



CULTURE AND HISTORY

– STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS



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FORORD



Dette nummer af Culture and History er et temanummer om LGBT+-studier, og er redigeret af studielektor i historie, Peter Edelberg ved Saxo-Instituttet.

I forbindelse med dette nummer vil redaktionen gerne sige farvel til Kristoffer Maribo og Louise Kjærgaard Depner. De har været skønne kolleger i den tidligere redaktion, og vi siger tak for tro tjeneste, og god vind i fremtiden.

Den nuværende redaktion består af studielektor i historie, ph.d., Peter Edelberg, ph.d.-stipendiat i arkæologi, Margaréta Hanna Pintér, ph.d.-stipendiat i græsk og latin, Valentina Orrù, og ph.d.-stipendiat i historie Rune Korgaard. Fra og med næste nummer vil adjunkt i etnologi, ph.d. Katy Kelsey Overstreet indtræde i redaktionen.

Culture and History er et tidsskrift, der almindeligvis publiceres online, og udgiver artikler forfattet af studerende og nyligt dimitterede ved Saxo-Instituttet, Københavns Universitet. Formålet er at give studerende fra instituttets forskellige fagligheder mulighed for at publicere artikler baseret på projekter, opgaver eller specialer og dermed dels formidle deres indsigter, dels prøve kræfter med forskningsartikelgenren. Tidsskriftets artikler udkommer både i temanumre, blandede numre og som fortløbende enkeltudgivelser og redigeres af en fast redaktion, eventuelt i samarbejde med gæsteredaktører, herunder studerende, som i fællesskab tager stilling til indkomne forslag og sørger for mulig fagfællebedømmelse. Tidsskriftet var oprindeligt støttet af Københavns Universitets U-2016-projekt, Undervisningsbaseret forskning.

God læselyst!

Redaktionen

This issue of Culture and History is a thematic issue on LGBT+ studies, edited by teaching associate professor in history, Peter Edelberg at the Saxo-Institute.

With this issue, the editorial board has said farewell to Kristoffer Maribo and Louise Kjærgaard Depner. We thank them for their service, and wish them all the best in the future.

The current editorial board consists of teaching associate professor in history, PhD, Peter Edelberg, PhD fellow in archeology, Margaréta Hanna Pintér, PhD fellow in Greek and Latin, Valentina Orrù, and PhD fellow in history, Rune Korgaard. With the coming issue, assistant professor in ethnology, Katy Kelsey Overstreet will join the editorial board.

Culture and History, which is usually published online, presents articles by students at the Saxo Institute at the University of Copenhagen. The aim is to provide students from the institute's different disciplines an opportunity to publish articles based on projects, essays or Master's theses, thereby presenting their findings and acquiring experience with writing research papers. The journal publishes both special thematic issues, mixed volumes and separate single articles and is edited by an editorial committee, sometimes in collaboration with theme editors, including students. The editors jointly decide on article proposals and take care of the peer review process. The journal was originally supported by University of Copenhagen's U-2016 project Teaching-based Research.



Forside: Fotografi fra Nationalmuseets samlinger er et loftsmaleri fra Grevinde Danners lejlighed i Ny Vestergade 13, tilflyttet i 1863. Lejligheden var blevet udsmykket af en rig tømrerhandler C.L. Maag i 1811 efter tidens antik-inspirerede mode af blandt andet malerne G. Hilker, P.C. Skovgaard og Constantin Hansen. Anvendes med Nationalmuseets tilladelse.

Front page: Photograph from the collections of the National Museum. Ceiling painting from the apartment of Countess Danner, Ny Vestergade 13. Used with permission.

INTRODUCTION

LGBT+ STUDIES

AT THE SAXO INSTITUTE

By:
Peter Edelberg
History



The last 5-6 years have experienced a boom in LGBT+ history in Denmark. In this introduction, I will shortly describe the major projects that have contributed to LGBT+ history in Denmark in recent years. Then I will introduce the articles in this special issue of *Culture and History – Student Research Papers* with the theme: LGBT+ studies. They have been written across several disciplines and sections at the Saxo Institute: history, ethnology, and the international section, Danish Culture Courses. Hopefully, they show the deep and committed interest of both Danish and international students in this field and can thus encourage further anchoring of LGBT+ studies.

Three major projects have in recent years contributed to our knowledge of LGBT+ history in Denmark and further across Scandinavia: The NordiQueer Project 2019-2022, the CHAD Project 2021-2024, and the Queer Kvinder (Queer Women) Project 2022-2026.

The project ‘A Nordic Queer Revolution? Homo- and Trans-Activism in Denmark, Norway and Sweden 1948-2018 (NordiQueer)’ gathered five scholars and an associated PhD fellow under the leadership of professors Jens Rydström (University of Lund) and Tone Hellesund (University of

Bergen). From Denmark, I participated and explored Scandinavian gay and lesbian activism from 1948-2021 (Edelberg 2024a; Edelberg 2024b).

At the Center for Gender, Sexuality and Difference at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures (NORS) at University of Copenhagen, the project ‘A Cultural History of Aids in Denmark (CHAD)’ resulted in a book that for the first time described and analyzed the cultural, political, and social history of hiv/aids in Denmark in the 1980s and 1990s (Nebeling Petersen et al. 2024) as well as several articles. The project was led by associate professor Michael Nebeling Petersen.

At Roskilde University an ongoing project on queer women in Danish history, ‘New Stories of Same-Sex Relations 1880-2020 (Queer Women)’, has already resulted in a book on protolesbian history in the period 1870-1920 (Andreassen 2025), as well as several articles. The project is led by professor in communication, Rikke Andreassen.

Other individual projects should be mentioned. In 2024, Danish historian, Jacob Preene started a 4-year PhD scholarship at the University of Örebro in Sweden on the project ‘History of Trans Activism in Scandinavia, 1960s to 2000s’, focusing on Denmark and Sweden. Another Danish-born PhD fellow, Christoffer Koch Andersen, is currently doing a project on ‘Codes of Life, Codes of Death: Tracing the (Im)possibility of Trans Lives in Algorithmic Assemblages’, also drawing on Danish data, at the University of Cambridge. In 2024, newly retired Danish historian, Karin Cohr Lützen, published an updated version of her seminal 1986-book, ‘Hvad hjertet begærer – Kvinders kærlighed til kvinder i 200 år (What the Heart Desires: Women’s Love of Women During 200 Years)’ (Lützen 2024).

This revolution in Danish LGBT+ history is truly astonishing, but unfortunately it might fizzle out. Still, no tenured scholar with designated research time, hired at a Danish historical department, with history of women, gender or sexuality as their primary field of inquiry, exist, to say nothing of tenured researchers at history departments with LGBT+ history as their primary field of inquiry. Luckily, the Gender Studies department at the University of Copenhagen, as well as the Department of Communication and Culture at Roskilde University has turned towards history in recent years, as we have seen, but their interest might go in other directions in the future. To ensure that we continue to produce LGBT+ historical studies, we need the historical departments to take responsibility, while historical projects at other departments will only enrich a cross-disciplinary investigation of history. One might also note the ‘brain drain’, the literary scholar Dag Heede once

remarked, when he noted that both younger and older Danish scholars who wished for positions where they could explore queer studies, would flee to e.g. Sweden. Not much has happened since with regards to designated positions or PhD scholarships in the field of queer history.

This special issue combines perspectives on LGBTQ+ studies from both history and ethnology students. Also, international students have contributed with a view on Denmark from the outside. Two articles outside of the theme, but serendipitously close to the theme of sexuality, minority and marginality, have been added to the issue.

In the first two articles, history students Stine Søby Fogh and Jacob Leisner conducts critical historical analyses of twentieth century history of sexuality. Leisner investigates an early Danish gay rights manifesto of 1954, and its peculiarly useful contradictory rhetorics, while Fogh traces the impact of (in)famous police inspector, Jens Jersild of the Copenhagen Vice Squad and his overlooked influence on the curriculum of sexual education in schools.

Ethnology student, Maria Louise Østengaard-Sejersen follows with an exploration of liquid gender identity in contemporary queer performance art. Another ethnology student, Thea Yde Petersen follows with a critical analysis of two surveys of the well-being of LGBTQ+ people in Danish workplaces and their widely differing results.

Two international students conclude the theme of the issue. Clara Rieger analyzes the importance of queer spaces based on her study of the lesbian/queer bar Vela in Copenhagen, and David Laufer explores the (im)possibility of living as a digital citizen in Denmark (who prides itself on its thorough digitization) if you are not cis-gendered.

Two articles outside of the theme follow. Emil Theodor Hansen studies slavery in ancient Athens and the socio-economical aspects of enslaved wet nurses, and Nuala Tranter discuss the male and, not least, the female gaze inside the harem during European colonialism. These two articles beautifully demonstrate how marginalization and sexualization are not just issues for LGBTQ+ or queer persons in history.

All in all, the articles illustrate the interest in LGBTQ+ studies or history and sexuality across the Saxo Institute and demonstrate what the students can achieve and contribute to the ongoing studies of sexuality, gender, marginalization and inclusion.



