that for moral panic to be successful it needs 'to find points of resonance with wider anxieties'. In the first chapter I described the conservative moment in which Russia finds itself now. This moment with its multiple panics about children's safety and 'Western' threats from outside serves as a backdrop for moral activism I look at. Muravyeva argues that this conservative moment using rhetoric of tradition marks the crisis of post-soviet ideology and the search for the way out through the strategies of alienation and prohibition (2014: 82).

Historically sexuality has been a privileged locus for moral panicking (Herdt 2009). Weeks notes as well how sex and erotic acts stand as ‘particular site of ethical and political concern – and of fear and loathing’ because they act as ‘crossover point for a number of tensions whose origins are elsewhere’ and touch on the important social boundaries (1985: 44). Over several past centuries Western societies have been subjected to the multiple moral panics about sexuality including child abuse, child sexuality and pedophile panics, pornography, public decency, AIDS, prostitution, venereal disease and homosexuality (Walkowitz 1980; Weeks 1985; Watney 1997; Kulick 2003; Lancaster 2011). Conceptual tools offered by Rubin (1984) to theorise stigma of erotic dissidence, sexual politics and sex panics shed some light on what she calls ‘persistent features of thought about sex’ which will be helpful to understand the specificity of moral crusades I analyse in the societal context in which they arise: sexual essentialism, hierarchies of sexual value and domino theory of sexual peril (1984: 275-282). Sexual essentialism refers to the understanding of sex as natural, ahistorical and unchanging, residing within the individual psychology or physiology (Rubin 1984: 275-276). Hierarchies of sexual value introduce how sexual acts are differentially appraised: ‘good and normal’ sex acts are vanilla, heterosexual, procreative, free of charge, in a relationship or married, not involving pornography, bodies only, same generation, monogamous, at home (Rubin 1984: 279-281). Abnormal and damned sexuality refers to homosexual, unmarried, promiscuous, non-procreative, commercial, alone or in groups, casual, cross-generational, in public, with pornography, with toys and sadomasochistic (Rubin 1984: 279-281). Rubin argues that those whose behaviour stands low on the hierarchy of sexual values are subjected to disreputability, stigmatization, sanctions and other forms of punishment (Rubin 1984: 279). This theoretical framework is extremely important for my research since the folk devils against which the moral activism is directed are people engaging simultaneously into several sexual behaviours standing low on a scale of sexual value: casual

and promiscuous heterosexual commercial sex in the case of women targeted by ‘Check You’; homosexual intergenerational sex in the case of men targeted by ‘Occupy Pedophilia’. Folk devils’ wrongdoing is ‘revealed’ through internet pranks organized by activists, exposed online and stigmatized and shamed through persistent labelling as ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’. Finally, Rubin’s ‘domino theory of sexual peril’ (1984: 282) assuming the slippery slope of sexual vice is characteristic of reasoning in both moral activism I examine and the present conservative moment in Russia.

The essentialist vision of ‘normal sexuality’ as a distinctly heterosexual one is something that characterizes both moral crusades I look at. On a larger scale it weaves into the present day state rhetoric of Russia as land of ‘traditional sexual practices’ with implied familial heterosexuality. Healey suggests three key features which characterized Stalinist and late Soviet sexuality and naturalized heterosexuality: discursive silencing of sexuality, absence of gender conflict and cheerfulness as bodily and mental state (2014: 60). The discursive silencing of sexuality, including even ‘normal’ and non-pathological heterosexuality, was reflected in the absence of sex education or talk about sex on everyday level (Healey 2014: 61). Heterosexuality was thus perceived as normal and natural, nothing to be talked about. This framework along with Rubin’s mapping of sexual stigma around public/private (1984) divide helps to understand all-too-common negative reaction in modern day Russia in regard to homosexual visibility or pride events: ‘why they are flaunting it?’ Recent Russian laws on protection of children against ‘harmful information’, including information about ‘non-traditional’ sexual practices and orientations constitute an attempt towards normalisation and institutionalization of sexual hierarchies within contemporary Russian society with the consequence of demonizing ‘non-traditional’ sexualities and legitimizing the scapegoating of non-conforming populations. I will demonstrate that negative

visibility of sexual others created by moral activism I examine contributes to this discriminatory dynamics.

Moral panics give rise to the figures of moral entrepreneurs (Becker 1963): political leaders who try to persuade others that punishment and destruction of scapegoats are a legitimate action (Lancaster 2011:24). Goode and Ben-Yahuda argue similarly that movement-like groups, expressing dissatisfaction with ‘the way things are’ constitute one of the avenues of expression for moral panics (2009:142). I will use the concept of moral entrepreneurship to approach the activists of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ and ‘Check You’ and analyze how they legitimize their regulatory projects. I will examine what are the stakes and interests for moral entrepreneurs to engage in the crusades against sexual vices. According to Hunt, another peculiarity of moral regulation projects is that they provide the linkage between ‘governance of others’ and ‘governance of the self’ (1999: 2). This is a significant insight for my work since as I will demonstrate the interplay between moral reform of others and reform of the self is a significant part of the dynamics of both communities.

Hunt defines the projects of moral regulation as projects where some people act to problematize the behavior of others and seek to impose regulation on them (1999:1). He notes that one of the distinctive features of moral regulation projects is that they are initiated from below, not by holders of institutional power and outside of state institutions and mainstream politics (1999: 2). The case of moral crusades I analyze is significant to the extent that both of them are coming from below with the help of online social media VK by marginal groups. The VK space has also provoked quick counter responses to the actions of moral

entrepreneurs from such pressure groups as Russian feminist communities⁴⁰. The case is illuminative of moral panics as a battlefield, which encompasses competing voices and claims struggling for cultural power. (Goode and Ben-Yahuda 2009: 30). This aspect falls within the trend of moral panics research re-evaluating the role of traditional media, acknowledging the increasing impact of online media in the construction and spread of moral panics as well as refusing totalizing tendencies within previous scholarship (McRobbie, Thornton 1995: 567).

In the introduction to the third edition of his work Cohen distinguishes three elements needed for the construction of moral panic: suitable enemy, already marginalized and lacking cultural resources; suitable victim, someone identification with whom is possible; and a consensus that denounced actions constitute a tendency, rather than insulated cases (Cohen 2002: 11). Rubin argues in a similar fashion that criminalization of innocuous sexual variation is legitimized through its portrayal in terms of threat to women and children, health and safety the family or national security (1984: 297). Hunt offers more articulate scheme to analyze moral regulation projects: a moralized object; a moralized subject or target; informal or expert knowledges; discourse within which knowledge is given normative content; a set of practices; a harm to be avoided (1999: 7). In the case of the moral activism I examine the enemies of social order are ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’ who threaten the familial values of heterosexuality, female fidelity and childhood innocence.

In order to the process of the discursive production of ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’ I use the social interactionist understanding of deviance and stigma (Goffman 1963). Cohen summarizes this approach as looking at ‘how society labels rule-breakers as belonging to

⁴⁰ Main Russian feminist online community <http://feministki.livejournal.com/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

certain deviant groups and how, once person is thus type-cast, his acts are interpreted in terms of the status to which he has been assigned' (Cohen 2002:3). Cohen sees this approach as radically reevaluating what is construed as social problem, by asking questions which interrogate the positions from which construction of the aberrant occurs (2002: 4). It hence offers a way of problematizing essentialist moves of moral entrepreneurs, who try to locate the reasons for aberrant sexual behavior in fixed identity essence. Plummer has expanded upon these theorizations by introducing the term 'sexual stigma' (1975), whereas Rubin wrote about 'stigma of erotic dissidence' (1984). Gail Pheterson, writing about the whore stigma, argues that it is specifically a female gendered stigma referring to illegitimate or illicit femaleness, where lines of sexual propriety are crossed by having too many partners or asking money for sex (1996: 65-70). She contends that even if the whore stigma targets explicitly prostitute women, serving as embodiment of this stigma, it implicitly controls all women who might be suspect of whorishness; the whore stigma is thus a sexist attack against female autonomy (Pheterson 1996: 12). Herek argues that one of the features of stigma is that it engulfs the entire identity of the person who has it (2004: 14). This insight is important for understanding demonized portrayal of sexual others and converges on a broader level with grasping sexual deviance in terms of identity essences.

Sexuality in Western culture has a substantial history of being regarded as biologically invariant, deterministically rooted in individual psychology or physiology, 'sex has been defined as the natural, unchanging, essential core of the self' (Stanton 1992:3). While it is now widely accepted that sexuality is culturally variable and social in its nature (Plummer 1975, Padgug 1992), the traces of previous mappings of sexuality are not easy to uproot. Sexological science has played a significant role in such mappings, where sexological theories elaborated by Freud, Ellis, Hirschfield and others offered varying interpretations on human

sexual development and the role of sexuality in disrupting/upholding social order (Plummer 1975, Weeks 1985). These theories have shaped current understandings of sexual practices and sexual identities and contributed towards understanding of sexuality in terms of a host of 'sexual essences appropriate to 'the male', 'the female', 'the child', 'the homosexual', 'the heterosexual', (and indeed 'the foot-fetishist', 'the child-molester', and on and on)' (Padgug 1992: 49-50). Social constructionist understanding of sexuality as exemplified by the work of Foucault (1992) helps to understand how sexual identities are shaped, produced and normalized in particular periods of time by the processes of definition, naming, cataloguing and describing (Foucault 1992). The activism of 'Check You' and 'Occupy pedophilia' seem to be engaged in the similar effort of delineating and analyzing identifiable and distinct groups members of which are viewed as fixed through their sexual essence which is manifested by their transgressive sexual behavior.

Much has been written on how in Western societies alignments were persistently made between homosexuality, child molestation, pedophilia and corruption of youth (Watney 1997; Weeks 1985, Angelidis 2004, 2005; Jewkes and Wykes 2012; Chenier 2012). Rubin, for example, describes how in 1950 in USA social anxieties were focused on the figure of 'sex offender'; discourse of sex offender blurred the distinction between 'child molesters' and homosexuals, consensual sex and violent sexual assault (1985: 269). As I demonstrated in the introduction this alignment is something that characterizes official political discourses in Russia, but as I will show through this thesis, it saturates 'Occupy Pedophilia' activism. Chenier argues that the function of paed-panics is to assure the integrity of familial space, which is a key locus of modern technology of power (2012: 182). In the third and the fourth chapters I will show how 'Occupy Pedophilia' and 'Check You' activism assures normative sexuality and rigid gender scripts.

Chapter 3: Digital Moral Activism

Cohen notes that causal theory or the language of casual explanations is one characteristic feature of all moral panic texts (Cohen 2002: 12); and that media coverage of deviance often includes exaggeration and distortion through style of representation (2002: 19). This search for causes and exaggerated portrayal of situation applies surprisingly not only to state anti-gay panic in Russia and to moral activism of ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ but also to the counter-reaction by international LGBTQ community to ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activism. As I mentioned in the introduction activity of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ gains large coverage in the international media due to the existence of ‘anti-gay’ laws and efforts of international LGBTQ and human rights organizations. The former usually suggest that Russian ‘anti-gay’ laws provoked or led to the rise of such dubious activism. This opinion was also expressed Russian LGBT activist, lawyer and journalist Nikolay Alexeev, the founder of GayRussia⁴¹

They have been given carte blanche for all their actions by these laws (...) They have received signals from the highest officials in the state -- the Duma, the president -- that basically you can do whatever you want if it concerns gay people because they are not first-class citizens; they are second-class or even third-class⁴²

Through my thesis I hope to demonstrate more intricate picture. First of all, the branch of moral activism using digital technologies in Russia existed before these laws. Secondly, it targets not only LGBTQ community, but other marginal sexual activities or ‘societal vices’.

⁴¹<http://www.gayrussia.eu/> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁴²<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/in-russia-violent-videos-show-a-startling-new-form-of-gay-bullying/278294/> accessed by 25.05.2014

Thirdly, this activism is grass-roots activism, on a broader level linked with oppositional activism in the internet and the relative unregulatedness of social media and the Internet in Russia until recent times. Another danger as it seems to me - is to understand 'Occupy pedophilia' by referring in a self-explanatory way to Neo-Nazi beliefs of its leader. In the previous chapter I mapped out the theoretical framework which I will use in my research. I will now turn to the detailed examination of digital moral activism: firstly placing particular attention to the nature of the media; secondly delineating the structure of the internet prank of both communities; thirdly, examining moral entrepreneurs and the workings of moral activism.

