

**The articles before us are the product of a long term authoress work in providing psychological assistance to women and girls of lesbian orientation, and working within educational programs in the field of diversity for numerous women and mixed nongovernmental organizations. The articles are published for Labris psychological web counseling.**

### **MEETING THE LOCAL LESBIAN SCENE – “IS THIS ME?”**

Mirroring themselves in the existing lesbian scene here, a great number of girls and women try to realize their personal lesbian identity by joining the scene or staying aside. This is either because they remain unwilling to identify with the picture in the mirror, or simply because they do not know how to do this. They become faced with the overlapping of many important dimensions and often find themselves in sort of a dimensional whirlpool – all this in a very complicated social context already.

It is not necessary to go into details here describing the homophobia present in our society, while it might be more important to point to its influence on internalized homophobia – the fear of the individual’s own sexual orientation that is different from the one of the majority, and sometimes the hatred towards oneself as being different. Moreover, it is certain that the question whether lesbianism is a healthy sexual choice or not will be repeated for dozens of years to come, since girls and women who have identified as lesbians at one moment make their way courageously – by creating a graphical image of the cutout that tiptoes out of the general population whose discourse about different sexual choices contain little affirmativeness. At the same time, it is a basic human right to be not just a cutout but a legitimate, equal part of the whole, which means to be as visible as anybody else, without fear. Therefore, it is a huge step that a girl or a woman needs to overcome in order to give herself the right to love another woman as a lover.

### **The Same and the Specific**

It is of utter importance to demystify the life of a lesbian or the joint life of two lovers. Demystification is one of the target topics aimed towards general, but also within the lesbian public. In a way, it represents a condition in case there is an authentic need for finding one’s place within the whole. It is necessary to teach the majority population about lesbian existence as well as change «knowing» of lesbianism through the most negative stereotypes. The members of the lesbian community meet with all that which is conditioned by a broader context as something that has little “permeability” for lesbianism as usual practice and it is important to distinguish it from everything else that falls under usual practice for girls and women of any sexual orientation.

Girls, that is young women frequently have difficulties in distinguishing the usual adolescent «torments» which generally accompany growing up and the gradual acquisition of life experience from the specificity of the lesbian existence. An example for this can be a situation where girls account for all their problems in the relationship with their parents to the parents’ suspicion or knowledge about their lesbianism; while the whole is actually made up of the previous relation to the parents as well as the usual adolescence process of separation, where both parents and children participate and where difficulties are expected in abandoning the patterns that all up-until-then relations had followed (the parents are sometimes slower in seeing their children become young women with needs and tactics in solving problems on their own, while “children” rush through the individualization process with big, often unrealistically ambitious steps – in this interaction there is often a discrepancy in the tempo of separation and respect for the mutual autonomies). It is clear that the previous relationship with the parents and the process of separation from the parents make the sameness through which young people go through regardless of their sexual orientation. What is special here are the obstacles that girls of lesbian orientation face and most often have to do with the judgment that parents show for this orientation that connect to the possible follow up in the form of specific prohibitions, punishments etc.

For somewhat older women there is also a dilemma whether they really meet with the specificities of lesbian existence or is actually, e.g. the area of building emotional relationships a normally complex mystery to all regardless of sexual orientation. Making the space where your relationship will run safely is often achieved by managing, building “micro space” where you are open about the love nature of your relationship for a certain number of persons, while the spheres such as primary family or work space often remain “protected” from this information. Of course, this is very justifiable when keeping in mind that any coming out of lesbian sexual orientation makes an inevitable change, but keeping this information secret also has its consequences in the degree of uneasiness that women bear as an integral part of themselves (this is something that they very hardly give up). It is very difficult to extend this micro area and truly live the well-known axiom of “personal is political”. In distinguishing the general and the specific, in this case the general is learning communication skills and negotiations within the emotional relations, handling the crisis etc, which is often lacking no matter what sexual orientation is in question.