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EN INDPODNING AF HETEROSEKSUALITET

Jens Jersilds indflydelse på seksualundervisning

Af:
Stine Søby Fogh
Historie



ABSTRACT: This article examines the ideas of Inspector Jens Jersild on sexuality, youth and childhood and his broader impact on sex education. Prior research has identified Jersild as a central figure in the debate on sexuality during the 1950s and has indicated his impact on sex education. I examine Jersild's ideas on sexuality, youth and childhood and assess his influence on the governmental guidelines for sex education in 1961 and 1971. Through sex education, Jersild sought to foster heterosexuality and discourage other sexual categories. The guidelines reflect a governmental desire to institutionalize Jersild's ideas yet also illustrate a temporal shift in the conceptualization of sexuality.

NØGLEORD: Jens Jersild, seksualundervisning, seksualitet, homoseksualitet, heteroseksualitet.



Introduktion

I 1950'erne debatteres forholdet mellem seksualitet, ungdom og barndom. En moralsk panik for homoseksualitet spredte sig blandt befolkningen. Historikeren Peter Edelberg peger på, at politiinspektør Jens Jersild har en central position i debatten (Edelberg 2013: 181, 209). Jersild advokerer for, at tidlig seksualundervisning fremmer heteroseksualitet. Ifølge forskeren Christian Graugaard har Jersild indflydelse på undervisningsministeriets vejledning til seksualundervisning i folkeskolen fra 1961 (Graugaard 2018: 47), men hvor stor indflydelse fik Jens Jersilds forestillinger på seksualvejledninger?

I denne artikel vil jeg forsøge at belyse Jersilds indflydelse og begrebsverden, der danner grundlaget for hans seksualitetsforståelse. En analyse af Jersilds indflydelse på seksualvejledningerne synes at forudsætte en idehistorisk analyse af hans begrebsverden. Med udgangspunkt i "Barnet og det homoseksuelle problem" fra 1957 og "Hvad unge bør vide om homoseksualitet, prostitution, sædelighedsforbrydelser, kønssygdomme" fra 1959, afkoder jeg først Jersilds forestillinger om børn, unge og seksualitet. Herefter udfolder jeg Jersilds begrebsliggørelse af homoseksualitet og prostitution, da det er centralt for at forstå hans syn på seksualitet og seksualoplysning. Til slut sammenligner jeg Jersilds indflydelse på to vejledninger i seksualundervisning i folkeskolen fra 1961 og 1971. Min artikel påviser, at Jersild gennem seksualoplysning søgte at fremme heteroseksualitet og modarbejde seksuelle kategorier såsom homoseksualitet. Implementeringen af Jersilds forestillinger i seksualvejledninger til folkeskolen i 1961 og 1971 afspejler et statsligt ønske om at institutionalisere disse idéer.

De to udvalgte værker af Jens Jersild repræsenterer hans opfattelse af børn, unge og seksualitet. Bøgerne supplerer hinanden. De har lignende argumentation og samme hovedpointer. Derfor fremgår der ikke en komparativ analyse, men derimod en generel analyse af Jersilds forestillinger. Værkerne vidner om en offentlig samtale om seksualitet, dets udvikling og kategorisering, men de kan ikke alene bruges til at forstå samtidens opfattelse af seksualitet, børn og unge. Værkerne indikerer Jersilds forståelse og inspiration af samtidens dominerende diskurser på områderne. Jersild blev inspireret af psykiatriske og sexologiske diskurser, men tilpassede også bestemte teorier til hans egen seksualitetsopfattelse. Fra hans udsigelsesposition kom han med sit eget konkrete output som

manifesterede sig i den offentlige debat og seksualvejledninger. Til videre undersøgelse er det oplagt at vurdere samtidens opfattelse af emnerne og placere Jersilds forestillinger idéhistorisk.

“Vejledning i seksualundervisning i folkeskolen” fra 1961 og “Vejledning om seksualoplysning i folkeskolen” fra 1971 repræsenterer undervisningsministeriets og læseplansudvalgets ønsker om seksualundervisningens indhold og udformning i folkeskolen. Vejledningerne belyser ikke Jersilds indflydelse på børns seksualitetsforståelse. Derimod påviser pjecerne et statsligt ønske om, at Jersilds forestillinger institutionaliseres. Det vil være oplagt at undersøge, hvor vidtrækkende Jersilds indflydelse var på selve seksualundervisningen og senere vejledninger til den.

Opfindelsen af seksualitet

Begreberne homoseksualitet og heteroseksualitet opfindes af ungaren Karl Maria Ketbeny i 1869 og genintroduceres af psykiateren Richard von Krafft-Ebing i 1886 (Stryker 2017: 53; Katz 2014). Begreberne er moderne opfindelser, der illustrerer adskillelsen af kønsidentitet og seksualitet. Seksualitet defineres nu ud fra den seksuelle partner (Halperin 1990: 15-16; Katz 1995: 12-14). Foucault peger på, at der i 1800-tallet sker et skred i måden at forstå seksualitet på. Forinden ansås ægteskabet som normen, mens anden seksuel adfærd var unormalt og lovstridigt. I 1800-tallet sker der en “mangesidet indpodning af ‘perversioner’” (Foucault 1998: 46). Seksuel adfærd kategoriseres, og en bred vifte af seksuelle identiteter produceres (Ibid.: 45-50). Seksualiteten bliver genstand for videnskabeliggørelse, der skaber forskellige seksuelle kategorier.

I begyndelsen anses heteroseksualitet og homoseksualitet som seksuelle afvigelser, men Krafft-Ebing introducerer en ny forståelse: Interessen i reproduktion afgør, om ens seksualitet afviger. Heteroseksualitet bliver den seksuelle norm, mens homoseksualitet fortsat fremstilles som en seksuel afvigelse. Homoseksualitet er en medfødt, biologisk tilstand, der kan diagnosticeres og kureres. Homoseksualitet patologiseres, og der argumenteres for, at seksuelle minoriteter ikke skal kriminaliseres (Stryker 2017: 53-54).

Debatten om homoseksualitet i 1950'erne

I kølvandet af 2. verdenskrig vokser fjendtligheden over for seksuelle minoriteter i Vesteuropa. Man frygter udbredelsen af homoseksualitet og korrumpning af unge mennesker. Interpol og andre internationale organisationer engagerer sig i spørgsmålet om seksuelle afvigelser, og det resulterer i en international, koordineret samarbejdsindsats, der vil bekæmpe homoseksualitet (Dupont 2019: 357-359, 361, 363, 389, 394).

Homoseksualitet afkriminaliseres i Danmark i 1933, men frygten for seksuelle minoriteter gælder stadig. Efter 2. verdenskrig dannes der en moralsk diskurs, der problematiserer homoseksualitet og prostitution. I 1950'erne begynder danskerne at debattere homoseksualitet, ungdom og mandlig prostitution. Den moralske diskurs udvikler sig til moralsk panik i den brede befolkning, hvor man frygter, at mandlig prostitution og enkelte seksuelle oplevelser medfører livslang homoseksualitet og asocialitet for unge mænd. Politiinspektøren Jens Jersild er en central meningsdanner i debatten. Han er fra 1950 chef for sædelighedspolitiet og med til at oprette en afdeling, der fører tilsyn med homoseksualitet og prostitution. Jersilds aktive engagement i samfundsdebatten og hans udgivelser om homoseksualitet, ungdom og prostitution øger opmærksomheden om emnerne. Homoseksualitet og mandlig prostitution er emner, alle forholder sig til. I 1960'erne forsvinder den moralske panik, og den dominerende diskurs om emnerne ændrer sig. Fremtrædende aviser fatter større sympati for homoseksuelle og modgår diskrimination. Unge, mandlige prostituerede ses ikke længere som et dominerende socialt problem. Den brede befolkning er ikke længere bekymret for homoseksualitet i samme grad som i 1950'erne (Dupont 2019: 393; Edelberg 2009: 17; Edelberg 2013: 172, 174-178, 181-182, 191-193, 198-200, 206-207).

Jens Jersilds seksualitetsforståelse

Jens Jersilds argumentation i den offentlige debat tager udgangspunkt i hans egen seksualitetsforståelse. Jersilds værker "Barnet og det homoseksuelle problem" og "Hvad unge bør vide om homoseksualitet, prostitution, sædelighedsforbrydelser, kønssygdomme" udfolder hans forestilling om menneskets seksualitet, seksuelle kategorier og hvordan seksualiteten opstår. I dette kapitel analyserer jeg hans begrebsverden, der tager udgangspunkt i sammenhæng mellem seksualitet, ungdom og barndom. Jersild inspireres i mindre grad af internationale psykiatriske og sexologiske diskurser fra samtiden. Han skelner mellem køns kategorier og argumenterer for, at seksualiteten primært erhverves i ungdommen gennem oplevelser, påvirkning, vane og tilfældighed, men andre faktorer spiller også ind.