3.1 On the nature of digital media

Several last years of oppositional and civic activism in Russia have inextricably been linked with mobile technologies, internet and social media. Indeed, the popularity of Navalny as opposition figure is largely due to his exposure blogging, providing detailed analysis of corruption schemes used by Russian politicians in various projects, starting from state financed construction works to buying medical appliances for state hospitals⁴³. Numerous projects were implemented by Navalny and his supporters, mobilizing citizens to use the power of mobile photo cameras to file complaints and make the 'officials work', i.e. fix the broken roads or repair dilapidating houses. Dennis (2007) argues that civic activism using mobile recording transmits a message that 'a person, people, institutions, and organizations were no longer insular and immune. Everyone now had to watch their back, literally, as people could learn how to play at being their own witness' (2007: 348). It is hard to

⁴³<http://rospil.info/> accessed by 25.05.2014

underestimate the importance of social media for movements and ‘outsider’ groups without considerable resources or access to policy makers (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009: 143). Russian social network VK offers a space for multiple forms of activism and collective action, including oppositional political activity, but it also serves as a media channel, space for entertainment and socializing. In the contemporary Russian context of state control of the media, Internet space until relatively recent times, when several laws tightening state grip on the internet were signed, has been considered the only genuinely free space where political protest and distribution of alternative points of view is possible. Social network VK has played a significant role in this process. Its founder Pavel Durov, whose VK page has more than 6 millions followers⁴⁴ is known by his defiant attitude towards Putin’s government and attempts to control VK. During spring 2014 Durov published a number of statements on his page which clearly indicated numerous attempts of Russian Federal Security Service and Prosecutor’s general office to pressure VK to hand over the private data of organizers of EuroMaidan groups in VK; to block anti-corruption group of Navalny in 2011 and 2014⁴⁵, which was refused by Durov. After losing his part of VK shares in January 2014, Durov has been fired from his post of VK CEO by shareholders in spring 2014 and left the country. Since April 2014 VK has lost its independent status and is controlled by Russian business magnate Usmanov and the president of state oil company RosNeft Sechin⁴⁶.

VK is a social network with distinct arrangement of boundaries between private and public. It is both relatively unregulated and anonymous⁴⁷, but the users are mostly registered

⁴⁴ <https://vk.com/durov> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁴⁵ <https://vk.com/durov> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁴⁶ <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/vkontakte-founder-pavel-durov-learns-hes-been-fired-through-media/498641.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁴⁷ Probably not anymore in the light of what I described above, but governmental surveillance of social media in Russia is not the focus of this work

with their real names, providing elements of their offline lives. VK facilitates private and public communication and private and public information exchange in forms of images, texts or videos. The visibility settings in public profiles in VK allow seeing the lists of friends of the person and display the date, time and the type of device from which last log-in was made. Thus users become more vulnerable towards various types of surveillance (including the governmental one). These particular constellations of factors make the internet pranks of moral activists' possible, providing an organizational environment for the activism, as well as allowing punishment through public exposure.

There is rather substantial prehistory of the groups practicing vigilante justice in Russia and using resources of social media⁴⁸. I will elaborate upon it in the next subchapter. The format of lure-exposure show was then not invented by the moral activists whom I examine, but rather appropriated, upgraded and made more spectacular. Moreover, as mushrooming of 'Occupy Pedophilia' activism suggests this format is easily replicable and seems to transgress national borders⁴⁹. The relevance of my case study lies in the fact that it constitutes a peculiar example of digital moral activism organized in the context of perceived inaction and failure of government to regulate societal values; however this activism in its workings is democracy resisting, which problematizes the scholarship on democratization potential of anti-state activism (Harding 2006). Lives, reputation, physical and mental well-being of persons designated by activists as threat are endangered and the great promise of the internet as democratic space for dialogue, which is particularly significant for Russian context, is called into question.

⁴⁸ For a nice overview visit: <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-digital-vigilantes/25042144.html> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁴⁹ See the article on the idea of 'pedophile' hunt picked up in Spain http://www.elconfidencial.com/sociedad/2013-12-13/proyecto-pilla-pilla-jovenes-espanoles-se-lanzan-a-la-caza-de-los-falsos-pederastas_65911/ Accessed on 08.06.2014

3.2 The structure of internet prank

3.2.1 'Check You'

'Check-You' pranks are usually structured in the following way. Young woman receives a private message on her VK profile from a person introducing himself as a wealthy businessman from another city on a work trip or from his representative, usually female, in charge of organizing his leisure. Sometimes a prankster can present 'herself' as a manager from elite escort agency looking for a woman for her client. She is asked through message if she would be willing to accompany this 'businessman' for a dinner/party in a fancy restaurant for a substantial sum of money as his escort. Sometimes additional reinforcement is added, acknowledging that targeted woman ideally fits the tastes of the client, that the client is respectable and important person:

Hi, I work as PR manager in the large company, our director plans to visit your city, he needs a girl for escort, he is not ugly, and he is young, 30 years old. He pays \$2000 for 24 hours, plus he will repay the costs of clothing for the meeting, you can keep this clothing for yourself. Plus, he can offer personal gifts for you. If you have any questions, please, ask⁵⁰

Hi, I am the representative of the wine company Merlot Radikon. I am main deputy director of the company! Our director will have wine presentation in Moscow on 5th day of this month. He asked me to find him a girl for escort. He is ready to pay for the beauty salon, clothing, shoes and accessories (any which you will choose). You can keep it all for yourself, plus you will receive a payment of 1000 Euros. You will have to be the best girl of the party. Hold arms around each other, feed him with grapes etc. It is not an old ugly guy. Our director is a young man; he is only 27 years old. He is

⁵⁰ Beginning of conversation in the following prank: http://i-check-you.ru/almaty/226-Unalbaeva_Makpal.html
Accessed on 08.06.2014

from Italy. Sporty and well-groomed man. This is a private party, but there will be a lot of businessmen and businesswomen from France, Italy, Moscow. You will have a great chance to meet influential people and spend the evening with wonderful person!⁵¹

Sometimes the latest model of iPhone is offered to be bought in addition to payment and clothing. In subsequent messages that are to follow allusions to sex are made, either by the prankster or by the woman herself, establishing the exact terms of the bargain. ‘The prankster specifies that if she would be willing to have sex after the evening additional sums of money will be offered as compensation. When women accept escort offer but refuse the possibility of sexual activity, motivating it by them being married or in the long-term relationships⁵², special attention and extra time can be taken to convince them by providing verbal guarantees of anonymity, one-time nature of the enterprise and substantial remuneration. Further several questions briefly specify woman’s preferences and taboos in sex, so that the ‘businessman’ could know what to expect. When the dialogue moves to the agreement phase, to ‘seal the deal’ nude photos are asked to be attached to the conversation⁵³, allegedly to both make sure that the woman is real and that the ‘businessman’ will be sure that she will fit his sexual expectations. When the photos are sent and final agreement is reached, suddenly the prankster reveals to the young woman that the arrangement was fake and she was tricked by ‘Check-You’. This last speech usually has a condemning labeling character and contains threats:

⁵¹ Beginning of conversation in the following prank http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/44-mastakova_ilona.html Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁵² The whole idea of ‘Check-You’ project revolves ambiguously both around exposing female corruptness and female infidelity by targeting married women and women in long-term relationship. However, numerous pranks were targeting single women as well, which points to the one of the contradictions in the heart of the project.

⁵³ Sometimes additional sums of money are promised for each taken photo

I didn't have any doubts that you will send the photos of your vagina, thereby check-you.org⁵⁴. It was a prank. How does it feel to sell your body and to be a whore, to cheat your boyfriend, with whom you are together for a year now? Don't try to evade it, all screenshots are saved, all your friends and your boyfriend will learn about it. I will send all the materials to check-you.org and to the group vk.com/check_you⁵⁵. If you will delete your VK page, don't worry, I have your friend list saved. Don't try to contact the police, this project is fully legal, it is known on TV, in newspapers and magazines. Are you willing to do something to rectify the situation?⁵⁶

Several remarks should be made here. First, as I said before, unlike in the case of Facebook, friend lists are publicly visible in VK. This creates a particular situation of vulnerability for people targeted by internet pranks as in 'Check-You' case. The 'proofs' of stigmatized identity can be easily mailed to the list of friends in VK. However, the prank does not stop by spoiling social reputation of targeted woman within the circle of her friends only. 'Check-You' gained its popularity as a form of online exposure show, feeding up its growing subscribers audience with weekly pranks publicly available through the pages of VK community and 'Check-You' website. The logo of the community features pink heart with a dollar symbol on it⁵⁷, signifying the test of love by money. Each new revelatory VK post on the walls of community was composed from the screenshots of correspondence, including nude photos, with a link to woman's VK profile. Every post was enthusiastically praised by community subscribers, actively providing their thoughts regarding new prank. Derogatory slut-shaming comments about women featuring on the pages of community were often made, encouraging and praising 'Check-You' punishment as a rightful one and sometimes calling

⁵⁴ Previous website where exposures were uploaded. Since that moment the archive of pranks had been moved many times. The whole archive is now moved to <http://www.i-check-you.ru/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁵⁵ Original VK page of 'Check-You' community, now not accessible since it is banned

⁵⁶ 'Verdict' speech of prankster in the following prank http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/47-ulanina_chechevitsina_katya.html Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁵⁷ http://lurkmore.so/images/c/c0/Check_you.jpg Accessed on 08.06.2014

for its escalation. Young women exposed in this group often subsequently deleted their VK accounts to escape bullying, shaming and accusations. By spring 2013 Check-You community has reached the peak of its popularity, having about 60000 subscribers⁵⁸. 'Check You' fame also reached TV: several short broadcasts⁵⁹ and two TV shows⁶⁰ were produced in the midst of debates about community.

The 'verdict' passage cited above might refer to the instances of blackmail by 'Check-You' activists. As argued by some internet commentators⁶¹ women were offered to pay activists in order to prevent the publication of correspondence and photos on VK page⁶². However, it is quite hard to establish the truthfulness of such claims, since archives of correspondence available on 'Check-You' websites will not reveal such data⁶³. Nevertheless, sometimes alternative means of guilt redemption were offered to women involved in the prank: they had to produce short video publicly begging 'Check-You' team not to publish the correspondence and photos, claiming that they have learnt an important lesson and will never repeat this mistake again, as well as thanking 'Check-You' team and praising them for their activities. It is quite hard to establish the authenticity of the videos, i.e. if women on the video are actual 'Check You' victims, since women usually pose with their face covered by the

⁵⁸ This is judging by memory. I have traced the project on the peak of its fame in spring 2013; however it is hard to establish the exact number of subscribers at this time due to its ban.

⁵⁹ Short broadcast (3:26 minutes) called 'Body as evidence' from RenTV channel <http://kivvi.kz/watch/20maohr9ej9a/> Accessed on 08.06.2014 short broadcast by Pervy Channel <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzJBHpHvK3U> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶⁰ Sensationalist TV show 'Morality check' (51:36 minutes), from Rossiya channel. The show features Tesak among invited 'experts' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUBlv5G0YPU#t=14> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶¹ This opinion was voiced in this TV broadcast based on the accounts of victims Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶² This opinion is voiced on the pages of encyclopedia of contemporary internet culture in Russia Lurkmore, having an entry about 'Check You': http://lurkmore.to/Check_you Accessed on 08.06.2014. According to this entry, the sums reaching 5000 rubles (approximately 125 euro) were sometimes asked from women in order not to have their private correspondence published on community pages. However I cannot guarantee truthfulness of this claim

⁶³ Moreover, 'Check You' founder Sergey Chernyshev admitted in one of the interviews, that random people inspired by the project were using 'Check You' scheme to earn some money through blackmail <http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

sheet of paper with ‘Check You’ words written on it to keep their privacy intact. It is also debatable whether the videos had the desired redeeming effect. However, the format of videos will be addressed in subsequent subchapter.

I need additionally note here, that initially ‘Check You’ pranks were targeting married women or women in long-term relationships only, when ‘doubting’ husbands or boyfriends could order a ‘check’ on their girlfriends or wives for a small sum of money. However, the commercial nature of ‘Check You’ enterprise is not that apparent. Project founder himself claimed that project is not oriented for profit⁶⁴. I would suggest that fascination with ‘Check You’ can be better interpreted when looking at the dynamics of exposure and spectacle, which I will examine in the last chapter.

3.2.2 ‘Occupy Pedophilia’

‘Occupy Pedophilia’ pranks are structured in the following way. A profile of young boy, usually about 15 years old⁶⁵, is created in social media or on dating websites. Quite often real adolescent is used, of 16-17 years old or younger, who is called ‘bait’ in ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ terminology. These adolescents are specially instructed what to do and how to behave and can sympathize with ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activism. ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists then wait until the adolescent is contacted by people offering the adolescent to meet up⁶⁶. Adolescent is encouraged to ask his date before meeting for money or new mobile phone. As

⁶⁴<http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶⁵The age of sexual consent in Russia is 16 years old.

⁶⁶This is the official version advanced by Tesak in the interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 Accessed on 08.06.2014. He noted for example, that once ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists have created an ‘adolescent’ profile, they can receive up to 50 messages from men interested in meeting ‘him’ per day.

‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists argue, this will prove the self-interestedness of ‘pedophile’.⁶⁷ The date is arranged amongst them. It can be held in private flat, on the street, in the park, but preferred places are those with fewer passers-by. Usually the ‘bait’ is sent out for a date. Adolescent has some time to speak with alleged ‘pedophile’. At some moment a group of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists with cameraman enters the scene. Then targeted man is interrogated by ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists. This interrogation includes verbal, symbolic and physical humiliations. It is recorded on camera and later uploaded on the pages of VK community or other web channels of communication, such as YouTube, RuTube⁶⁸ used by ‘Occupy Pedophilia’. Activists of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ refer to these humiliation sessions as ‘safari’. During humiliation sessions alleged ‘pedophiles’ are subjected to multiple verbal abuses, mixed with elements of interviewing and sometimes of physical violence. Such humiliation rites include shaving victims’ heads in reverse Mohawk pattern and painting rainbow flag on them, forcing them to speak in the rubber dildo as in microphone, sometimes forcing them to suck the dildo, stripping victims, forcing them to dance, and pouring liquids on them⁶⁹. Distinct display of physical violence is rarely present in the videos, however, in one of the interviews community leader and key figure behind ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activism, Maksim Martsinkevich, also known by nickname Tesak⁷⁰ himself has referred to it rather unambiguously when was asked what happens next with ‘pedophiles’ he catches: ‘All what follows I cut out. You know, you can do some editing’⁷¹. After the session the video is edited,

⁶⁷ From educational seminar on how to catch a pedophile https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpbTIV9_Lh0 Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁶⁸ Russian video hosting

⁶⁹In some blogs it is stated that urine is poured on ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ victims <http://www.lgbtqnation.com/2013/11/russian-anti-gay-extremist-under-criminal-investigation-reportedly-flees-country/> Accessed on 08.06.2014

⁷⁰‘Tesak’ means ‘hatchet’ in Russian. For the sake of brevity and convenience I will be referring to Maksim Martsinkevich as Tesak through this thesis.

⁷¹Statement given in the interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 Accessed on 08.06.2014

where most crucial moments from correspondence, photos of ‘pedophile’ if any, the footage of talks between ‘bait’ and ‘pedophile’

Official VK page of community named ‘Occupy Pedophilia show’ with the avatar of superman on it, has more than 90000 followers and is now blocked⁷² However, VK page ‘Tesak against pedophile’ having more than 196000 followers⁷³ is quite active. Community avatar represents a photo of Tesak making a characteristic gesture which is also used as a logo of the community⁷⁴. It is a modification of thumb up gesture where thumb is bended to symbolize the act of destroying ‘pedophiles’ lives. I will elaborate on the significance of Tesak’s figure in the following subchapter and on the trope of destruction subsequently. On the avatar of the community the word ‘pedophile’ has rainbow coloring⁷⁵. The phrase below says: ‘All the HD editions are now in one place’, which refers to all videos of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ available for watching, including interviews, humiliation videos featuring Tesak and other video forms⁷⁶. Simple search in VK reveals the existence of 665 public pages/groups⁷⁷ using words ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ in their titles⁷⁸. Some of them are active regional communities having from hundreds to thousands members; others may include less visited or abandoned groups and pages.

⁷² http://vk.com/okkupy_pedofilyay Accessed by 25.05.2014

⁷³ <http://vk.com/okkypay> Accessed by 25.05.2014

⁷⁴ Photo of activists making the gesture <http://cs7003.vk.me/c540105/v540105541/10997/1WkgrJqANpw.jpg> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁷⁵ Community avatar <http://cs407731.vk.me/v407731742/3a5f/4dlt8PsO2Os.jpg> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁷⁶ As accessed by 25.05.2014 community contains 111 videos, 54 of them are grouped into category ‘Editions’ and features humiliation sessions with Tesak’s participation http://vk.com/videos-41966408?section=album_45743487

⁷⁷ VK allows to create both public pages and groups

⁷⁸ <http://vk.com/search?c%5Bq%5D=%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%B0%D0%B9-%D0%BF%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%BE%D1%84%D0%B8%D0%BB%D1%8F%D0%B9&c%5Bsection%5D=communities> accessed by 25.05.2014

3.3 Introducing moral entrepreneurs

A man's preoccupation may become his occupation
Howard Becker *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*,
1965: 153

After clarifications were provided in the previous section on the structure of internet pranks, I now turn to the moral activism of both communities⁷⁹ by examining its roots, exploring its official statements and mapping the key figures. I will do this in two sections first discussing 'Occupy pedophilia' and the figure of Tesak and afterwards linking him to 'Check You' activism.

3.3.1 Moral entrepreneurship of Tesak

The figure of Tesak is extremely significant in advancing digital vigilante activism. He is the founder of National-socialist movement Restrukt⁸⁰, which loosely unites multiple projects of moral regulation from 'Occupy' branch, fighting with the 'vices' of Russian society: 'Occupy Narkophilia'⁸¹ (fight with drug addiction and drug dealers), 'Occupy Alcophilia'⁸² (fighting against selling alcohol and cigarettes to minors), 'Occupy

⁷⁹When I speak of 'both communities' I use it as convenient shortcut to refer both to 'Occupy pedophilia' and 'Check You'

⁸⁰Official webpage: <http://restrukt.me/> accessed by 25.05.2014 and <http://restruct-life.com/> accessed by 25.05.2014, main page in VK http://vk.com/restruct_life 29752 followers on 31.05.2014; YouTube channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/RestructLife> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁸¹Main page in VK http://vk.com/occupay_drugs 25669 followers on 31.05.2014; website <http://occupaynark.ru/> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁸²Main page in VK <http://vk.com/public62772961> 1572 followers on 31.05.2014;

Gerontophilia' (fight with male adolescent prostitution). It is through these digital activist projects, and especially 'Occupy Pedophilia' that Tesak has gained his present popularity as a fighter with 'pedophiles' or anti-pedophile activist. I will argue how his figure can be grasped through the term 'moral entrepreneur', since as will be demonstrated later, his activism has developed into full-scale career and successful business enterprise.

Before his prison sentence he was known as a founder of Nazi group 'Format 18'⁸³, what he called in the interview 'creative workshop'⁸⁴. During the time of 'creative experimentation' Tesak was filming short videos, including the infamous video of staged execution of Tadzhik drug dealer in the forest. Hangmen were wearing Ku-Klux-Klan masks. Some beef meat was used to imitate the dismembered body of drug dealer. The incident which led to Tesak's prison sentence happened in February 2007 in Moscow club Bilingua, where democratic parties were holding political debates. After Tesak was provoking the audience with his supporters⁸⁵, a group of political figures present during the debates⁸⁶ have written a collective statement to Russian Prosecutor General's Office, referring to the article 282⁸⁷ stating that Tesak has incited hatred towards liberals⁸⁸ Criminal case was open⁸⁹ but took a while to process. Finally he was arrested in July 2007 and subsequently imprisoned for

⁸³'Format 18' is said to be allied for some time with ultra-right national-socialist organization 'National-Socialist Society' from 2006 to 2007. However after some conflict the cooperation amongst the two stopped.

⁸⁴https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

⁸⁵Raising hand with Nazi salute gesture and asking opposition figure Latynina question: 'Do you agree that if we will kill all the liberals, life will be better?' Later shouting: 'Let's kill liberals who hate nationalists!' Detailed footage of the event is available on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WtvQ13-StE#t=14> accessed by 25.05.2014, lenta.ru article also provides the description of the event <http://lenta.ru/articles/2008/02/19/tesak/> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁸⁶Including opposition leader Navalny at that times vice chairman of Moscow branch of 'Jabloko' party and Maria Gaidar

⁸⁷Russian Criminal code article 282 'Incitement of hatred on the basis of nationality, race or religious belief'

⁸⁸From his interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

⁸⁹More on intricacies of relationship between Tesak and liberal opposition in English in this sympathizing blog post: <http://evilrussia.wordpress.com/2012/11/27/very-new-post/> accessed by 25.05.2014

three and a half years for inciting hatred towards Tadzhiks⁹⁰ and liberals. When his prison sentence was over in December 2010, Tesak wrote a book reflecting on his prison experience. This book was sold and spread outside of the system publishing houses⁹¹.

Tesak's scorn for liberals and especially opposition leader Navalny is a narrative pattern permeating his interviews, public speeches and even humiliation sessions⁹². In one interview speaking of his activism, Tesak nonchalantly used self-made proverb: "Today you visit the rally in Khimki, and tomorrow you will invite boy to your house"⁹³ thereby trying to build alignment between liberal political views and sexual perversity and to denigrate his opponents through the trope of slippery slope of sexual peril (Rubin 1984). In order to establish the validity of his claims Tesak engages in a process of discreditation of liberal opposition perceived as an enemy; Goode and Ben-Yehuda define this process as vilification of opponents (2009: 147). However Tesak borrows freely the forms of activism from Russian liberal opposition, but also from global protest movements, which is reflected in his choice of name of 'Occupy Pedophilia'⁹⁴. It can be argued that such borrowings used for questionable 'Occupy Pedophilia' activism do some work towards discrediting these movements, which do not enjoy very wide support in Russia:

⁹⁰Citizens of Tadzikistan. In the Russian context often used to generally refer to guest workers from Tadzikistan

⁹¹This part is based upon Tesak's interview published on 19.07.2012 and accessible on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

⁹²See some examples also in further chapters

⁹³From the interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1e9y270Z3c> accessed by 25.05.2014 . Khimki is a satellite city next to Moscow. From 2007 to 2012 the conflict evolved in regards to governmental plans of building a high-speed motorway linking St.Petersburg and Moscow through the adjacent forest. These plans sparked a local environmental resistance movement and mobilized the wider oppositional support.

⁹⁴The name most likely mocks Russian protest movement formed in the wake of presidential elections in 2012 'Occupy Abay' where protest camp was organized in the center of Moscow next to the statue of Kazakh poet Abay Kunanbaev <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/13/russian-protests-march-occupy-abay> accessed by 09.06.2014

‘Occupy Pedophilia’ is done to mock liberals. Not more than that. Because I deeply believe that all pedophiles are liberals. All people we caught, they all smoke, no one does sport. They are moral freaks. They don’t try to develop themselves. Ok, they had this craving for a boy: ‘I will buy you mobile phone’. Purely liberal⁹⁵

The idea of fighting moral vices with the use of digital technologies in Russia is not new. While researching materials for this thesis, I found out about mock TV channel ‘Duri Net’ which has been doing similar type of vigilante activism fighting drug addiction⁹⁶ long ago before ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ project. They usually tracked drug dealers through internet, agreed upon a meeting and then did some vigilante justice to the folk devils. Later on, ‘Duri Net’ switched the focus of its activism from drug dealers to ‘pedophiles’⁹⁷, however their dialogues were much less violent and lacked the spectacularity of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’. They also used younger adolescents to attract ‘pedophiles’⁹⁸ It is highly likely that Tesak watched videos of ‘Duri Net’⁹⁹ and was inspired by the project., critiquing, however its drawbacks, such as not using the ‘bait’. As he states, the success of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ was a surprise to him. However, in his view, to reach the ultimate goal of this activism – achieving prison sentences for ‘pedophiles’, more solid ‘proofs’ of person’s intention to have sex with particular adolescent need to be accumulated¹⁰⁰ which means that using fake profiles in social networks is not necessarily the best method to achieve these goals.

⁹⁵Quote from Tesak’s interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

⁹⁶<https://hueviebin1.livejournal.com/59314.html?style=mine> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁹⁷Tesak’s quote from the interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

⁹⁸<http://hueviebin1.livejournal.com/60921.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

⁹⁹As stated in the interview where Tesak tells how he came up to the idea of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1e9y270Z3c> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁰⁰As stated in the interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1e9y270Z3c> accessed by 25.05.2014

There are several videos in the internet where Tesak explains his ideology of social-tutovism, standing as value system of Restrukt movement, uniting various ‘Occupy’ projects. This particular hybrid ideology¹⁰¹, which was formed by Tesak during his prison sentence¹⁰² merges elements of Nietzschean and Nihilist views; radical doubt and disbelief in authority figures or towards taken-for-granted values, such as necessity to go to work everyday¹⁰³. ‘Bad habits’ such as alcoholism, drug or tobacco addiction are seen in this framework as a sign of moral decay or leading towards moral decay and weakness¹⁰⁴. ‘In prison people are ready to be fucked in the ass in exchange for one cigarette’¹⁰⁵. Hunt mentions how projects of moral regulation are often articulated through languages of decline or degeneration, when proposed moral reform seeks to overcome the decline (1999: 11). This insight is reflected in the name ‘Restrukt’ implying the possibility of restructuring the society. However, Tesak rather contradictorily claims that if society is corrupt, there is no point of saving it; rather, one has to facilitate its destruction by exposing the putridity of the old values so that new ones can appear. Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue that social movements are engaged in the ‘politics of reality’, convincing others that their visions of reality are correct through the process of claim-making (2009: 144). The following quote expresses the process of claim-making by Tesak. It advances the argument regarding the condition of society, insisting on the seriousness and importance of the issue, presents the ‘evidence’ in its support and offers a program for action through ‘exposure’ activism:

¹⁰¹The following passage is based on Tesak’s seminar on social-tutovism in Kiev: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x0xOEEiocc&feature=player_embedded accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁰²As he claims elsewhere he read a lot during his prison sentence

¹⁰³Tesak explicitly claims that he is not a Marxist, but thinks that it is pointless and unfair to sell one’s labor to someone, rather, one has to create one’s own workplace. From Kiev seminar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x0xOEEiocc&feature=player_embedded accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁰⁴This vision is inspired by him reading Carlos Castaneda books as Tesak himself stated

¹⁰⁵From seminar in Kiev: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x0xOEEiocc&feature=player_embedded accessed by 25.05.2014