Sexualization as one of the light motifs of this type of diversity can sometimes look logical, because apparently it terminologically explains the term “sexual diversity” itself. However, this is a multi-faceted medal, since sexualization seen firsthand often supports negative stereotypes of lesbians, both with the majority population and with the lesbians themselves. The imperative that lesbian identity is often valued by accomplished sexual contacts/relationships and the pressure which makes it difficult to utter “No, I have never had any relationship (often neither with girls nor with men)”, inevitably resembles one of the criteria of “measuring the successfulness” in heterosexual world which we often want to distance from and proclaim the women culture different and stepping out of the notoriously mentioned patriarchy. This, not so scarcely seen imperative, sometimes results in (young) women resorting to various explanations such as previous pretended heterosexuality or we hear vaguely “Yes, I had some relationships before” with no further explanation. In any case, one can imagine the degree of uneasiness and how it affects the self-esteem.

And finally, in accounting “the same and the specific” stands the fact that between lovers there can occur the problem of violence in emotional relationship. The same phenomenon of the internalized homophobia represents only one factor that may provoke abuse. This problem is one of the taboos since it is unwillingly recognized as a similarity with hetero relations and also brings into spotlight the axiom that women who love women often state and this is about “women relationships being different”.

### ***My Place in the Continuum***

Girls and women of lesbian orientation often go down the path from the exclusiveness which authentically belongs to this existence (sometimes creating a ghetto where they finally have the possibility of identification in similarities) to blending with the dominant habits and life style of the majority. Where in this continuum girls and women will find themselves, mostly depends on the prehistory they have, on how they will manage at the existing lesbian scene, as well as, sometimes crucially important, internalized homophobia. They go through serious and deep dilemmas while searching for their own, the safest modality. There are different ways of managing:

1. Entering and exiting the ghetto in trying to unite the worlds (majority and sexually different) either because you have not yet told anyone that you fall in love with women or because you idealistically wish for the possibility of such unity.
2. Dwelling almost exclusively in the ghetto that provides the necessary protection and benevolent public where one can function more easily since one does not need to hide the essential part of self. In the ghetto there are at least two groups: a) the women activists who often, driven by so called “political correctness” remain in the ghetto and here they achieve the maximum of all of their identities, personal and professional; b) others who, under any condition, do not want any form of lesbian or feminist political engagement – but solely see the function of the scene in meeting other women. Ghetto, in one of its outcomes, makes the other “real world” distant (sometimes also intensely frightening) and the ghetto proclaims one of its aspects i.e. the virtual reality, to be the true reality.

3. Gravitating towards hetero world or permanent withdrawal into oneself due to:

- a) The lesbian circles are experienced as being threatening (according to the label of the previously described sexualization) or as it is sometimes heard when activists working on lesbian human rights are talked about: “They are very well educated, they work on something all the time, there is nothing for me here”, or
- b) There is no identification with the lesbians they meet (lesbian identity includes the variety of colors in its realization and there can be e.g. confusion or antipathy towards the “butch-femme” stereotype or this can even provoke defiance – again there is a question of the same and the specific; an example of the identification obstacle can also be the generation gap; there seem to be two generations that make the lesbian scene in some periods); or women can be driven by an authentic recognition that in loving other women in a sexual way does not represent a similarity that can instantly form comradeships or friendships – when out of all this you recognize yourself as a person with considerably different interests (“I’m not only a lesbian in my life”), or the identification is prevented by, again, internalized homophobia. A permanent withdrawal of women and girls into themselves can result in never forming emotional relationships but more likely assuming the stand of “a sympathizer” of lesbianism as sexual preference.

And here, of course, the forms of managing and self organizing of women do not end...

To conclude...

One of the forms of managing (internalized) homophobia can surely be the organized investment in the illumination and, to some degree, changing the image of the sexually different. This requires an active lesbian movement that we cannot claim to have at this time. Until then, less systematic ways of influence need to be invented.

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