Jens Jersild er optaget af menneskets seksualitet og skelner mellem tre hovedkategorier: Heteroseksualitet, biseksualitet og homoseksualitet. Derudover skelner han mellem seksuelle afvigelser og heteroseksualitet. De seksuelle afvigelser er uønskede, da det er "en form for perversion, d.v.s. en unaturlig kønsdrift" (Jersild 1959: 58). Heteroseksualitet fremstilles som den naturlige seksuelle kategori og normen. De andre seksualitetskategorier afviger fra normen. Jersild vurderer seksualitetskategorierne ud fra, om han ser det som en naturlig kønsdrift. Det kommer an på ens seksuelle partners køn samt seksuelle lyster. Derfor er de seksuelle afvigelser for Jersild

mange: Homoseksualitet, biseksualitet, ekshibitionister, kiggere, transvestitter, fetichister, sadister, masochister og løsslupne kvinder. Udspecificeringen af seksualitetskategorier ses som sande af Jersild. Alle afvigende seksuelle indstillinger bliver noget uønsket, der ikke skal spredes (Jersild 1959: 5, 15, 19, 39-59; Jersild 1957, 13).

Ifølge Jersild, erhverver mennesket sig en seksualitet gennem seksuel adfærd. Homoseksualitet “er erhvervet og ikke medfødt” (Jersild 1957: 52). Det er centralt at få børn og unge til “at tænke, tale og handle heteroseksuelt” (Ibid.: 49). Efter en række seksuelle erfaringer, bliver seksualiteten permanent og uforanderlig i 20’erne (Ibid.: 49). Ungdommen er en afgørende livsfase, da seksualiteten tager form der. Børn og unge skal tillæres heteroseksualitet. Jersilds projekt om seksualoplysning ønsker at “bibringe disse en heteroseksuel indstilling [...] Målet bør være, at ingen af de unge kommer ud i ulykkelige forhold” (Ibid.: 56). Jersild mener, at heteroseksualitet skal fremdyrkes og indlæres, mens seksuelle afvigelser er permanente ulykkelige forhold, der skal forebygges.

Jersild inspireres af samtidens seksualitetsforståelse og særligt af den amerikanske sexolog Kinseys fire faktorer til homoseksualitet. Jersild lægger mest vægt på to af faktorerne: det seksuelles vanedannende effekt og andre menneskers påvirkning. De sidste to faktorer, menneskets fysiologiske evne til seksuel stimulans og tilfældigheden ved de første seksuelle oplevelser, træder i baggrunden for Jersild (Jersild 1957: 21-23; Jersild 1959: 21-24). Unge kan udsættes for “en tilstrækkelig stærk påvirkning i homoseksuel retning [...] de herved har opnået en tilfredsstillelse, som er blevet en vane for dem” (Jersild 1959: 23). For Jersild er forældrene, heteroseksuel opdragelse og kontakt med jævnaldrende afgørende for at bekæmpe en ikke-heteroseksuel indstilling. Jersild peger på, at en tilladt, aktiv heteroseksuel adfærd forebygger seksuelle afvigelser (Jersild 1957: 48; Jersild 1959: 21). At forbyde ungdommen seksuel adfærd skaber grobund for seksuelle afvigelser. Børns og unges seksualitet formes af normer, påbud og forbud. Alle seksualitetskategorier påvirkes af ydre faktorer som omgivelser, institutioner og forældre.

Jersild præges også af psykiatriens seksualitetsforståelse. Jersild medgiver, at medfødte og nedarvede egenskaber spiller en rolle i erhvervelsen af seksualitet. Individets reaktioner, fysiologi og psyke er forskellige (Jersild 1957: 23). Homoseksualitet kan præges af “nedarvede egenskaber” (Ibid.: 24) såsom “invaliditet, fedme, kvindagtigt ydre” (Ibid.). Jersilds forståelse gør ikke op med den psykiatriske forklaring, men han nedgraderer den. Det afgørende er påvirkning, erfaringer og vaner, mens egenskaber kan spille en rolle (Ibid.: 23-24).

Ifølge Jersild erhverves seksualiteten i ungdommen, men forinden kan seksualitet påvirkes i en retning. Puberteten er som regel startskuddet for, at seksualiteten tager varig form. Efter puberteten stiger antallet af drenge, der er definitivt heteroseksuelle, men en del er stadig usikre. Omkring 20-årsalderen er seksualiteten fastlagt (Ibid.: 45, 49). Jersild kæder ungdommen og en mere fast seksuel indstilling sammen. Derfor har de unge et ansvar for at blive heteroseksuelle, da ungdommens seksuelle oplevelser er afgørende for seksualitetens udvikling. Modsat er barndommen en periode, hvor forskelligartet seksuel adfærd afprøves (Jersild 1957: 47-49; Jersild 1959: 23-24).

Barnets stadige formbarhed er central. Jersild anser barndommen som et biseksuelt forstadie. Seksualitetens udvikling præges ikke af homoseksuel adfærd mellem børn, men kan præges af voksne. Børn kan præges "i en heteroseksuel retning, når deres udvikling foregår nogenlunde uforstyrret af alvorlige indgreb fra anden side" (Jersild 1959: 49). Et 5-årigt barn, der er blevet misbrugt af en mand, kan tage "varig skade" (Ibid.: 48), altså blive homoseksuel, hvis den seksuelle påvirkning har været langvarig. Barnets seksualitet former sig mod en bestemt retning, hvis de voksne påvirker barnet. Modsat sætter oplevelser med jævnaldrende børn ikke et varigt præg. Ifølge Jersild er barndommens seksuelle retning ikke definitiv og formbar. Voksnes langvarige, konsekvente påvirkning af barnet er en undtagelse, der kan forme barnets seksualitet i en bestemt retning (Jersild 1957: 48-49; Jersild 1959: 18-21).

Jens Jersilds forestilling om seksualitet, børn og ungdom præges af hans skelnen mellem naturlig og unaturlig kønsdrift, heteroseksualitet og seksuelle afvigelser. Seksualitet erhverves gennem oplevelser, påvirkning, vane og tilfældighed, men kan præges af medfødte og nedarvede egenskaber. Jersilds begrebsverden præges af samtidens internationale psykiatriske og sexologiske diskurser, men han udvælger, hierarkiserer og omformer også disse teorier ud fra sin egen seksualitetsopfattelse. Ifølge Jersild, er ungdommen en afgørende livsfase, da størstedelen tilegner sig en bestemt seksualitet der. Barndommen er et biseksuelt, eksperimenterende forstadie, der kun efter langvarig, konsekvent påvirkning fra voksne kan påvirkes i en bestemt retning. Ungdommen er en periode, hvor heteroseksualitet skal indpodes. Jersild mener, at påvirkning i en ikke-heteroseksuel retning skal forebygges, da det er en samfundsfare.

Homoseksualitet og prostitution – samfundsfare og ulykke

Af alle seksualitetskategorier, skriver Jens Jersild mest om homoseksualitet og prostitution, idet han klassificerer dem som samfundsfarer. En analyse af Jersilds forestillinger om homoseksualitet og prostitution er afgørende for at forstå hans ønske om at indpode heteroseksualitet og forebygge

såkaldte seksuelle afvigelser. I det følgende undersøger jeg Jersilds begrebsliggørelse af homoseksualitet, forførelse og prostitution.

Han ser homoseksualitet som en samfundsfare og ulykke (Jersild 1957: 17, 50). Samfundet opfatter ifølge Jersild homoseksualitet som “uønsket, dels fordi en forøgelse af antallet af homoseksuelle medfører yderligere efterstræbelser af de unge, og dels fordi familierne [...] er det grundlag, man bygger på” (Jersild 1959: 33). I samfundets øjne modarbejder homoseksualitet samfundets fundament, den heteroseksuelle familie. Jersild beskriver en stigning i antallet af homoseksuelle, hvilket yderligere truer samfundet (Jersild 1957: 9-10). Jersild skelner mellem den lovlydige homoseksuelle og den farlige homoseksuelle. Den farlige homoseksuelle har en relation til personer under 18 år, mens den lovlydige ikke har (Jersild 1957: 17, 52; Jersild 1959: 16-18). Den farlige homoseksuelle er til fare for samfundet, da personen kan forføre unge til homoseksualitet eller betale en mindreårig prostitueret (Jersild 1959, 24-35). Kvindelige homoseksuelle problematiseres ikke i lige så høj grad som mandlige, da de som regel ikke har forhold til mindreårige (Jersild 1957: 30-31). Jersild problematiserer kun den farlige, mandlige homoseksuelle. Problematiseringen understøtter dog befolkningens frygt for og syn på homoseksualitet som samfundsundergravende. Homoseksuelle kan lide under Jersilds problematisering trods de gode intentioner om at anerkende homoseksuelles ret til en værdig tilværelse (Ibid.: 10, 52). Jersilds syn på homoseksualitet understøtter hans projekt mod den farlige homoseksuelle og erhvervelsen af homoseksualitet.