The point is that our society is decaying. Both in Russia and Ukraine. It decays, there is moral degradation going on, physical decay, bad habits, genetic failures. How one can fight it? One can be like communist, Komsomol member¹⁰⁶: “I am good, I don’t drink, don’t smoke, I have family, I pay taxes...”, but what is really going on, you are just a vegetable¹⁰⁷, who the fuck needs you, because if you are a respectable citizen, you are not ready for any anti-social acts. One cannot change society by kind and positive behavior (...) One has to be more firm, more evil, more aggressive, more anti-social (...) There are social attitudes which have decayed. No one follows it and it is treated as a dead tree. Take chastity. Chastity as a social attitude: everything is fine, a girl, a virgin is going to get married. The girl...I hope there are not too many girls here, not to be pelted with eggs. Everyone fucks starting from 14 years old of age. Ask her father: “My daughter is clever girl!” She fucks with classmates on sport mats and you don’t know anything about it! You think you have a fine son. Your son is pederast, who sells himself for \$300, what is perfectly shown in the project ‘Occupy Gerontophilia’... So the social attitude is decayed, it is simply not there, you have to detect it and expose it. How will you explain it to boy or girl that it is not all right to sell yourself for money? You will tell that Jesus sees it all? They don’t believe in Jesus. Law forbids it? It doesn’t. So it is impossible to punish them. Only by ruining their destiny, mocking them. Give them a new stimulus for not doing it, so to speak¹⁰⁸

Tesak publicly presents himself as an embodiment of everything that he preaches, personifying ‘how things ought to be’ (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 2009: 144) and stressing in his interviews the importance of self-development and self-actualization. Thus his project of moral reformation seems to be in line with Hunt’s thesis on dynamic aspect of the projects of moral regulation, including the regulation of the self along with the regulation of the others (1999). Tesak’s muscular body stands as a visual symbol of healthy lifestyle he promotes and

¹⁰⁶Contrary to Hunt’s claim that the projects of moral regulation glorify imagined visions of the golden past, (1999) Tesak seems to be not a supporter of communism as the above claim suggests accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁰⁷Derogatory term in Russian (‘Ovosch’), meaning literally ‘vegetable’ and ‘passive and mediocre person’

¹⁰⁸From seminar in Kiev https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6x0xOEEiocc&feature=player_embedded accessed by 25.05.2014

a role model for young adolescents¹⁰⁹. Tesak is known as racist, atheist, supporter of eugenics¹¹⁰, in his interviews he called Breivik¹¹¹ a ‘holy person’¹¹², who made a ‘powerful gesture’ and is ‘not afraid to state his opinion’. Several suggestions have been made about Tesak being financed by Kremlin as a part of ‘manageable Nazism’ project¹¹³ or as an effort to marginalize or discredit Russian nationalist movement¹¹⁴. However, there are reasons to treat such causal versions tentatively. Already by the end of 2012, before the Russian state toughened its grip on the internet, Tesak was speaking of the unfortunate consequence of his activism coinciding with state-led paed panic. He mentioned that pedophilia can be used as a pretext for closing websites and leading to the increase of state control of the internet and ultimately to the censorship and erasure of any dissident opinions, which he wholeheartedly opposes.¹¹⁵

During Tesak’s first trial before his imprisonment Navalny voiced concern regarding the punishment being too harsh, arguing that this will create a halo of a martyr around Tesak’s persona. It definitely did and the current story with Tesak’s awaiting his second trial tends to repeat this pattern. In the end of January 2014 Tesak was extradited from Cuba, where he had fled from the Russian authorities due to the charges of posting extremist videos promoting

¹⁰⁹He also was giving paid consultations on how to loose weight

¹¹⁰Publicly stated in the interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹¹Perpetrator of attacks in Norway which led to the death of 8 people in 2011, organized mass shootings and killed 69 persons in 2012

¹¹²Publicly stated in the interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹³For an example of this view see this article from 19.03.2013 in Russian: <http://www.specletter.com/politika/2013-03-19/cshit-mech-i-tesak.html> accessed by 25.05.2014 or here <http://www.ksonline.ru/stats/-/id/2546/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹⁴Here is the example of this opinion. The author is highly critical of both Tesak’s activism and any conspiracy version of him being financed by Kremlin <https://hueviebin1.livejournal.com/59314.html?style=mime> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1e9y270Z3c> accessed by 25.05.2014

Neo-Nazi ideology in the Internet¹¹⁶ and subsequently imprisoned¹¹⁷. One of the public pages of Tesak in VK¹¹⁸, carefully maintained by his supporters, features his portrait, half-naked, with pitiful look, holding his hands in prayer-like gesture¹¹⁹. Verbal presentation on these pages usually refers to Tesak as political prisoner suffering from the repressive regime. Tesak himself appropriates the term ‘prisoner of conscience’¹²⁰ to refer to his past sentence and current imprisonment. Such verbal strategies of Tesak’s self-presentation as well as the designation of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ as ‘activism’ or as ‘social movement’ put the gloss of respectability on it and erases discriminatory practices and violence incurred on its victims.

Business activities of Tesak before his last arrest included¹²¹ taking payments for participation in humiliation sessions¹²², organizing paid seminars on various subjects from how to catch a pedophile to how to pick up women and touring various cities in Russia and Ukraine with this seminars¹²³; receiving donations from supporters; placing ads in his videos; selling and advertising sport nutrition¹²⁴, selling his book, selling t-shirts with logos of his movements and amulets and inventing other intricate ways of raising money such as

¹¹⁶ In these videos he made some comments on North Caucasians, on Birulyovo pogroms and on two films ‘Stalingrad’ and ‘Okolofutbola’ <http://lenta.ru/news/2014/01/29/tesak/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹⁷ The date of his trial was postponed several times and is now 10.06.2014

¹¹⁸ http://vk.com/marcinkevich_official accessed by 25.05.2014

¹¹⁹ <http://cs620720.vk.me/v620720075/8123/Qq27LpmzWTs.jpg> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²⁰ The term ‘prisoner of conscience’ is coined in 1961 by Amnesty International founder Peter Benenson. It usually refers to the prisoners who have been imprisoned for non-violent expression of their beliefs and is used in the context of human rights activism and advocacy. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prisoner_of_conscience accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²¹ I assume that some of them, not requiring his physical presence, are still functioning, such as receiving donations

¹²² According to this video, participating as observer in ‘safari’ costs 300 rubles (about 10 dollars) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpbTIV9_Lh0 accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²³ I here list the names of some of his seminars recorded and uploaded on YouTube to transmit the idea of their diversity: ‘How to loose or gain weight’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UHHR5B55fA> accessed by 25.05.2014; ‘How to behave when you are detained by police’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZEN4zkVwth4> accessed by 25.05.2014; ‘Don’t believe, don’t be afraid, don’t work’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTXjeYU1WoQ> accessed by 25.05.2014; ‘Lecture on prison’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmeTnJRxaMs> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²⁴ VK page of Restrukt Sport <http://vk.com/restruktSport88> accessed by 25.05.2014

monetizing his YouTube channel or having his advertising agency¹²⁵. Taking into consideration that before his second arrest Tesak made a lot of appearances in media as invited expert to some sensationalist TV shows, there might have been some financial remuneration involved. Tesak thus managed to develop his activism into successful financial enterprise. This public flashing of Tesak's persona led some commentators to reproach him in stupidity and narcissism. However, taking into consideration the mode of 'Occupy Pedophilia' activism, it seems that Tesak's public figure not only personified the anti-pedophile activism in Russian society, but also had served as a role model for some groups among unruly Russian youth, desiring to open 'Occupy Pedophilia' branch in new cities.

Spreading 'Occupy pedophilia' videos through the internet serves several purposes. From officially declared ones it teaches 'pedophiles' a lesson through public shaming and attracts public attention to the 'problem of pedophilia'. However such wide visibility also helps to raise support for the community, promote Tesak's ideas and persona; and involve new members into the group. Tesak starts his videos from his distinctive salute: 'Hello, my little lovers of extremism!' alluding to the young age of his audience. In an interview with two young men supporting the movement, one mentioned that he firstly simply watched 'Occupy pedophilia' videos for half a year and afterwards joined the community because he wanted to destroy social life of 'pedophiles' and because he shared Tesak's national-socialist beliefs; he later states that one of the goals of 'Occupy Pedophilia' is the 'propaganda of healthy sexual orientation'¹²⁶. The other, however, admitted that he simply liked the idea of the project¹²⁷. As Herdt reminds, mobilization of cultural anger can unite separate individuals in a fight against

¹²⁵All the methods listed by Tesak himself in web seminar 'How to earn money without working' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD5_4f62YTw accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²⁶Interview <http://www.rosbalt.ru/generation/2013/07/05/1149305.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹²⁷ Interview <http://www.rosbalt.ru/generation/2013/07/05/1149305.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

common enemy represented by sexual scapegoat (2009: 5). Moral activism of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ can mobilize broader constituencies through advancing the idea of fighting with a distinct vice, rather than activism framed around the body of political beliefs or ideologies. Goode and Ben-Yehuda argue that social movements in order to attract supporters for their cause need to ‘tell one hell of a good story’ (2009: 145), rather than tentatively describe the state of affairs.

This activism might also play an educational role for young adolescents by presenting an image of proper manhood embodied by Tesak or manly and dangerous activism embodied by ‘pedophile’ hunt. Van der Meer in his study of gay-bashers in the Netherlands notes that anti-gay violence is quite linked to the dynamics of peer groups and constitutes a peculiar rite of passage into masculinity (being strong) through the conquest of effeminized gay males and by winning status and prestige through such acts of violence (2003). In this regard the project ‘Occupy Gerontophilia’ represents a particular interest. It uses the same digital vigilantism methods and correctional ethos as ‘Occupy Pedophilia’, but targets male adolescents ready to have commercial sex with older men, who in turn serve as ‘bait’. What is significant, the project was led by young Tesak’s apprentice, Fillip who ‘served’ as a ‘bait’ in ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ project for a year¹²⁸ and after gaining enough experience has opened up his own project, which is now banned by VK. ‘Occupy Gerontophilia’ presents additional interest because it blurs some traditional dichotomies fueling paed panics. The following quote opens up Tesak’s apocalyptic visions of nation’s spiritual decay which does not make orthodox distinctions between innocent youth/corrupt adults:

¹²⁸ See reportage about ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ produced by Russian channel RenTV including interview with Fillip and his father, who visited one of the ‘safaris’ with his son <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAmj4RCQ8GY> accessed by 25.05.2014. Fillip’s father, for example, expressing concern over Fillip’s involvement in this activism starts with: ‘I understand that this is a noble cause but as a parent I am anxious’

Children is a separate topic (...) One of my friends, a girl, she created a male profile on dating website. She was contacting children: 'Hey, let's meet' (showing gesture imitating intercourse). She calls me this evening, she has a son herself, and she tells me: 'Max, I am shocked! They are simply little whores. It is easier to convince 13 years old boy to have sex in exchange for mobile phone, than to convince 18 years old girl to have sex with you' This is a disaster. We are growing young whores. So the problem is deeper: there are pedophiles from the one side, from the other there are children, educated in our society, society of consumption, comfort. That's enough. These children became whores. Even if they won't give it to uncle Grisha right now, they will give it to uncle Misha, uncle Sasha, it will anyway happen. This is the essence of liberalism¹²⁹

I thus argue that it is significant not to conceptualize 'Occupy Pedophilia' crusade only in terms of evil anti-gay neo-Nazi activism with attendant ideas of homophobia as it is usually portrayed by Western LGBTQ and Human Rights publications. Howard Becker in discussing the 'career' of moral entrepreneur notes that something which started as an amateur interest can transform into full-time job (1965: 153). From what I demonstrated, Tesak's figure can be better grasped as a professional moral entrepreneur who developed a host of lucrative popular projects fighting societal vices, a 'professional discoverer of wrongs to be righted, of situations requiring new rules' (Becker 1965:153). Example below will both illustrate this passionate search for new vices and serve as a bridge before turning to the discussion of 'Check You'.

¹²⁹ Tesak's statement from the interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211 accessed by 25.05.2014

In one web-seminar¹³⁰ Tesak, after lamenting how tired he is from dealing with ‘pedophiles’, shares with his sympathizers the idea for his new project RosPodstilka¹³¹. Knowing the history of relationships between Tesak and opposition figure Navalny it is not hard to decode the title as a mockery of popular Navalny’s projects such as RosPil¹³², RosJKH¹³³, RosYama¹³⁴. ‘Podstilka’ is a Russian analogue of ‘broad’. This project, in Tesak’s view, could deal simultaneously with female whorishness and with the fact that some women find it acceptable of sleeping with man from Caucasian republics, in fact Tesak refer to them using quite offensive term ‘hach’, referring to male Caucasians¹³⁵ in general. The idea behind the project is very similar to that of ‘Check-You’, with a slight modification: instead of rich and young businessmen Tesak, masquerading as Caucasian male, will go to a date with this woman and discuss all details of bargain. The whole dialogue will be video-recorded and later uploaded to the community pages with links to woman’s profile in social networks. Tesak argued that he will not be adding any additional details to the videos; rather, this ‘social project’ will speak for itself and provoke moral indignation of audience. Separate subsection of RosPodstilka will be dedicated to exposing young males willing to have sex for money with Caucasian males, which is in Tesak’s view amounts to quasi-epidemics in modern day Russia. Surprisingly, later on Tesak elaborates his position for the legalization of prostitution, which he calls a ‘profession like any others’. Thus, paradoxically, in this articulation it is not

¹³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0KBKv4iwEf4>, published on YouTube on 16.03.2013, accessed by 25.05.2014

¹³¹ The project was never realised

¹³² <http://rospil.info/> The project through which Navalny gained wider popularity. It is dedicated to exposure of corruption schemes, promoting societal control of governmental spendings and spendings of state companies accessed by 25.05.2014

¹³³ <http://roszkh.ru/> Web service helping to file complaints to municipal officials, dedicated to the ‘making municipal services work properly’, where abbreviation JKH stands for ‘housing and communal services’. accessed by 25.05.2014

¹³⁴ <http://rosyama.ru/>. The word ‘yama’ means ‘pit’ in Russian. Web service dedicated to photographing road pits and filing complaints to municipal authorities accessed by 25.05.2014

¹³⁵ The word ‘Caucasians’ is used in Russia to refer both to citizens of Russian Caucasian republics and other Caucasian states such as Georgia or Azerbaijan

‘whorishness’ per se which is unaccepted, but the idea of selling young national bodies to ethnic Others – male Caucasians.

3.3.2 On Pick-up, Tesak and ‘Check You’

One important alignment concerning activities of moral entrepreneurs I look at is their embrace of self-help discourses, workshops and reform-your-life ideologies alike. Moral reform of societal vices thus includes moral reform of the self (Hunt 1999). In previous subchapter I already mentioned Tesak’s successful business activity as trainer, showmen and author. This aspect of his activity fits social-tutovism ideology described earlier. There is an additional facet adding to the allure of his public persona: Tesak’s alleged sexual prowess. In the web seminar named ‘How to make money without working’ Tesak makes an eloquent comparison between money-making and seducing women:

You can live from these projects when you have a well functioning flywheel. It is like with girls: if you want to fuck many girls, you have to launch the flywheel. Meet today one, tomorrow another. One will give it to you in a week, another in a month. You can not expect all girls give it to you immediately. The same applies to money: this little project, another one. Gradually money will drip from everywhere¹³⁶

It is even more evident in Tesak’s seminar on pick-up entitled ‘How to meet girls? Pick-up lesson from Tesak’¹³⁷. The name of the seminar presupposes that Tesak can teach his

¹³⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD5_4f62YTw accessed by 25.05.2014

¹³⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80oDgXIs2IM> accessed by 25.05.2014

male audience techniques of seduction and he is indeed can be regarded as sexual guru. Before I will turn to Tesak's understanding of pick-up, I will say a few words on Russian pick-up community.

What I mention as pick-up and what is usually understood in Russia as pick-up refers to the movement interested in applying various techniques and methods for effective seduction of women in order to have sex with them¹³⁸. Some of these methods and techniques include mastering body language and conversational skills (Hendriks 2012:3), others use some elements of 'speed seduction' and neuro-linguistic programming¹³⁹. Pick-up in Russia is a Western import which gained popularity in 1990s in the circles having access to the internet¹⁴⁰. In the Anglo-American context the person, practicing pick-up is known as 'pick-up artist' (PUA), while community uniting its practitioners is called 'seduction community' (Baker 2013: 8). Key work for Russian pick-up movement is a book of Fillip Bogachev *Russian Model of Effective Seduction* which is considered to be a middle course¹⁴¹ between two popular pick-up methods based on the book of Ross Jeffries *How to Get the Women You Desire into Bed* (1992) and so called 'Mystery method' introduced in the book of Eric Weber *How To Pick Up Girls!* (1970). Pick-up is a commercial enterprise, selling videos and books, organizing trainings, web seminars and workshops for socially awkward males. It is possible to argue, using Connellian concepts of hegemonic masculinity (1995) that pick-up trainings constitute a boot camp for members of subordinate or complicit geeky masculinities into hegemonic one, which is defined through compulsory heterosexuality and sexual conquest of

¹³⁸ There are subgroups of female pick-up, however it is much less popular

¹³⁹ Considered as pseudoscience by wider scientific community

¹⁴⁰ Biggest Russian pick-up forums and websites include: <http://www.pickupforum.ru/>, <http://forum.pickup.ru/>, <http://www.pickup.ru/>, <http://www.lover.ru/>, <http://www.rmes.ru/> All accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁴¹ [http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BF_\(%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5\)](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BF_(%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5)) accessed by 25.05.2014

women by men. Pick-up has been criticized by feminist authors (Denes 2011, Baker 2013) for its ideological underpinnings, i.e. using evolutionary psychology and sociobiology to legitimize its techniques and condone rape scripts (Denes 2011), but also for its manipulative methods and misogynist rhetoric. One of the hallmarks of Russian pick-up community is the objectifying and classifying practice of judging female attractiveness by the scale from one to ten points to produce more effective strategies of seduction in regards to the place on the scale occupied by a woman. On pick-up forums when men ask advices regarding relationships with women, they rarely provide any descriptions of woman's personality except her place on the scale of attractiveness. Overall, Russian pick-up community can be described as commercial self-help movement based on the ideology of male supremacy and natural male sex drive. It legitimizes itself through allusions to science and biologically rooted gender roles, sexually objectifies women and uses such essentialist notions as 'female psychology' or 'real men'. For the sake of the present thesis, several tenets of Russian pick-up movement are crucial: firstly, according to its logic every woman is seducible if one uses right techniques; every man can learn these techniques through pick-up trainings. Advices on how to seduce a married woman or woman in long-term relationships are present on the pages of websites and forums¹⁴². Hendriks in his discussion of pick-up artistry convincingly argues that what looks like hedonistic movement contains ascetic tendencies and elements of Weberian work ethics stressing self-discipline and self improvement (2012). Secondly, women are defined as different from men in their psychology, behavior, needs and wants. They perceived as manipulative and cunning, and it is important to know special tricks to rule over them or to get sex from them. Pick-up as a movement promoting male sexual prowess extends into such

¹⁴²<http://www.pickup.ru/blog/category/23/post/834>; <http://www.pickup.ru/blog/category/23/post/690>; <http://www.pickup.ru/blog/category/23/post/616> all accessed by 25.05.2014

moral project as ‘Check You’, proudly naming itself as ‘virtual pick-up’¹⁴³, grounded into pick-up’s assumption that every woman can be seduced if enough persistence is put into it from the man. I first suggest looking at the inflection of pick-up introduced by Tesak and later examine in detail ‘Check You’. Tesak starts his seminar speech as:

Today I will tell you how to meet girls and lure them into sex in the first day. This is basically what men need from women. All the rest is a rare exception. If you just look at it objectively: when a guy meets a girl he needs to fuck¹⁴⁴ her¹⁴⁵

Even if Tesak admits¹⁴⁶ that according to the principles of National-Socialism, promiscuous sex is not the way things should function, according to him, one hardly can do anything with it, since modern day societal reality in Russia is quite different and the reason for this mess are women, who engage in sexual activity from the early age. Tesak declares, that he is not interested in saving ‘whores’ from immorality; moreover, he would rather use this state of affairs for his benefit, embracing the philosophy of ‘spoiling already spoiled’ which accords with his social-tutovist visions of societal transformation described in the previous subchapter. As he admits, if after the second date woman doesn’t agree to have sex with him, he withdraws, because she is not a ‘whore’ and he will not spoil her. He seems to share dichotomous vision of ‘good woman’/‘whore’, however, further examination reveals the messiness and contradictory elements within the logic of his reasoning. While referring to female sexuality he uses notions such as ‘whore by nature’ or statements as ‘all women love to be fucked like ‘whores’’ thereby blurring divisions claimed above. Tesak highlights that in

¹⁴³<http://i-check-you.ru/about.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁴⁴There are several ways of referring to the verb ‘fuck’ in Russian foul language, the softer version is ‘trahat’ which means ‘to bang’ or ‘to screw’. More vulgar version is ‘ebaty’ or ‘ebatysya’. It is this word which is persistently used by Tesak throughout this seminar

¹⁴⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80oDgXIs2IM> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁴⁶In the following discussion all references to Tesak statements are based on his talk in this pick-up seminar

order to pick-up a girl one has to work out a lot and do sport in order to appeal to female instincts, which will eventually block all social restraints imposed by society. I will demonstrate later how such visions of male persistence in achieving the goal reflect in 'Check You' activism and how they also undermine essentializing claims of innate female corruptness or 'whorishness'.

Tesak advocates the position, that one has to go through a lot of sexual exploits, get fed up with it and find oneself a proper smart and beautiful woman: 'so that she would not be a whore' to start with her a family. His notions about male-female relationships are also rooted in evolutionary assumptions shared by pick-up community. He thus sees female sexuality as inherently monogamous, because of unequal distribution of parental investment, and submissive, claiming that 80 % of women like to be slapped during sex. Tesak preaches to his audience promiscuity, called by him as 'theory of emotional security', according to which it is healthier for a man to have simultaneous relations with multiple women. In the very last part of the seminar Tesak shares quite problematic thought concerning sexual consent, i.e. he suggests to use force if a woman resists sex, claiming that she is thus testing a man. To him, woman's agreement to come home or to accept to have sex in the internet equals to her making a commitment to have it, whereas an agreement of a girl to have sex with him through internet symbolically amounts to him having sex with her. However, he also suggests an idea to install video cameras into bedroom to prevent rape accusations and to have nice home porn collection to watch afterwards. These visions of substituting agreement in message with willingness to participate in practice and consequently with identity of 'whore' or 'pedophile' are strikingly similar both to 'Check You' and 'Occupy pedophilia' activism. I will pay particular attention to it in my last chapter on representation to argue that this move constitutes the basic operation of both enterprises and justifies punishment regimes.

The founder of ‘Check You’ is known as Sergey Chernyshev¹⁴⁷, former pick-up practitioner, young student of St. Petersburg State University of Aerospace Instrumentation preferring not to make public appearances and to protect his identity. He claims that ‘Check You’ project was born rather spontaneously in summer 2012 out of his pick-up hobby: competing with friend who can pick up more girls in the internet¹⁴⁸. Chernyshev highlights that the impetus behind the creation of ‘Check You’ was not a financial gain or blackmail as some critiques of the project argued¹⁴⁹; but rather contributing to the change of society where younger generation has become too materialistic, without any other values¹⁵⁰. To Chernyshev internet pranks organized by ‘Check You’ are regarded as perfectly legitimate means of testing woman’s fidelity to her boyfriend or husband. As he declares, the main idea behind Check-You is to promote public blaming of unfaithful women and to teach them a moral lesson¹⁵¹. When asked whether he has a moral right to perform these fidelity checks, Chernyshev alludes to wide support of ‘Check You’ in anonymous internet polls¹⁵², claiming that if it is widely supported, than the activity is not futile. The activism becomes justified through tapping into shared societal sentiments. What is worthy of notice, moral corruptness and materialistic values are considered by Chernyshev and his followers to be the flaws of younger generation irrespectively of gender, but when it comes to internet pranks organized by ‘Check You’, it targets exclusively women. Chernyshev comments that

¹⁴⁷There are debates whether he is a real person

¹⁴⁸<http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁴⁹When the project was active on VK pages it was possible to order internet prank for targeted person after small payment of approximately 800 rubles (18 euro)

¹⁵⁰Note the agendered character of this phrasing

¹⁵¹<http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁵²<http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> accessed by 25.05.2014

Mostly, pranksters are guys. They are not interested in doing pranks to other guys. With girls it is much more interesting. It is like a game. And when you try this with a guy, you know that when he refuses he is either too lazy to go anywhere or is afraid of meeting a beautiful girl¹⁵³

‘Check You’ website¹⁵⁴ having a phrase ‘Destroying lives, ruining destinies’ as its motto, contains a manifesto of the project. This usage of destruction trope correlates both with social-tutovism of Tesak and with the logo and vocabulary of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’, abundantly using the word ‘destruction’. It also puts into question the alleged correctional goals of both communities. ‘Check You’ manifesto states that the rationale for their activism is the spread of commitment-free relationships and propaganda of sex in Russian media. It goes further, asserting that many girls now are unprepared for family relationships and instead looking for sugar daddies granting them an access to luxury lifestyles. In this manifesto ‘Check-You’ website is referred to as online ‘board of shame’, exposing frivolous women who have been lured by money into unfaithfulness. What is striking in such formulations is that the set of viewpoints associated with pick-up artistry informing this activism is not viewed by ‘Check You’ activists as condoning promiscuity, i.e. heterosexual male promiscuity is foregrounded as manly virtue of mastery and persistence while heterosexual female promiscuity as a sign of decay and corruption.

As for the absence of male names on this board of shame¹⁵⁵, ‘Check You’ manifesto explains it by using naturalized vision of male unbridled sexuality: firstly, pranks targeting males would not make a lot of sense since men will rarely refuse the possibility of having sex;

¹⁵³<http://rusrep.ru/article/2013/05/24/troll/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁵⁴<http://i-check-you.ru/about.html> In the following passage I am using the terminology from this manifesto

¹⁵⁵On previous ‘Check You’ websites there were a small number of pranks with males, about 5%, however present version of the website contains no references to this fact, i.e. the presence of men is eliminated and the manifesto is written in such a way as if from the very beginning ‘Check You’ activism targeted women only

secondly, societal tolerance of male infidelity is much higher, thereby making the whole enterprise less exciting. Thus, 'Check-You' manifesto justifies its moral activism by using double moral standard when judging male and female sexuality. The narrative of natural sex drive symbolically absolves men of any accusations of corruption. What is more striking, when admitting the pernicious consequences of societal decay, manifested in materialistic attitude in intimate relationships, 'Check You' holds women accountable for it.