Jersild baserer homoseksualitet som samfundsfare på to problemer: Forførelsesteorien og mandlig prostitution. De knyttes til to persontyper, forføreren og klienten. Forførelsesteorien og mandlig prostitution hænger ikke sammen, men de fremhæves begge som en fare for ungdommen og kan være en glidebane for den enkelte. Forførelsesteorien og mandlig prostitution er farlige, fordi de kan resultere i øget kriminalitet og homoseksualitet (Jersild 1957: 24-31).

Forførelsesteorien handler om forførelsen til en seksualitet. Det var en gængs teori blandt danske og internationale psykiatere i første halvdel af 1900-tallet (Edelberg 2012: 135-136). For Jersild betyder forførelsesteorien, at unge individer kan påvirkes i en homoseksuel retning, den seksuelle adfærd bliver vanedannende og de forføres til homoseksualitet. Jersild fremhæver forførelsesteorien som en årsag til homoseksualitet. Alle køn, unge som gamle kan være forførere. Kvindelige homoseksuelle forfører i begrænset grad og problematiseres ikke. Både den voksne og unge mandlige forfører er et samfundsproblem. Kun den voksne forfører kriminaliseres, da forhold til mindreårige er ulovligt (Jersild 1957: 28-31, 37; Jersild 1959, 24-28).

Prostitution ses af Jersild som en glidebane til kriminalitet. Jersild beskriver, at homoseksuel prostitution i 1950'erne straffes med op til 2 års fængsel, mens heteroseksuel prostitution straffes med en betinget dom. Hvis mindreårige prostituerer sig selv, bliver de sandsynligvis børneværnets ansvar. Hvis klienten har et forhold til en mindreårig dreng, straffes klienten. Ifølge Jersild, er de mandlige prostituerede ofte ikke homoseksuelle. De både opsøger og opsøges af klienter. Jersild peger på, at unge vælger prostitution af grunde såsom dårlige familieforhold, dårlig påvirkning fra venner, pengemangel og oplevelser med homoseksuelle før. Ifølge Jersild, kan prostitution have negative konsekvenser som asocialitet, dovenskab og yderligere kriminalitet. Prostitution er en glidebane til mere kriminalitet for over halvdelen af unge, mandlige prostituerede, og derfor er prostitution en samfundsfare (Jersild 1957: 39-41, 44, 49-50; Jersild 1959: 28-31).

Jersild problematiserer kvindelig prostitution og løstgængeri, da det kan genere andre mennesker. Løstgængeri er en glidebane til prostitution, hvis der er pengemangel. Jersild peger på, at årsager til kvindelig prostitution og løstgængeri er manglende oplysning, bestemte egenskaber, pengemangel og alkohol. Ligeledes kan de påvirkes til prostitution af omgivelser, venner eller uforudsete forhold som pludseligt forældreskab og pengemangel. Dermed kan heteroseksuelle kvinder være et samfundsproblem, hvis de har en promiskuøs, generende seksuel adfærd (Jersild 1959: 45-51, 56).

Jersild mener, at ungdommen har et ansvar for at blive heteroseksuelle, men der er forhindringer. En række forhold gør unge mere udsatte for at afvige fra heteroseksualitet, f.eks. miljø, omgangskreds, manglende seksualoplysning og dårlig opdragelse. Unge kan være en samfundsfare, da homoseksuelle unge kan forføre andre unge. Jersild mener, at seksualoplysning kan forebygge seksuelle afvigelser og fremdyrke heteroseksualitet i en tid, hvor homoseksuel adfærd stiger, og homoseksualitet ses som en samfundsfare.

Jersilds indflydelse på seksualvejledningerne

Jens Jersilds forestillinger om seksualitet, unge og børn præger undervisningsministeriets vejledninger i seksualundervisning fra 1961 og 1971. I det følgende sammenligner jeg Jersilds argumentation og begrebsverden med to vejledningers anbefalinger til seksualundervisning i folkeskolen. Vejledningerne udtrykker et ønske om at institutionalisere dele af Jersilds idéer om homoseksualitet, forførelse og seksuelle afvigelser i den danske folkeskole.

Jersilds forestillinger om seksualitet, unge og børn præger undervisningsministeriets udgivelse "Vejledning i seksualundervisning i folkeskolen" fra 1961. Pjecen introducerer emner som lokkere,

homoseksualitet og seksuelle afvigelser. Det er den første særskilte vejledning til seksualundervisning, men først i 1970 bliver seksualundervisningen obligatorisk. Alle undervises ikke i stoffet: I 1962 underviser 98% af de københavnske skoler i seksualundervisning, mens det kun er 14% af landsbyskolerne.

Alle elever i 1960'erne introduceres ikke for undervisningsmaterialet og Jersilds forestillinger (Graugaard 2018: 47; Undervisningsministeriet 1961: 32). Vejledningen for seksualundervisning fra 1961 udtrykker et ønske om, at børn skal udvikle sig harmonisk. Børns ansvarsfornemmelser, "deres personlighedsudvikling og karakterdannelse" skal fremmes (Undervisningsministeriet 1961: 6). Barnets udvikling fremmes bl.a. ved at advare "mod afsporing af det normale følelsesliv ved seksuelle forhold til personer af samme køn" (Ibid.: 13). Børn og unge skal ikke påvirkes af homoseksuelle, der er interesseret i mindreårige. Barnets udvikling skal ikke afspores fra heteroseksualitet. Den seksuelle udvikling er nu også skolens ansvar. I tråd med Jersild, forbinder seksualvejledningen homoseksualitet som unormalt og en samfundsfare. Den homoseksuelles påvirkning af unge er farlig for samfundet. Seksualvejledningen udtrykker et ønske om at forebygge homoseksualitet ligesom Jersild (Undervisningsministeriet 1961: 6-7, 9, 13).

Allerede i undervisningen for 1. og 2. klasse skal der være fokus på forførelsesteorien. Alle børn skal "advares imod at følge med personer, de ikke kender" (Ibid.: 12). Advarslen inspireres af Jersild, der ønsker at "mindre børn må advares mod at følge med de såkaldte 'lokkere'" (Jersild 1959: 8). Børn skal advares indirekte om forførere tidligt i skoleforløbet.

Vejledningens beskrivelser af homoseksualitet, seksuelle afvigelser og prostitution parafraserer Jersild. Der bruges ord som samfundsfare og trækkerdreng, samme angivelse af antal homoseksuelle og argumentet om at prostitution leder til kriminalitet. Pjecen angiver "Barnet og det homoseksuelle problem" og "Hvad unge bør vide..." som anvendt litteratur. Vejledningen godtager Jersilds skelnen mellem lovlydige homoseksuelle og farlige homoseksuelle, herunder klienter og forførere. Beskrivelsen af homoseksualitet i vejledningen prioriteres højere end andre seksualitetskategorier, da det ses som "afvigelse, som har størst mulighed for at gribe ind i de unges liv på uheldig måde" (Undervisningsministeriet 1961: 22). Jersilds forestillinger om seksualitet, prostitution og forførelsesteorien godtages af undervisningsministeriet. Da seksualundervisning ikke er obligatorisk, og vejledningen anser homoseksualitet som et problem, hvis vigtighed varierer lokalt, er det kun et fåtal af elever, der nok undervises i Jersilds forestillinger (Undervisningsministeriet 1961: 8-9, 22, 51; Jersild 1957: 16).

Efter seksualundervisningen gøres obligatorisk i 1970, kommer der en ny vejledning i seksualundervisning til folkeskolen i 1971 (Hoffmeyer og Leth 1971: 5). Vejledningen fra 1971 trækker stadig på den forrige vejledning. Jersilds tanker spøger, men der er sket et skred i seksualitetsforståelsen.

Ligesom i pjecen fra 1961, anbefaler vejledningen, at undervisere skal advare børn i 1. til 4. klasse mod fremmede. Vejledningen prioriterer at forklare grunden til advarslen og omtale “lokkere’ og exhibitionister” (Ibid.: 25). I stil med Jersild, gør miljø og familieforhold børn mere udsatte for at blive seksuelt afvigende (Ibid.). Vejledningen fra 1971 går mere i dybden med Jersilds tankegang om tidlig seksualoplysning og udsatte børn end den forrige vejledning.

Seksualvejledningen fra 1971 præsenterer en anden opfattelse af homoseksualitet, men viderefører også Jersilds tanker om den farlige homoseksuelle. Homoseksualitet ses ikke som en samfundsfare, men der advares stadig mod den farlige homoseksuelle, der lokker og forfører. Ligeledes er mandlig prostitution stadig en glidebane til kriminalitet trods reduceret mandlig prostitution (Edelberg 2009: 22) Der sker et skred i holdningen til homoseksualitet. Børn, “der er i udvikling mod en ren homoseksuel indstilling” (Hoffmeyer og Leth 1971: 35) skal hjælpes. Undervisning skal svække “den diskriminerende fordømmelse og intolerance [...] mod homoseksuelle” (Ibid.). Der advares ikke mod en homoseksuel udvikling, men det fremstilles stadig som en seksuel afvigelse. Jersild og pjecen advokerer for homoseksuelles ret til en værdig tilværelse, men pjecen gør op med samfundets modvilje mod homoseksualitet. Jersilds forestillinger om dem farlige homoseksuelle, mandlig prostitution og homoseksualitet som en seksuel afvigelse spøger stadig i pjecen, men nu kan unge opleve “en homoseksuel betagelse” (Hoffmeyer og Leth 1971: 35) uden at blive forført til at blive homoseksuelle. Seksualitetsforståelsen er ikke lige så forankret i forførelsesteorien som i 1961. Seksualvejledningen fra 1971 farves af Jersilds forestillinger, men den distancerer sig fra forestillingen om homoseksualitet og forførelsen dertil som en samfundsfare. Bestemte vendinger og idéen om kriminalitet som konsekvens af prostitution bibeholdes.

Vejledningen i seksualvejledning i 1971 vidner om, at homoseksualitet stadig ses som en seksuel afvigelse af den brede befolkning. Samtidigt ses homoseksualitet ikke længere som en trussel mod samfundet. I vejledningen består Jersilds skelnen mellem den lovlydige og farlige homoseksuelle, men der gøres op med centrale dele af hans forestillinger. Seksualitetens udvikling ses i et andet lys, mens sammenhæng mellem kriminalitet og prostitution stadig understreges. Dele af Jersilds argumentation videreføres i den obligatoriske seksualundervisning, men homoseksualitet er ikke en

samfundsfare, men derimod noget, der skal udvises tolerance overfor. Vejledningerne viser et skred i synet på seksualitet fra 1961 til 1971, men Jersilds forestillinger om seksualitet, børn og unge institutionaliseres delvist i folkeskolen. Elever, der bliver undervist i vejledningerne, kan være præget af Jersilds forestillinger. Jersilds forestillinger kan have plantet sig i dele af befolkningen og påvirket deres opfattelse af emner som homoseksualitet, prostitution og seksualitetskategorier.

Konklusion

Jens Jersilds forestillinger farves af samtidens bekæmpelse af homoseksualitet samt teorier om forholdet mellem børn, unge og seksualitet. Seksualitet erhverves og kan dermed forebygges eller fremdrives i en tidlig alder. Ifølge Jersild, kan seksualoplysning kan være med til at indpode heteroseksualitet og forebygge seksuelle afvigelser. Ungdommen er en afgørende periode, hvor seksualiteten tager form efter en række seksuelle oplevelser og bliver definitiv. Barndommen er flydende og omformelig, men kan efter langvarig, konsekvent påvirkning fra voksne påvirkes i en bestemt retning. Jersild mener, at heteroseksualiteten skal podes ind i de unge, mens seksuel afvigelse skal forebygges.

Jersild ser seksuelle afvigelser som en ulykke. Et eksempel er homoseksualitet. Homoseksualitet er hverken ønskeligt for individet, da det er en ulykkelig skæbne, eller samfundet, da det er samfundsundergravende. Jersild anser udbredelsen af homoseksualitet som en trussel mod samfundets fundament, den heteroseksuelle familie, mens mandlig prostitution kan lede til yderligere kriminalitet.

Homoseksualitet og andre seksuelle minoriteter kan forebygges gennem seksualoplysning ifølge Jersild. Hans forestillinger implementeres i seksualvejledninger til folkeskolen i 1961 og 1971. Pjecerne vidner om et statsligt ønske om at institutionalisere Jersilds forestillinger om seksualitet, børn og unge samt forme elevers seksualitetsforståelse derefter. Skredet fra 1961 til 1971 viser, at der er et nyt syn på seksualitetskategorier i samfundet. Homoseksualitet fremstilles i seksualvejledning ikke som en samfundsfare, men skal derimod tolereres. Alligevel spørger Jersilds forestillinger i seksualvejledningen i 1971, f.eks. i beskrivelser af den farlige homoseksuelle, prostitution og seksuelle afvigelser.

Jens Jersilds indflydelse på samfundsdebatten i 1950'erne og senere påvirkning af seksualvejledningerne er en flig af historien om seksualitetskategorier i Danmark. Jersilds indflydelse belyser, hvordan han og statslige institutioner forholder sig til seksuelle minoriteter, men samtidigt

også synet på heteroseksualitet som fundament for ægteskabet og samfundet. Dermed er fortællingen om Jersild og seksualvejledningerne også et præj om, hvordan staten søger at styrke en heteronormativ dagsorden blandt borgere og kommende generationer gennem seksualundervisning.



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SEKSUALITET SOM STRATEGI

En undersøgelse af seksualitetsbegrebets dobbeltrolle i dansk LGBT+-
aktivismes tidlige historie

Af:
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Historie



ABSTRACT: This article examines Holger Bramlev's 1954 manifesto and its strategic use of the concept of sexuality during the early phase of Danish LGBT+ activism. Through a Foucauldian reading, the analysis explores how Bramlev simultaneously utilized and reproduced contemporary medical and identity-based understandings of homosexuality to advance demands for recognition and rights. The article argues that Bramlev's manifesto illustrates the double role of the concept of sexuality: as a tool for mobilizing resistance and as a framework that reinforces oppressive categorizations. The article concludes that Bramlev's eclectic and often contradictory arguments can be seen as a meaningful response to a contradictory discourse around sexuality.

NØGLEORD: Dansk LGBT+-historie, aktivisme, Forbundet af 1948, homoseksualitet



Bramlevs manifest

I 1954 forfattede Holger Bramlev, revisor og daværende formand for Forbundet af 1948, et politisk program, som han betragtede som et fælles manifest for homo- og biseksuelle i hele Skandinavien. Forbundet af 1948 var den første og på det tidspunkt eneste organisation i Danmark, der arbejdede for seksuelle minoriteters rettigheder, og organisationen skulle senere udvikle sig til det, vi i dag kender som LGBT+ Danmark. Denne tekst, som jeg i løbet af artiklen vil henvise til som Bramlevs manifest, blev ikke udgivet men sendt til udvalgte eksperter, kulturpersonligheder og offentlige aktører i et forsøg på at mobilisere støtte – men uden svar (Edelberg 2024: 522).

Jeg vil i følgende artikel undersøge hvordan forestillingen om homoseksualitet som identitet samt medicinsk faktum, bliver brugt som retorisk strategi i Bramlevs manifest. Analysen tager udgangspunkt i en foucauldiansk forståelse af seksualiteten som en moderne social konstruktion. Det betyder at jeg i analysen vil fokusere på hvordan forskellige kulturelle forestillinger om homoseksualitet, karakteristisk for Bramlevs samtid, kunne bruges strategisk i en kamp for bedre vilkår og rettigheder.

Manifestet blev formuleret som et politisk skrift for homoseksuelles og biseksuelles rettigheder i en tid, hvor homoseksualitet i vid udstrækning blev opfattet som et problem – en opfattelse, der prægede både den brede befolkning og centrale offentlige institutioner. Særligt fremtrædende var den såkaldte forførelsesteori, anført af den københavnske politimester Jersild og det danske psykiatriske etablissement, som hævdede, at homoseksualitet kunne overføres gennem forførelse, underforstået at det var en ulykke der burde forhindres (Edelberg 2012: 132-6).

I manifestet argumenterer Bramlev for at homoseksuelle bør nyde den samme anseelse og rettigheder som heteroseksuelle. Herunder med sigte på at ændre datidens differentierede seksuelle lavalder på 18 for homoseksuelle forhold, overfor 15 for heteroseksuelle forhold. Til det formål anvender Bramlev både forestillinger om homoseksualitet som en særligt art menneske samt som medicinsk faktum.

Bramlevs manifest er en central, men for offentligheden, ukendt kilde i dansk LGBT+ historie. Selvom manifestet aldrig blev udgivet, giver kilden indsigt i tidlige danske LGBT+ aktivismes forståelse og anvendelse af seksualitetsbegrebet.

Jeg vil i det følgende lave en optegnelse af den teoretiske ramme jeg trækker på i min analyse.

Begrebsliggørelsen af seksualitet

I *Viljen til viden – Seksualitetens historie, bind 1* intervenserer Michel Foucault i 1970'ernes seksualitetsdebat med en kritik af den såkaldte "repressionshypotese" (Foucault 2019: 15-22) – forestillingen om, at den moderne vestlige kultur i århundreder har undertrykt seksualiteten ved at pålægge den tavshed og begrænse dens udfoldelse til ægteskab og forplantning (Ibid.: 15-17).

Foucault hævder, at de seneste århundreder derimod har været præget af en stadigt voksende tale om sex. Fra og med det 18. århundrede ser han en egentlig diskursiv eksplosion, hvor seksualiteten i stigende grad bliver genstand for undersøgelse, regulering og tale (Ibid-15-17). Foucault betragter ikke denne udvikling som en frigørelsesproces, men derimod som en ny form for kontrol. Seksualiteten differentieres og klassificeres, og der opstår forskellige "perverse" former for seksualitet der er defineret ud fra deres afvigelse fra den heteroseksuelle ægtskabsnorm (Ibid.: 45).