3.4 On repentance videos and 'pedophile' hunt

In the previous section I mentioned the phenomenon of repentance videos¹⁵⁶, which were produced by women by request of 'Check You' activists as a means of redeeming the guilt and escaping the publication of photos and correspondence on the website. These short videos bear strange resemblance to the religious practice of confession. Women are asked to produce short speech, video record it and send to activists. In these speeches they admit their guilt and thank the activists or the website for the lesson they have learnt:

Thank you, 'Check You', it is an important lesson for me, I have never thought before that I behave like a whore. Now I am drastically changing my life. I want to thank this website, which helps to transform whores into normal women¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶Now all of them are available through the website <http://www.i-check-you.ru/video.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁵⁷From repentance video http://vk.com/video211766210_165311040 accessed by 25.05.2014

It happened so that I was duped by ‘Check You’. Many thanks for doing this. I am happy it happened because it drastically changed my life, and now I look at similar things differently. Girls, who trash ‘Check You’, remember that you are whores. Because ‘Check You’ is a real and useful project, which does real work, not just chatters. It saves the Internet and our lives from such whores¹⁵⁸

Through such formulations and the usage of thankful phrases in the videos ‘Check You’ activism is rendered respectable and elevated in its correctional mission. Women, however, are forced to accept definitional scripts of ‘Check You’ and refer to themselves in the past as ‘whores’ until activists have managed to reeducate them through the prank. Repentance videos thus embody the triumph of moral entrepreneurs in imposing their definitions of reality and justifying the righteousness of their actions, while presenting women as sinners. Pheterson remarks that disidentifying with prostitutes while struggling against the whore stigma is an ineffectual strategy of resistance, since those who are accused of it are both not allowed self-definition and exercise self-denial, because distancing oneself from the label ‘whore’ means denying the freedoms granted for men (1996: 12). It is surprising that pick-up ethos of male promiscuity and sexual conquest serving as ideological backdrop for ‘Check You’ community, which I described in previous subchapter, is never problematized; moreover, discordant critical voices of women, critiquing ‘Check You’ are discredited by using the same naming.

Repentance videos were usually commented by the subscribers, often voicing disbelief about whether a woman who once agreed to engage in commercial sex can ever be reformed. In this case it is not even the sex act per se which serves as solid enough reason to attribute

¹⁵⁸From repentance video http://vk.com/video211766210_165311045?hash=1e6ef77a54f90da1 accessed by 25.05.2014

women a fixed essence of ‘whores’, but mere agreement given in verbal form through messaging. Thereby, repentance videos which were planned as an act of “atonement” for wrongdoing further solidify misogynistic rhetoric of ‘Check-You’ through the usage of the trope of irredeemably corrupt women. This problematic of redemption and multiple allusions to irredeemable ‘whores’ put into question the whole purpose of ‘Check You’ activism and its correctional ethos. On the level of the interviews and manifesto the project clearly associates itself with the ‘noble’ goals of doing the right thing approved by society and making a change in the social mores. However, on a practical level activists seem to be seriously interested in perpetuating the whore stigma and not letting women to erase unpleasant incident from the past by creating new websites if the previous were banned. As I mentioned before, many targeted women have deleted their VK profiles to stop shaming, however now there is an anonymous activist on ‘Check You’ website¹⁵⁹ who persistently tracks these women and provides links to their newly created VK profiles if the old ones were deleted.

The terminology used by ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ designates traps and subsequent humiliation sessions organized by the activists for their unaware victim as ‘safari’. This linguistic choice is not neutral. Originally the word ‘safari’ was used to designate a big-game hunt in Africa and subsequently referred to tourist trips into African wildlife involving photographing of wild nature and animals. Both meanings figure in ‘Occupy pedophilia’ practice of luring people into a trap and using camera to document the torment. This recording of humiliation on camera and subsequent exposure online for shaming symbolizes the acts of physical violence. As Tesak said many times, he would have preferred to use direct physical violence against ‘pedophiles’, but he can not do this because it will lead to his imprisonment.

¹⁵⁹<http://www.i-check-you.ru/> accessed by 25.05.2014

Franklin notes how the perpetrators of anti-gay violence often refer to the thrill seeking motivation in committing assaults, foregrounding the excitement of preparation, rehearsal and peer participation (1999: 14-15). Her insight opens up an understanding of 'safari' as homosocial bonding experience accomplished through the chase and subsequent triumph over the sexual scapegoat. The choice of the words 'safari' and 'bait' connote demeaning comparison of persons targeted by 'Occupy pedophilia' with wild and dangerous animals (Wild because of their sexuality?), who have to be lured into a trap; and thus reinforces the sense of danger and threat which 'pedophiles' present to the society. What is striking is that through this linguistic framing the cyberspace is also presented as uncontrolled dangerous environment where pedophiles lurk, thereby weaving into state-led discourses on pedophilia described in the first chapter.

As Jewkes and Wykes have demonstrated in their discussion of 'cyber paed panics' in the UK (2012) such panics create the myth of 'dangerous stranger' hiding in the cyber space and draw away the attention from the child abuse happening in the 'safety of the home', usually perpetrated by heterosexual 'farther figure' (2012: 937)¹⁶⁰. Thus there are serious political consequences in stirring 'cyber paed panics': the private familial space of home is constructed as a safe harbor, and the possibility of heterosexual males being primarily implicated in child abuse is not taken into account. I consider this example relevant for 'Occupy pedophilia' activities. Not only this activism constructs 'pedophile' as a distinct type with a particular history and as a dangerous stranger lurking in the cyber space. It seriously misunderstands pedophilia as exclusively homosexual practice. Folk devils are constantly referred to by activists not only as 'pedophiles' but as 'pederasts' or 'homosexuals'. This

¹⁶⁰Their claim is backed up by the data from British anti-child abuse NGO, which indicates that 95% percent of children who experienced an instance of sexual abuse knew their abusers (Jewkes and Wykes 2012:937)

alignment manifests itself not only on the level of discourse: ‘Occupy pedophilia’ activists rarely use female adolescents as ‘baits’. Indeed, from Tesak’s various statements addressing this gender discrepancy a different meaning of this activism emerges. It does not indiscriminately protect children and adolescents from evil ‘pedophiles’ as it claims. As Tesak argues in his educational video on ‘pedophile hunt’:

If the girl is 12 years old and her body is developed as a woman’s body, the guy could not be called a pedophile from the medical point of view. Yes, it is a scoundrel which wanted to lure 14 year old girl for a mobile phone. A scoundrel, but not a pedophile. We are catching pedophiles. In extreme circumstances - pederasts who love boys. To me it is the same thing¹⁶¹

In the above quote heterosexuality is defined by Tesak as an appropriate erotic conduct, whereas taboos on intergenerational heterosexual sex are regarded in much milder ways than in the case of homosexual intergenerational contacts which are marked as abhorrent. Homosexuality is pathologized through alignment with pedophilia and pedophilia is misrepresented as exclusively homosexual practice. What is as well implied in blurring the lines between pedophilia and homosexuality is that hierarchies of sexual value remain well protected: heterosexuality becomes absolved from any blame, whereas the space of home and family is represented as safe from sexual abuse, violence or perversion.

¹⁶¹https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpbTIV9_Lh0 accessed by 25.05.2014

Chapter 4: Representing Sexual Difference. Punishment through Exposure

In this chapter I would like to analyze the work of representation done by ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’. As I made clear in the previous chapters, I conceptualize both corrective communities as instances of moral crusades against sexual vices, where people engaging in non-normative sexual practices are labeled by the community activists as ‘folk devils’ (Cohen 1972), worthy of punishment. I will argue in this chapter that the process of naming and punishment operates through scopic regimes (Gillian 2001) of exposure in the internet.

The question from which I start my inquiry is how sexual otherness is established, interpreted and represented by the moral activists? My initial assumption is that through the activities of ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’, people, engaging in non-normative sexual practices¹⁶² are represented as if they were ‘distinct species’, fixed types, completely and irrevocably defined by their sexual behavior. In opposition to their essentializing approach I would like to argue that ‘folk devils’ are constructed through the representational activities. Coherence of social values which are allegedly threatened is left unproblematic and taken-for-granted by the activists, presupposing the existence of a solid and homogenous moral ground in a diverse society. Plummer, while commenting on this way of defining ‘sexual deviancy’, notes that such an absolutist approach reifies otherwise complex society and renders it as if consensual (1975: 68).

¹⁶²In fact they are not even engaged in them, it is assumed by the activists of both communities, I will get back to this shortly.

To unpack the stigmatizing ideological work I see the representational activities of ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ as practices producing distinct meanings about sexual otherness. I will examine the operations through which specific visions of sexual difference are constructed. In so doing I will apply Hall’s account (1997) of constructionist approaches to representation that is among other things based on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and Saussurean discussion of signification. To specify my argument I have to add that the affectively charged sexual types: ‘whores’ in the case of ‘Check You’ and ‘pedophiles’ in the case of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’, are constructed through the regimes of online exposure, allegedly revealing the hidden ‘truth’ about targeted young women or men; and through the regimes of representation via videos, websites and texts, which try to fix particular meanings in place. It seems crucial that for the activists sexuality in general and stigmatized sexual practice in particular have the power to define the ‘inner core’ of the person. Foucault, writing about the proliferation of the discourses about sex in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe illustrates how the persecution of marginal sexualities ‘entailed an incorporation of perversions and a new specification of individuals’, through which a ‘homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology...’ (Foucault 1992: 17). Both communities I look at frame themselves as the projects of moral regulation aimed at controlling sexual deviancy and eradicating sexual vices, while their activity seem to produce an abundance of discourses and knowledges about non-normative sexual practices rather than repress sexual deviance. In his lecture on how to catch a pedophile¹⁶³, Tesak admits: ‘No one knows who the pedophiles are! These men usually have a job, family, and children’. This statement seems to

¹⁶³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpbTIV9_Lh0 accessed by 09.06.2014

be both driven by the desire to bridge the gap in knowledge and to uncover and unmask what is hidden by making ‘pedophiles’ visible and knowable.

4.1 (Mis)recognition

In his discussion of homosexual visibility, as an ultimate example of sexual ‘deviance’, Plummer notes that both perception and action are crucial for the recognition of homosexuality (1975: 178), which is mediated in its nature and thus allowing for the possibility of misrecognition and misattribution (1975: 179). Both points are relevant for the further discussion on the chain of substitutions, which is used by the activists of ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ to claim the truthfulness of their revelatory enterprises. I will delineate the process through which audiences and sympathizers of both communities are invited to recognize sexual others as guilty of moral vice. Firstly, in the case of ‘Check You’, online agreement of women given in the private correspondence to participate in monetized sexual exchange is equated with the actual practice of participation. To ‘prove’ this the screenshots of correspondence as well as nude photos which women have attached to it were publicly displayed on the pages of ‘Check You’ community. Thereby agreement to participate in practice is made to stand for practice. It seems crucial that screenshots of messages and photos endow the whole procedure with the status of unquestioned self-evidentiality and unmediated reality, thereby symbolically supporting truth claims made by ‘Check You’ activists.

Secondly, transgressive and tabooed sexual practice, standing low on the hierarchies of sexual value (Rubin 1984) and exposed by moral activists is equated with a stigmatized

identity, with an attendant presumed fixity of this identity, promising the repetition of behavior in future. As I mentioned in my theoretical framework, stigmatized status tends to be applied to the entire identity of the person (Herek 2004: 14). Sexual deviance reinforces this ascriptive dynamics due to the tendency to regard sexuality as innate and rooted within the individual (Rubin 1984: 275-276). Thus, corrective measures employed by both communities are legitimized as a reasonable and proper way to teach ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’ a lesson. As a creator of ‘Check You’ community Sergey Chernyshev mentioned in an online interview about the process of duping women:

Everything depends on seriousness of your intention. If you are a freak and have lots of free time, you can dupe 65-80% of girls using the Internet. If you do not have much time, 45-50%. It is always an individual process, if you have not succeeded in swindling the girl, it does not mean she is not a whore. Vey often with the second try you will succeed (...). Many of those girls who resisted, will be easily seduced in person. It is much easier to seduce them in person than via the Internet¹⁶⁴

The logic of this quote assumes that practically nothing can warrant women’s fidelity. It also foregrounds already mentioned virtue of manly persistence and mastery, characteristic of pick-up’s self-help ideology. Women, in turn, are represented in an essentialist way, reduced to moral corruptness, stigmatized sexuality, and as if deserving to be punished and shamed. In the final messages sent to women by ‘Check You’ activists, revealing that the bargain was a prank, women are often fixed through the naming as incorrigible ‘whores’:

‘How does it feel to be a rapacious whore?’¹⁶⁵;

¹⁶⁴ Interview available in Russian accessed by 25.05.2014 <http://www.royalcheese.ru/people/1683-iz-pervyh-ust-check-you-com.html>

¹⁶⁵ One of the final messages of ‘Check You’ prankster in the prank http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/169-tyagulskaya_ulyana.html accessed by 09.06.2014

‘Now you are officially a whore, the whole country knows it!’¹⁶⁶

‘How does it feel to be a whore like you? To cheat your husband? You have a 2 years old son and you are destroying a family! What kind of whore you are?!’¹⁶⁷

However this logic of argumentation suffers from some contradictory cracks. What is the purpose of moral correction entertained by ‘Check You’ activists, if the women cannot be absolved from guilt and practically every woman is implicated to be inherently guilty of ‘slutting’? Similarly, Tesak often remains skeptical of the effects which humiliation sessions have on ‘pedophiles’, who according to him, can continue correspondence with adolescents or create new profiles on dating sites immediately after humiliation sessions¹⁶⁸. As I argued in the section before, both communities in their position towards sexual scapegoats seem to be torn around the question of (ir)redeemability, navigating between the rhetoric of ‘destruction’ and the possibility of correction of sexual deviants.