Foucault ser seksualitetsbegrebet som en udefrakommende installation, som produceres og overføres gennem juridiske og psykiatriske diskurser (Ibid.: 45). Psykiatrien spiller en central rolle i at biologisere og psykologisere det afvigende, og derved gøre det til genstand for behandling og kontrol (Ibid.: 111). De afvigende kategorier udvikler sig ifølge Foucault, i løbet af det 19. århundrede til egentlige personlighedstyper. Den homoseksuelle, bliver sin egen art, hvor intet af hvad han foretager sig, undslipper hans seksualitet. På den måde indlemmes perversionerne i individernes kroppe. Før var den der udøvede sodomi, kun et retssubjekt, nu bliver overtrædelsen udtryk for en særlig natur (Ibid.: 53). Foucault vender derved blikket fra repressionshypotesen generelle udsagn om at seksualiteten er undertrykt, og kigger i stedet på det undertrykkende i at man har overtaget psykiatriens seksualitetsbegreber.

Foucaults forståelse af seksualitetens installation hænger tæt sammen med hans forståelse af magt. Med til denne magtopfattelse hører, at hvor der er magt, vil der altid være modstand. Denne modstand må dog altid artikulere i forhold til den givne magtform, og vil derfor, i hvert fald til at begynde med, være af samme form som magten (Ibid.: 9).

Bramlev gennem Foucaults blik

Jeg har i min læsning af manifestet været inspireret af tanken om, at modstandsdiskursen altid må tage udgangspunkt i mesterdiskursen. Dette læser jeg som rammen for selve manifestet, idet Bramlev ved at anvende mesterdiskursen begreber strategisk, vender logikken til de homoseksuelles fordel.

Her er det vigtigt at indføre, at jeg ikke forestiller mig Bramlev som en suprahistorisk størrelse, der er sig fuldstændigt bevidst om hvilke implikationer det har at argumentere ud fra et standpunkt, hvor man tager

den homoseksuelle kategori for givet. Derimod læser jeg Bramlev som en karakter der, dybt forankret i sin tid, netop er underlagt tidens logik. Derfor understreger Bramlevs strategiske anvendelse af seksualitetsbegrebet netop Foucaults pointe om at modstand må tage udgangspunkt i magten.

Hvad der gør Bramlev interessant i lyset af Foucault er at manifestets retorik demonstrerer dobbeltheden i overtagelsen af mesterdiskursens begreber. Forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en personlighedstype, kan både bruges til at marginalisere og legitimere. Ligeledes gælder det homoseksualitet som medicinsk faktum, der både gør homoseksuelle til udtryk for en perverteret natur, men ikke desto mindre væsner af natur, der ikke kan klandres for sine medfødte tilbøjeligheder. Denne åbenhed der ligger i begrebsliggørelsen af den homoseksuelle, baserer sig ikke desto mindre på en grundantagelse om seksualitetsbegrebets gyldighed. En antagelse, der som analysen vil vise, er strategisk nyttig i kampen for rettigheder, men som samtidigt bærer en ikke uproblematisk ideologisk bagage med sig. Analysen af Bramlevs manifest, gennem Foucault, taler derfor ind i en diskussion af hvordan begrebsliggørelsen af seksualiteten både rummer frigørende og begrænsende potentialer.

I de kommende afsnit følger analysen af Bramlevs manifest. For at gøre det mere overskueligt, har jeg valgt at opdele mit argument i tre dele. Først vil jeg pege på hvordan Bramlev ved at argumentere indenfor rammen af den eksisterende diskurs, både opnår mulighed for at gøre sine krav om lige rettigheder og anerkendelse gældende, men på samme tid reproducerer forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en særlig karakter. Derefter vil jeg undersøge hvordan denne dobbelthed gør sig gældende med hensyn til den medicinske/biologiske diskurs. Afslutningsvist vil der være en diskussion af Bramlevs argumentationen i sin helhed, med blik på hvordan vi skal forstå Bramlevs eklekticisme i et historisk perspektiv.

Homoseksualitet som særlig personlighed

Forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en personlighed, tager forskellige former i løbet af manifestet. Jeg vil for kronologiens skyld starte i antikken. I det følgende citat ser vi hvordan Bramlev bruger forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en ahistorisk og universel kategori, ved at påkalde sig de antikke mænds seksualvaner:

I såvel den græske Oldtid, som i den romerske Kejsertid, var homoseksualitet anerkendt og aabenlyst praktiseret i samfundene fra överst til nederst.¹

¹Bramlevs manifest, 1954. Korrespondance mellem Axel Axlil og Holger Bramlev. Rigsarkivet. Axel Axlils arkiv,1.

Allerede her kunne man problematisere Bramlevs argumentation, ved at anklage ham for at projicere kontemporære identitetskategorier ned på en uvillig fortid. Men hvis vi kigger på funktionen af Bramlevs historiebrug, fremstår hans argument mere meningsfuldt. For det første, naturaliserer Bramlev den homoseksuelle, ved at give den homoseksuelle en historie. Han bruger så at sige historien til at legitimere homoseksuelle i sin samtid. Derudover er valget af det antikke interessant. Det antikke bliver for mange set som den vestlige civilisations fødested og er samtidigt blevet idealiseret og hædret i vesten, som et kulturelt højdepunkt. Ved at pege på at der i denne "højkultur" åbenlyst blev praktiseret homoseksualitet, sigter Bramlev mod at forbedre samfundets syn på den homoseksuelle. Her ses det tydeligt hvordan forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en universel kategori, kan være frugtbar til aktivistiske formål. Dog kan der påpeges en dobbelthed i konsekvenserne af forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en identitet. På den ene side er forestillingen et udtryk for en begrebsliggørelse af seksualitet, der sygeliggør den homoseksuelle og derved tilskriver kategorien negative attributter. Omvendt, ved at tage kategorien på sig, får de homoseksuelle en mulighed, for at gøre sig gældende, i et mere positivt lys. Dette ser vi også i følgende citat:

Thi det er overtro, at homoseksuelle Mennesker skulle være en Pariakaste og blottet for Moral, idet Fakta tværtimod udviser, at en meget væsentlig del af denne Kategori Mennesker er særligt pertentlige og ordentlige, og i denne Forbindelse man også henvises til den store Stab af Kunstens Udøvere derunder mange dygtige Musikere, Malere, Digtere samt Tænkere og statsmænd.²

Her bruges forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en identitet med særlige karaktertræk, netop til egen fordel. Ikke bare er homoseksuelle ligesom alle andre mennesker, de har faktisk særligt gode karaktertræk. Denne aktive anvendelse af forestillingen af en homoseksuel identitet er interessant af flere grunde. Foucault beskrev seksualitetsbegrebet som en udefrakommende installation, produceret og overført gennem blandt andet psykiatrien. Men her er en relevant kritik af Foucault, at han i for høj grad iscenesætter den homoseksuelle som en passiv part. Det ovenstående eksempel peger omvendt på hvordan forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en identitet med særlige karaktertræk, aktivt kan anvendes af homoseksuelle til at påkalde sig lige rettigheder. Denne tvetydighed kan betragtes som et eksempel på Foucaults pointe om hvordan at modstand mod magten, altid som udgangspunkt, vil være af samme form som magten selv. Grundet de historiske omstændigheder kan man argumentere for at de

² *Ibid.*, 7

homoseksuelles modstand, er nødt til at tage sit udgangspunkt i den magtform de undertrykkes af. Men samtidig kan de benytte sig af denne magtform til at kæmpe for rettigheder og en plads i samfundet, ved at påtage sig den homoseksuelle kategori.

Forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en distinkt personlighed der udgør en særlig gruppe i samfundet, bruges også med henvisning til Verdenserklæringen om Menneskerettighederne af 1948, artikel 2, hvori det fastslås at:

Enhver har krav på alle de rettigheder og friheder, som nævnes i denne erklæring, uden forskelsbehandling af nogen art, f.eks. på grund af race, farve, køn, sprog, religion, politisk eller anden anskuelse, national eller social oprindelse, formueforhold, fødsel eller anden samfundsmæssig stilling.³

Bramlev argumenterer for, med henvisning til artikel 2, at der også må herske lige rettigheder for borgere på det seksuelle område, idet han sammenligner seksualitet med bestemmelserne omkring køn og religion.⁴ Bramlevs fortolkning placerer derved de homoseksuelle som en minoritet, der bør nyde beskyttelse under menneskerettighederne. Dette tjener som endnu et eksempel på hvordan forestillingen om den homoseksuelle, som en særlig art menneske, kan bruges til at opnå rettigheder. Den moderne konceptualisering af seksualiteten må siges at være udtalt præmis for hans argument. Hvis man derimod så kønslig omgang mellem personer af samme køn som en dårlig vane, eller en forbrydelse på lige fod med tyveri, ville man ikke kunne argumentere for at de homoseksuelle skulle hører under traktaten. Det er netop forestillingen om seksualiteten som konstituerende for subjektet, der bliver forudsætningen for det retsmæssige krav.

Homoseksualitet som biologisk realitet

Ligesom der kan siges at være en dobbelthed, med hensyn konsekvenserne af forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en identitet, kan den medicinske/biologiske diskurs omkring homoseksualitet, ligeledes på en gang bruges til at legitimere og problematisere homoseksualitet. Bramlev bruger forestillingen om homoseksualitet som medicinsk faktum til at argumentere for lige rettigheder. Men samtidig udspringer forførelsesteorien af en medicinsk diskurs, der indbygget i sig ser homoseksualitet som en ulykke. Den medicinske/biologiske diskurs ses i flere afskygninger. I følgende citat ses

³ FN's Generalforsamling, *Verdenserklæringen om Menneskerettighederne*, vedtaget 10. december 1948, dansk version tilgængelig på UNRIC, <https://unric.org/da/verdenserklæringen-om-menneskerettighederne/>

⁴ *Bramlevs manifest*. 1954, Axel Axcils arkiv, 8.

forestillingen om homoseksualitet som biologisk faktum anvendt:

Homoseksualitet har eksisteret til alle Tider, som et Naturudslag ikke blot hos mennesker, men ogsaa forekommende hos Dyr.⁵

Her ses det hvordan at homoseksualitet som biologisk faktum bruges til at naturalisere den homoseksuelle. Ved at pege på at det ikke er udtryk for et valg, men omvendt biologisk determineret, og naturligt i den grad at vi også ser det i dyreriget, argumenterer Bramlev for de homoseksuelles eksistensberettigelse. Desuden tjener argumentet til at fjerne homoseksualitet fra spørgsmål om moral, idet den homoseksuelle ikke har magten over deres biologi. Denne biologiske determinisme hænger desuden sammen med Bramlevs historiske argument.⁶ Homoseksuelle har altid eksisteret og vil altid eksistere, derfor nytter det ikke noget prøve at forhindre det.

Forestillingen om seksualitet som et biologisk determineret anlæg ses også idet Bramlev forsøger at tilbagevise forførelsesteorien, og argumentere for at man hidtil har bekæmpet en indbildt fare. Heri argumenterer Bramlev for at homoseksualitet har bund i medfødte anlæg eller miljøbestemte faktorer, som senest falder på plads ved pubertetens indtrædelse. Her bruger Bramlev interessant nok en medicinsk-psykiatrisk diskurs til at tilbagevise forførelsesteorien, der er af samme videnskabelige baggrund.⁷

Denne dobbelthed optræder også da Bramlev argumenterer for lige rettigheder mellem homoseksuelle og heteroseksuelle med hensyn til aldersgrænsen for homoseksuelle forhold, som var sat til 18 år, mod det heteroseksuelle forhold der var sat til 15 år.⁸ Her henviser Bramlev til psykiatriprofessoren, Hjalmar Helweg, som videnskabeligt belæg for at seksualiteten ved pubertetens indtrædelse er så fast indlejret at den næppe kan omstilles, hvorfor man ikke bør være bange for at 15-årige forføres til homoseksualitet.⁹ Dette bliver et billede på hvordan psykiatriske diskurser, der i første omgang har betragtet homoseksualitet som en patologisk afvigelse, kan bruges til at agitere for homoseksuelles lige rettigheder. Hjalmar Helwig kan nemlig også citeres for at skrive i sin bog *Den Retslige Psykiatri* at den homoseksuelle seksualdrift oftest var rettet mod mindreårige, og at den homoseksuelle person typisk var forbundet

⁵ *Ibid.*,1.

⁶ *Ibid.*,1-2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*,2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

med *psykopathisk karakteranomalie med deraf følgende nedsat stabilitet og mod- standsdygtighed* og af den grund mente at han, at den homoseksuelle drift ofte blev kriminel (Edelberg 2012: 167).

Her ses derved et eksempel på hvordan Bramlev kan bruge en patologisk videnskabelig diskurs, til sin egen fordel. Forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en patologisk afvigelse, kan på den ene side bruges til at problematisere de homoseksuelle, idet forestillingen sygeliggør dem. Men samtidig kan Bramlev anvende dele af teorierne, i kampen for homoseksuelles rettigheder. Her bruges forestillingen, om homoseksualiteten som noget der enten er medfødt eller som senest falder på plads ved puberteten, til at agitere for lige rettigheder omkring den seksuelle lavalder.

Eklektikeren Bramlev

Som de to forrige sektioner demonstrerer, henter Bramlev sine argumenter fra vidt forskellige steder. Argumentation starter ved almene misforståelser af antikken, for så at bevæge sig over i en nyfortolkning af psykiatriens seksualpatologi. Ved at pakke følgende citat ud, vil jeg lægge op til en diskussion af hvor og hvordan Bramlevs argumentation bliver usammenhængende.

Den Aversion imod Homoseksualitet der findes, er først og fremmest Udslag af religiøs oprindelse, men det synes betænkeligt, at samfundet på dette punkt - i modsætning til næsten alle andre Områder - ikke også har frigjort sig fra denne Indflydelse, som såvel det praktiske livs udfoldelse, som Videnskabens Undersøgelser, har taget grunden bort under.¹⁰

For det første kan det påpeges at den diskurs om homoseksualitet som dominerede i tiden, ikke kan siges at være af religiøs oprindelse. Jersilds forførelsesteori stammer først og fremmest fra en psykiatrisk diskurs der ikke skelede til religiøse spørgsmål. Her kunne man indvende at Bramlev kunne have peget på hvordan baggrunden for sådanne diskurser, er en bredere diffus aversion mod homoseksuelle, som er af religiøs afstamning. Jeg vil dog her i stedet forholde mig til hvilken funktion argumentet har. Ved at knytte aversion mod homoseksualitet til religion, indsætter Bramlev tolerance overfor homoseksualitet i en moderniserings- og frigørelsesfortælling. Heri sættes den moderne videnskab, i modsætning til de forældede religiøse dogmer. Videnskabens fremskridt har altså taget grunden bort under den irrationelle og religiøse homofobi.

¹⁰ *Bramlevs manifest*, 1954. Axel Axcils arkiv, 1.

Men dette argument peger kun på Bramlevs inkonsekvente historieopfattelse. Her iscenesættes aversionen mod homoseksualitet som noget der hører til gamle dage. Men samtidig fremhæver Bramlev den græske oldtid og den romerske kejsertid, som tidspunkter hvor homoseksualiteten trivedes åbenlyst i samfundet. Dette er interessant, da det peger på en større pointe, omkring hvordan Bramlev benytter sig af forskellige ufærdige ideer, til at kæmpe for de homoseksuelles rettigheder.

Umiddelbart kunne man nemlig forledes til at tænke, at Jersild og hans forførelsesteori, med sit implicitte syn på homoseksualitet som en ulykke, tog fejl, og Bramlev fik ret. Men som følge af analysen kan vi pege på hverken Jersilds forførelsesteori eller Bramlevs sammensatte pointer, harmonerer med en nutidig forståelse af seksualitet. Bramlev anvendte kontemporære forestillinger om homoseksualitet som en ahistorisk kategori, og biologisk faktum, der begge svært kan underbygges i dag. For det første mangler vi stadig en overbevisende teori om hvorfor folk ender med den seksualitet som de gør. Desuden kan det peges på det åbenlyst problematiske ved at benytte sig af oldtiden, som et tidspunkt hvor homoseksualitet var udbredt. Først og fremmest ud fra en forståelse af seksualiteten som en moderne opfindelse. Derudover peger teoretikeren David M. Halperin, i sin analyse af det antikke Athen, på hvordan man må forstå deres seksuelle relationer ud fra en politisk analyse. Her var sex ikke noget mellem to personer, sex var noget den aktive part påførte den passive. Sex var derfor en polariserende og hierarkiserende aktivitet, ved at penetrere en anden person, viste man hvem der var under en. At blive penetreret som fri mandlig borger blev derfor i det antikke Athen set ned på. Derfor kan den græske oldtid ikke siges at være et godt eksempel for hvad Bramlev kæmper for (Halperin 1990: 30-1).

Til gengæld kan man pege på hvordan både Bramlev og Jersilds verdenssyn stemmer overens med de bagvedliggende interesser de har for deres virke. På den ene side kan man påpege, at hvis man ser homoseksualitet som en ulykke og derfor er interesseret i at begrænse antallet af unge der "ender" i homoseksualitet, er det en belejlig teori at disse kan forføres til det, eftersom det muliggør at forhindre det. Omvendt hvis man som Bramlev ønsker et opgør med den marginaliserede status kønslig omgang mellem mænd blev henvist til, så er det belejligt at anvende forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en givet kategori, en personlighed med en hæderkronet historie.