In the parallel case of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’, agreement to go on a date with an adolescent (and the actual physical act of going to the park, flat, depending on the arranged place) is seen by the activists of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ as an unequivocal indicator of the willingness and readiness of the ‘pedophile’ to have a sexual encounter with an adolescent later during the date. In the second displacement, practice is equated with identity of ‘pervert’,

¹⁶⁶ Final message from the prank http://i-check-you.ru/cheboksaryi/165-evgeneva_katenok.html accessed by 09.06.2014

¹⁶⁷ Final message from the prank http://i-check-you.ru/kostroma/179-beletskaya_ekaterina.html accessed by 09.06.2014

¹⁶⁸ From the lecture on ‘how to catch a pedophile’: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpbTIV9_Lh0 accessed by 09.06.2014

who by the force of coincidence happens to be gay¹⁶⁹. Not surprisingly then, during video-recorded humiliation sessions ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists are never satisfied when alleged ‘pedophile’ mentions that he wanted simply to get to know the person first. They immediately shift the ‘dialogue’ towards the questions about sex, sexual positions, and sexual past of the person, making their victim accountable for the ‘perverse’ inclinations and practices in which he participated in the past or allegedly wanted to participate during the date. This ‘journey’ into the sexual history of the ‘pedophiles’ (average length of humiliation session is 30 minutes) pushed forward by unending questions of Tesak presents a twisted variation of the incitement to discourse mixing the stylistic features of police interrogation¹⁷⁰, journalistic interview, psychological examination and religious confession:

Tesak (energetically, just finished painting the rainbow on J’s shaved head, speaking to the camera): J. is 27 years old, he has a rainbow bald spot now, a paunch. What is your weight?

J (unwillingly): 85

Tesak (with scorn): 85 kilograms, so he is a fat dude¹⁷¹, ugly gomosek¹⁷². Are you a gomosek or bisexual? Or pedophile? Who are you? Pedophile or pederast?

J (unwillingly): Bi

Tesak (pensively): You are bi...So how did you come up with an idea to fuck a boy? How this idea came to your mind?

J (unwillingly): I don’t know

Tesak: Louder!

J: I don’t know

¹⁶⁹ ‘Occupy pedophilia’ activism defines itself as anti-pedophile, not anti-gay, though in practice this is of course not the case

¹⁷⁰ In his interviews Tesak repeatedly told the stories about the intricacies of police interrogation he went through during his first imprisonment. It is quite possible to assume that he applies some of the interrogatory techniques in his ‘interviewing’ during humiliation sessions.

¹⁷¹ Original statement in Russian is rather oxymoronic ‘jirny drisch’ which loosely means ‘fat skinny person’

¹⁷² Vulgar and demeaning word for homosexual in Russia

Tesak: Wait, you messaged the boy somehow. Come on, speak. Fuck! Repent! Quick! How it happened? Why have you decided to fuck the boy? Why have you decided? Why? Explain!

J: I don't even know

Tesak (energetically): How? Have you imagined that in your mind? Have you jerked off imagining this?

J: No

Tesak: Who is responsible for this? Was it the boy who seduced you?

J (uncertain): Probably it was me.

Tesak (excited): It was you who seduced him. What have you wrote to him? Tell! Repent!¹⁷³

Tesak seems to be interested in every aspect of his victim's existence: religious and political views, parental backgrounds and hobbies, linking almost each detail of personal biography to sexuality. Growing in the family without father, visiting chorus as hobby, identifying politically as liberal; causes and consequences of sexual 'abnormality' are abundant for Tesak. In his persistent and enthusiastic attempt to find out the tiniest details of his victim's sexual past Tesak never falls short of questions despite the reluctance of the interrogated. Foucault makes an apt remark on the interplay between pleasure, power and knowledge, arguing that pleasure comes from regulatory practices of 'exercising power that questions, monitors, watches, spies, searches out, palpates, brings to light' (1992: 19). Some of the questions posed by Tesak to his victims during humiliation sessions struck me by the degree of detailed awareness about marginal sexual practices. This awareness might stem from the culture of prison homosexuality in Russia, experienced by Tesak during his prison term and often narrated in the interviews¹⁷⁴. Homoerotic tension arising during some

¹⁷³Excerpt from the video filmed in Lviv, Ukraine

¹⁷⁴Prison homosexuality and prison male on male rape is a distinctive feature of Russian prison culture which is characterized by the existence of caste-like system where the lowest possible caste, treated in the worst way, is

humiliation sessions might be fruitfully linked to Foucauldian spirals of power and pleasure (1992: 19) present in the dynamics between interrogator and criminal, psychiatrist and deviant, examiner and examined. Indeed, there are humorous videos and internet memes speculating around the idea of Tesak having sadistic homosexual inclinations¹⁷⁵. Tesak himself is often present in the videos with the naked torso, sometimes wrapping his arm around the victim. Franklin writes about how gang-bang heterosexual rapes and anti-gay violence, apart from exhibiting and confirming masculinity, constitute instances of homosocial bonding, sometimes with thinly veiled aspects of homoeroticism (1998: 12-13). I will illustrate this point further by using a transcript of the dialogue from one of the videos, where homoerotic aspect is particularly striking:

Tesak (pointing towards his ‘comrades’ out of the camera frame): Look at those present here. Whom amongst them do you like? Whom would you want to seduce?

A: No one

Tesak: Whom would you want to ask out for a date? This one, with a beard, could you fight with him?

A: No

Tesak: And the one we sent as a bait. Is he fine? Ordinary guy, like one of those you had before.

A: He was too young

Tesak: How many guys did you have? Speak in the microphone!

Tesak pushes towards A’s face rainbow colored dildo used as a microphone during humiliation sessions. A. turns aside.

the one of the ‘abused’ (‘opushchennye’ in Russian), associated with passive homosexuality. This stigmatized status is ascriptive and can be incurred on the person without his knowledge (for example, by touching his lips during the night with the towel soaked in sperm) or touching his lips with penis. In one of the interviews Tesak eloquently spoke about how he was subjected to the attempt to be touched by a penis and how he resisted despite severe beatings. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6MhnYoIPUDU> accessed by 09-06.2014

¹⁷⁵See for example this video composed from the excerpts from various ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ videos featuring Tesak <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIZ2rtpZiZ0> accessed by 25.05.2014

Tesak (amazed): Have you ever sucked a dick? Hold it like this! Hold it! Otherwise I will take it from you and...(silenced phrase, possibly violent) Have you understood me or not?

A: Understood.

Tesak: What is your opinion of gay parades?

A: It is just a show.

Tesak: One has to do the real work, right? One has to screw each other.

A: Why 'screw'?

Tesak: Some romance, then screwing. Some beer drinking. I am too rude, ain't I?

A: Why 'screwing'?

Tesak: In the ass! How else can you do this: either ass or mouth! Have you ever licked someone's anus?

A: No

Tesak: Have you been licked?

A: No

Tesak: Could you stick this dick (pointing at dildo-microphone) in your ass?

A: No

Tesak: Have you ever been fucked by a dick like this?

A: No

Tesak: Do you have dick of this size? What size is your winkie? I am asking just to know what kind of traumas you can inflict on boys.

Representation is linked to symbolic power, which classifies, assigns meaning and marks the Other (Hall 1997: 259). Persistent focus on sexuality in the 'dialogue' between activists and 'pedophiles' during humiliation sessions, linking every single piece of personal information to sex, might constitute, according to Hall's understanding one of the techniques of stereotypical portrayal of difference (1997: 266). Such radical reductionism is pushed to the extreme when the victim is forced to use rubber dildo as a microphone, which is sometimes colored in rainbow colors to signify the alignment between homosexuality and pedophilia, which I discussed in the previous section.

4.2 Discursive construction of sexual others

Hall argues that ‘meanings are imbricated in relations of power’ (1997: 8). Unequal power relations between those who expose ‘the truth’ and those whose truth is exposed lead to the production of particular knowledges about the figures of ‘whores’ and ‘pedophiles’ through the practices of representation. Foucauldian understanding of power/knowledge complex is applicable here. Knowledge linked to power has the power to make itself true (Hall 1997: 33). Discourses advanced by moral activists sustain the regimes of truth about the sexuality of the scapegoats. These regimes are sustained in the context of mediated online communication and prevalent understandings of sexual stigma and sexual vice; through the equation of words with actions and actions with identity, through the statements made by moral activists about sexual others and mediated regimes of their representation.

‘Check You’ activists have created what they call a virtual ‘board of shame’, a website which contains the profiles of ‘exposed’ women, whose ‘truth’ has been revealed¹⁷⁶. At the present moment there are 156 cases of exposure collected on the website. This ‘virtual board of shame’¹⁷⁷, reminiscent of the aesthetics of ‘boards of shame’ during Soviet times¹⁷⁸, serves as a repository of perversion, and constitutes a quasi-scientific zeal in cataloguing, naming and shaming women who dared to transgress the borders of proper womanhood and the sacred borders between sexual intimacy and commerce. Cohen in his analysis of moral panics

¹⁷⁶ ‘Check-You’ website <http://www.i-check-you.ru/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁷⁷ ‘Check You’ activists expression

¹⁷⁸ See for example Kelly’s article mentioning this phenomenon ‘A Laboratory for the Manufacture of Proletarian Writers’: The Stengazeta (Wall Newspaper), Kul’turnost’ and the Language of Politics in the Early Soviet Period’ (2014)

about the Mods and Rockers in England calls the portrayals of similar sort as ‘deviance inventories’ (2002: 31), allowing for ‘full-scale demonology’ to develop (2002: 31)

Similar passion for collecting and cataloguing ‘perversity’ is present in the joint endeavor of multiple ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ communities uploading the videos on one website¹⁷⁹, quite predictably having the motto ‘For the future’ as well as an imprint of child’s palm as their logo. The caption below the logo says: ‘Interregional social movement’. The website contains 100 ‘pedophile’ profiles with their real names (when applicable), pseudonyms given to them by ‘Occupy pedophilia’ activists, city, category (‘boy lover’, ‘girl lover’ or ‘pedophiles with criminal records’) and rating. The rating is composed by the votes of the viewers and has a golden drop button similar in its functioning to Facebook ‘like’ button. In this case golden drop refers to ‘golden shower’ sexual practice (both standing for an ultimate sign of sexual perversity and actual humiliation practice used in some of ‘Occupy pedophilia’ videos). Golden drop symbol also refers to the imaginary channel of ‘Occupy pedophilia’ named ‘Golden rain’, mock the only oppositional TV channel in Russia ‘Rain’¹⁸⁰. Such stance is explained by Tesak’s uneasy relations with liberal Russian opposition¹⁸¹ which I examined in detail in previous sections. The passion for naming and typifying sexual transgressors, giving them ‘analytical, visible, permanent reality’ (Foucault 1992: 18) is particularly striking in the titles of the videos, which repeat the ways ‘Occupy pedophilia’ nickname their victims. As Tesak admitted in one of the interviews, he is interested in creating the ‘social portrait’¹⁸² of ‘pedophile’. The list of names on this website which refer to Russian slang, popular culture and prison jargon; global popular culture; age, national, ethnic

¹⁷⁹ <http://antipedofil.org/> accessed by 09.06.2014

¹⁸⁰ ‘Dozhd’ in Russian transcription. <http://tvrain.ru/>

¹⁸¹ See his interview in Russian <http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/09/18/tesak>

¹⁸² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTSdcd_dqN8#t=211

and occupational differences; desire and lust; organizational difficulties during humiliation sessions; stereotypical portrayals of homosexuality, which all exemplify the effort of the activists to document, specify, give ‘pedophiles’ distinct shapes and reality which they lacked before :

Bunny; Lord of the rings; Sweet tooth; Cutie; Unpunctual; Old new; Gentleman; Bisexual stylist; Child guardian; Blue Badger; Italian pedophile; Terrorist-dinosaur; Sweet cheburek; Guest from Moscow; Old profligate; Lucky tractor driver; Two blue doctors; Lustful director; Driver-philosopher; The owner of American company; Old Romeo; Versifier; Omar the runner; Masquerade; Gray gay (the victim of ophthalmologist); Naked whiner; Sucker-rigger; Sportsman; Accountant-pedophile; Naked wrestler; Glamorous screenwriter; Singer-carpenter; Tender Uzbek; Missionary; Wet conductor; The truth about officers; Crybaby Uzbek; Insidious make-up artist; Magical Chechen¹⁸³

In his discussion of discursive approach to representation advanced by Foucault, Hall mentions that not only subjects are produced through discourse, i.e. the figures of the madman or the homosexual, personifying discourses about madness or homosexuality, but also that ‘discourses themselves construct the subject-positions from which they become meaningful and have effects’ (1997: 40). The subject-position is a place for a potential viewer or observer to make sense of discourse and to become a bearer of its power/knowledge (Hall 1997: 40). In relation to this it is worthy to ask what subject positions are offered to the viewer of the ‘Check You’ website to identify with? As viewers we are invited to engage in relationships of looking as if ‘Check You’ activists, organizing internet prank, would be looking at women. But more importantly, the viewer is invited to occupy the position of a client evaluating nude female bodies to see if they are worth the price offered to be paid. The layout of the website

¹⁸³Names of the videos uploaded by various ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ communities on the website <http://antipedofil.org/> accessed by 25.05.2014

resembles the design of websites of highly paid sex workers, who are called ‘individualki’ in Russian; where the visitor can browse the catalogue of profiles, trace them geographically, apply various search filters etc. Thereby the potential viewer of ‘Check You’ website is doing two kinds of looking, and is having two positions to identify with: either heterosexual male activist of ‘Check You’ or heterosexual male client of female sex worker.

As I mentioned in previous chapter, during the ‘Check You’ pranks women were asked through private messaging to produce nude photographs of themselves and certain parts of their bodies, so that the ‘client’ could be sure that everything is fine. Usually the request of photographs was justified as either a proof of authenticity or as a teaser for future client, demanding close-ups of breasts and genitalia. How to understand this fragmentation request from ‘Check You’ activists? Hall in his discussion on stereotyping in the representation of difference distinguishes the representational practice of fetishism (1997: 264). He points out that one of its effects is a technique of symbolic dismantling: when a portion of a body is taken for a subject (Hall 1997: 266). Hall argues that fetishism involves disavowal, when the fascination or desire is both indulged and denied (1997:267) Fetishism thus constitutes a ‘having-it-both-ways strategy’ for representing tabooed topics, which ‘allows observer to go on looking while disavowing the sexual nature of their gaze’ (Hall 1997: 268). Could this partly account for the extreme popularity which ‘Check You’ community had among young male subscribers at the peak of its fame during spring 2013? The spectacle of corrupt ‘whore’ masterfully exposed by ‘Check You’ activists, permits indulging into unrestrained online voyeurism, being simultaneously disgusted and sexually aroused by tabooed sexual practice.

Saussurean understanding of signification can provide an insight into the production of the meaning about sexual difference in the cases I am looking at. If it is the difference

between signs that signifies, then, to have a distinct species of 'whore', there should be the figure of 'good, faithful woman', to have a figure of 'pervert' or 'pedophile' there should be a vision of 'normal' masculinity. This understanding of signification correlates with interactionist accounts of social/sexual 'deviance', where existence of 'deviance' is inconceivable without unproblematic normality, from which it departs (Goffman 1963, Plummer 1975). Once again, Soviet example of disciplinary regulation of workers and citizens through 'boards of shame' (also known as 'black boards') is at place here: to put someone's name on such a board was meant as way to shame and influence the behavior of wrongdoers through the regime of public visibility. In contradistinction to 'boards of shame', 'boards of honor' (also known as 'red boards') have existed, where the exemplary workers' photographs and names were displayed. As is the case with binary oppositions in general, there are hierarchical relations governing the binary pair. In the pairs 'board of shame'/'board of honor', 'faithful woman'/'whore', 'perverted' masculinity/ 'normal' masculinity, homosexual/heterosexual, one of the items is construed as lowlier than the other. Individual exposures fabricated by 'Check-You' are indeed presented with this logic in mind: after 'revelatory' screenshots of private messages, there are screenshots of personal profile of targeted woman along with her photos (both nude, produced for the alleged 'client' and everyday photos taken by activists from woman's profile). Through this juxtaposition of virtual presentation of the self constructed by woman in her VK profile with 'truthful' alternative account offered by 'Check-You' activists, binary vision of 'faithful woman' vs. 'whore' is actually reinforced while the noble enterprise of unmasking, allowing for the things to take on their 'true' shapes, is elevated in its mission. As I demonstrated in the previous sections, Sergey Chernyshev is quite certain in advancing the viewpoint that every woman can be lured into sex for money, it only depends on the skill of 'Check-You' pranksters. Indeed, abovementioned mixing of screenshots offers an apocalyptic vision of menace, which

women represent. Here she is, hugging her boyfriend on the profile picture, having ‘in love’ as relationship status, taking selfie in the shopping mall, looking like an ordinary girl next door having public VK profile. Could one even suspect her of moral depravity if it is not for the righteous Check-You activists, enlightening their fellow brothers about what is really going on?

As Hall suggests in the chapter on stereotyping techniques, the Us/Them binary also facilitates the bonding together into ‘imagined community’ of ‘all of Us who are ‘normal’’ (1997: 258). ‘Normal masculinity’ of ‘Occupy pedophilia’ activists is foregrounded by excessive muscular bodily display and compulsory heterosexuality. Preoccupation with muscular body is a trend established by Tesak, but further followed by other activists of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ and by recent sub-projects of the movement as ‘National Sport Organization Restrukt Sport’. The contrast between muscular bodies of ‘Occupy pedophilia’ activists is made especially striking during video-recorded humiliation sessions, where non-muscular bodies of alleged ‘pedophiles’ become marked and diminished through the combination of verbal, symbolic and physical humiliation. During one of the humiliation sessions while shaving the head of his victim in reverse Mohawk hairstyle Tesak explicitly draws upon the vocabulary of binary oppositions while, expressing the insurmountable boundary between himself and his victim:

I have Mohican hairstyle and you will have a hairstyle which will signify that you are against those like me. You are against homophobia, aren’t you? Against homophobia, against racism, against fascism, against national socialism?...I have a Mohawk, it means that I don’t like fags, I am not a homophobe, I hate you, I despise you, I am not

a homophobe, I am not afraid of you. I am racist, I am Nazi, my haircut is like that and yours is reversed, because you are against all of this.¹⁸⁴

Hall mentions that stereotypical representation occurs when inequalities of power are present, where power is usually directed against already subordinate or excluded group (1997: 258). By targeting already stigmatized community, especially in the climate of institutionalized state homophobia in Russia and presenting them as dangerous and pathological through affiliation with pedophilia, it is not surprising that ‘Occupy pedophilia’ movement manages to find a lot of supporters. Birthday greeting published on 8 of May 2014 on the official VK page of ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ community refers to Tesak as “a man who caught with his own hands huge number of pedophiles”. Online petition against criminal prosecution of Tesak, (whose arrest has been extended until 10 of June), addressed to Investigative Committee of the Russian Prosecutor General's Office has recently reached its 100000 signatures goal¹⁸⁵, which means that now this online initiative will have to be taken into consideration by Russian parliament¹⁸⁶

The central tenet of the constructionist approach to meaning and representation is that things and actions take on meaning and become objects of knowledge in discourse (Hall 1997: 30). In the present chapter I have analyzed two regimes of representation of gender and sexual difference offered by ‘Check You’ and ‘Occupy Pedophilia’ activists. I have looked at how these communities produce and fix the subjects of their discourses: figures of ‘whore’ and ‘pedophile’. The peculiarity and interest of both cases

¹⁸⁴Excerpt from the video http://vk.com/video174430997_167192159?list=1d04e1661c10c0f922 accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁸⁵The petition has 100103 signatures. <http://www.onlinepetition.ru/остановить-уголовное-преследование-максима-марцинкевича/petition.html> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁸⁶According to the president Vladimir Putin’s statement from 06.02.2012

lies in the fact that representational practices serve as practices of moral regulation and punishment, perpetuating the stigma of sexual difference. The scopis regimes of 'Occupy pedophilia' and 'Check You' operate through rendering sexual otherness visible. This type of visibility produces the equation of what is visible with the knowledge about persons represented. What is usually invisible is exposed, made public and visible and is equated with what is known, moreover with something which speaks the truth of the person. Scientific-like manner of classifying, categorizing and cataloguing sexual others creates the impression of credibility and diligence of the activists, as well as a sense of seriousness of the threat which sexual others present due to their multiple number. Specific visions foregrounded by 'Occupy pedophilia' and 'Check You' present sexual difference in hierarchical ways and might have diverse social effects for those who are represented, for the future projects of moral regulation and for the politics of LGBTQ visibility in Russia. As for 'Check You' it has already produced a homologous offspring which has learnt a lesson from the quick ban of the community in VK. Closed men-only communities named 'Hens of...' ¹⁸⁷ are now mushrooming on the pages of VK. It all started from the community 'Hens of Tyumen' which received some media coverage and provoked a controversy in the internet ¹⁸⁸. These communities, having the phrase "Let's expose all the hens/bitches" as their motto, are dedicated to exposing the private information about female inhabitants of the city by providing 'first-hand' experience from the fellow male members ¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷Put the name of big Russian or Ukrainian city. There are over 30 of these closed communities present in VK at the moment. I will list links to some of them: <http://vk.com/chelnychk>, community in Naberezhnye Chelny, more than 40000 of subscribers by 25.05.2014; http://vk.com/koko_kiev community in Kiev, over 44000 subscribers by 25.05.2014; <http://vk.com/moodo> community in Tyumen more than 24000 subscribers by 25.05.2014

¹⁸⁸On this controversy this may serve as an introductory article <http://lenta.ru/news/2014/03/07/tumen/> accessed by 25.05.2014

¹⁸⁹ See for example the interview with creator of Kiev community in Russian with the headline 'Whores should suffer' http://vkurse.ru/article/Kiev_Chickens18+/ accessed by 25.05.2014

Conclusion

In this work I have examined two Russian digital moral activisms, which spearhead moral crusades against sexual scapegoats by using the resources of social media network VK. I conceptualized them as projects of moral regulation stirring moral panics about marginal sexual behaviors. I have paid particular attention to the figures of moral entrepreneurs to reveal how the projects of moral regulation of others are linked with the regulation of the self and normative visions of sexuality and gender. The analysis of scopie regimes of representation of sexual difference shows how regulatory effort to punish deviants and desire to know who they are leads to the proliferation of discourses about sexual others. Through the particular dynamics of exposure, punishment and representation sexual otherness is rendered visible and made relevant by linking homosexuality with pedophilia or through allusions to the threats to gender norms, family or children. This systematic misrepresentation and negative visibility does disservice to the already stigmatized. My research also demonstrated that the premises upon which both cases of moral activism are built contain contradictory and discriminatory logics. The main contradiction seems to be a dialectics of redeemable and irredeemable sexual deviant, challenging the legitimacy of the projects of moral regulation and correction. I have shown how this vision of irredeemability might be rooted in the entrenched ways of essentialist thinking about sexuality and sexual stigma. I have demonstrated how the context of state-orchestrated anti-gay and cyber paed panics provides fertile soil for the regulatory projects which I examined.

This thesis only tangentially explored the interlinking of homosociality, homoeroticism, masculinity and nationalism inherent in the regulatory projects as well as the role of pleasure in surveillance and looking. Another possible direction for future research could be developing and critically applying the concept of moral panic to analyze the present conservative moment in Russia. Current processes of state-led moral panicking nourished by pro-government media as well as repressive measures aiming to regulate private lives and stripping citizens of their rights are developing with alarming speed and need to be analyzed and fixed through research. Chances are that subsequent years will bring harsher reaction. An assault on women's reproductive rights might be underway. Critical language needs to be developed to analyze the state-led assault on rights and meanings.

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Web pages of communities

Main VK pages of 'Occupy Pedophilia'

<http://vk.com/okkypay> ; http://vk.com/okkupay_pedofilyay

VK page of Tesak

http://vk.com/marcinkevich_official

List of available humiliation videos

http://vk.com/videos-41966408?section=album_45743487

VK pages and websites of 'Occupy Narkophilia' and 'Occupy Alkophilia'

http://vk.com/occupay_drugs; <http://occupaynark.ru/> ; <http://vk.com/public62772961>

Websites, VK pages of Restrukt Movement

<http://restrukt.me/>; <http://restruct-life.com/>; http://vk.com/restruct_life

<http://vk.com/restruktsport88>

YouTube channel of Restrukt Movement

<http://www.youtube.com/user/RestruktLife>

Website with humiliation videos of all 'Occupy Pedophilia' branches

<http://antipedofil.org/>

Pick-up websites and forums

<http://www.pickupforum.ru/>; <http://forum.pickup.ru/>; <http://www.pickup.ru/>,

<http://www.lover.ru/>; <http://www.rmes.ru/>

‘Check You’ website with the archive of the pranks

<http://www.i-check-you.ru/>

List of the pranks used as sources in this thesis

http://i-check-you.ru/almaty/226-Unalbaeva_Makpal.html

http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/44-mastakova_ilona.html

http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/47-ulanina_chechevitsina_katya.html

http://i-check-you.ru/moskva/169-tyagulskaya_ulyana.html

http://i-check-you.ru/cheboksary/165-evgeneva_katenok.html

http://i-check-you.ru/kostroma/179-beletskaya_ekaterina.html

Repentance videos used in this thesis:

http://vk.com/video211766210_165311040

http://vk.com/video211766210_165311045?hash=1e6ef77a54f90da1