Overordnet set kan Bramlevs eklektiske og til tider kontradiktoriske argumentation ses som en meningsfuld og strategisk reaktion på en samtidig diskurs der netop var fyldt af modsætninger. Bramlevs brug af både historiske, medicinske og moralske diskurser vidner om en aktiv anvendelse af de ressourcer der stod til rådighed, i kampen for bedre vilkår og rettigheder. Derfor sætter analysen af

Bramlevs manifest også spørgsmålstegn ved Foucaults udlægning af de homoseksuelle som en passiv part der er blevet udsat for en undertrykkende installation. Derimod kunne Bramlev aktivt bruge begrebsliggørelsen af seksualiteten til at arbejde for homoseksuelles rettigheder.

Konklusion

I analysens to første dele har jeg haft fokus på hvordan forestillingen om homoseksualitet som et medicinsk faktum samt identitet, er blevet benyttet retorisk. Jeg har i min analyse argumenteret for, at der i både den biologiske og sociale begrebsliggørelse af den homoseksuelle, optræder en dobbelthed.

På den ene side kan man argumentere for at Bramlev og de homoseksuelle, accepterer nogle undertrykkende rammer omkring at udleve sin seksualitet, ved at acceptere forestillingen om den homoseksuelle som en særlig art. Derudover kan det også påpeges hvordan denne forestilling i sig bærer en negativ typificering af den homoseksuelle. Omvendt kan man pege på at Bramlev netop ved at påtage sig forestillingen om homoseksualitet som en identitet, får mulighed for at gøre sig gældende og sætte krav. Dette ses både med hensyn til at pege på homoseksuelle, som en type menneske, med særligt gode karaktertræk. Men også i forestillingen om de homoseksuelle som en særlig gruppe, der bør nyde beskyttelse under artikel 2 i Verdenserklæringen om Menneskerettighederne 1948. Her kan en relevant kritik af Foucault være at han iscenesætter den homoseksuelle som en passiv part, der udsættes for en seksualinstallation. Analysen peger derimod på hvilke interesser homoseksuelle kan have i aktivt at påtage sig denne identitet og hvilke fordele man kan drage deraf. Når det kommer til brugen af forestillingen om homoseksualitet som et medicinsk faktum, kan der også påpeges en dobbelthed. På den ene side kan det påpeges, hvordan Bramlev er oppe imod en forførelsesteori, som er af psykiatrisk afstamning. På den anden side, bruger Bramlev netop psykiatrisk viden til at argumentere imod forførelsesteorien.

Analysen undersøger derved hvordan vekselvirkning mellem juridiske og psykiatriske institutioner overfor aktivisters begrebsliggørelse af seksualitet, tager sig ud i en konkret historisk situation. Herunder hvilke muligheder og begrænsninger der opstår som følge af en modstand der opererer indenfor seksualitetsbegrebets rammer. Artiklen beskæftiger sig afslutningsvist med Bramlevs til tider usammenhængende argumentation. Her argumenteres der for at Bramlevs eklektiske og til tider kontradiktoriske argumentation kan ses som en meningsfuld reaktion på en samtidig diskurs der stak i flere retninger.

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KØNSLIGE NARRATIVER I PERFORMANCEKUNSTEN

En udforskning af flydende kønsidentiteter i performancekunsten med
perspektiver fra tre queer kunstnere

Af:

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of performance art in redefining gender identities through an analysis of the works of three queer artists: Justin Shoulder, Kristoffer Raasted, and Stine Kloster. By deconstructing established gender norms and presenting fluid expressions of gender, these artists illuminate how performance art can generate new narratives and challenge traditional conceptions of gender. The article focuses on the capacity of performance art to promote cultural diversity and discusses its contribution to a deeper understanding of gender as a dynamic and mutable construct. This approach demonstrates how performance art serves as a platform for cultural dialogue and transformation.

NØGLEORD: Performancekunst, queer, køn, seksualitet, identitet.



Indledning

”Det er vores pligt som kulturelle producenter konstant at skubbe til nuet” (Jakobsen 2019). I citatet fremsætter leder af Performa Biennalen Roselee Goldberg, dét der gør performancekunsten betydningsfuld nemlig dens sociale størrelse gennem interaktionen mellem performer og beskuer. Med andre ord er det meningsfulde i performancekunsten tilstedeværelsen, idet vi forholder os til hinanden, responderer på hinanden og performeren skaber en oplevelse, der forsøger at påvirke beskueren.

Performancekunsten var og er i dag en dynamisk og udforskende kunstform, hvor kunstnere via deres levende præstationer bryder grænserne for konventionel kunst og udforsker komplekse temaer (Jakobsen 2019). Temaerne inkluderer alt fra politiske og sociale spørgsmål, kropslighed og identitet, til eksistentielle dimensioner. Disse værker engagerer publikum direkte og skaber rum for refleksion, deltagelse og konfrontation.

Denne artikel fokuserer på køn, da det går på tværs af performancekunstens temaer og fungerer som et aktivt greb til at sætte spørgsmålstegn ved normer, identiteter og magtstrukturer. Performancekunsten har netop potentiale for at skubbe til nuet, og her spiller køn særligt en rolle, fordi det er tæt forbundet med sociale konstruktioner, som performancekunsten kan udfordre direkte og kropsligt (Gade 2005:14-16). Kønnets betydning bliver iscenesat på måder, der udfordrer traditionelle binære opfattelser, hvilket skaber rum for flydende kønsidentiteter kan udfolde sig. Dette kunstneriske medium giver plads til en mangfoldighed af kønsudtryk, der ikke er bundet af normative opfattelser men i stedet åbner op for en dynamisk forståelse af køn.

Performancekunsten fungerer i dag som talerør for minoritetsgrupper, og fremførelserne påtager sig stadigt samfundskritiske og politiske værdier især indenfor køn og LGBTQ+ miljøet (Elnif 2023). Performancekunsten planter sig derfor solidt i vores kultur- og samfundsarv og stiller stadig spørgsmålet, hvordan aktiveres et værk, der finder sted i nuet, men også følger med teknologien og befinder sig online? Og hvordan aktiveres betydningen af værket gennem kønnet performance?

Artiklen undersøger fra et etnologisk perspektiv, hvordan queer kunstneres værker ikke blot udtrykker flydende kønsidentiteter, men også fungerer som en kulturel praksis, der skaber nye fortællinger om, hvad det vil sige at være menneske i en verden, hvor samfundets normer baseres

på forståelsen af køn som en fast binærkategori. Performancekunstens præsentation af de flydende kønsidentiteter åbner op for nye perspektiver og en dybere forståelse af, hvordan køn ikke blot er en personlig identitet men også et kulturelt produkt. Her kan etnologien i denne sammenhæng undersøge, hvordan flydende kønsidentiteter udleveres og forstås med performancekunsten som centrum for artiklen.

Jeg ønsker med artiklen at sætte fokus på, hvordan performancekunst kan fungere som en dåseåbner for dialogen om kønslige perspektiver i samfundet samt at bidrage til forståelsen af at queer kunstens berigelse af den kulturelle mangfoldighed også er et arbejde for en større retfærdighed og accept. I denne sammenhæng ønsker jeg at fremme en refleksion over, hvordan flydende kønsidentiteter former og formes af kulturelle landskaber. Artiklen undersøger følgende spørgsmål: Hvordan performs flydende kønsidentiteter i performancekunsten? og hvordan opfattes performativitetens begreb i et queerperspektiv?

Artiklen anvender Camila Jalvings bog *Værk som handling* (2011) som ramme for undersøgelsen af flydende kønsidentiteter i performancekunsten ved at benytte Jalvings nøgleelementer som nærvær, relation og publikum, som er præsent i performancekunsten. For at få indblik i forståelsen af kønsidentiteter præsenteres filosofien og sociologen Judith Butlers teori om kønsperformativitet, og analysen baseres på de tre queer performancekunstnere Justin Shoulder, Kristoffer Raasted (Orchid Domain) og Stine Kloster (Ess Beck), der udfordrer konventionelle kønsnormer, kønsstereotyper og skaber dialog om kønsdiskurserne gennem teknologi-, lyd-, kostumer- og kropslig- performances. Dette leder til en diskussion af kompleksiteten indenfor seksualitet, performance og performativitet i et queerperspektiv med kunsthistorikerens Amelia Jones værk *In Between Subjects A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (2020) med perspektiver fra Judith Butler samt litteraturteoretiker og kønsforsker Eve Kosofsky Sedwick.

Performancekunst og repræsentationen af køn

I kølvandet på happenings, avantgarde og neoavantgarden dukkede performance som selvstændig kunstnerisk genre op indenfor billedkunst- og teater i 1960'erne og 70'erne (Jalving:2011:32). Den performancepraksis der blomstrede på det tidspunkt er i billedkunsten kendetegnet ved kunstnerens krop, hvor kroppen blev et konkret materiale i kunsten. Performancekunst blev en levende fremførelse af kunstneren selv eller med andre deltagende primært billedkunstnere men også dansere, teaterfolk og musikere, hvor krop, objekt, rum og tid blev udforsket som sceniske

grundelementer. I bogen *Body art: Performing the subject* (1998) af Amelia Jones beskriver hun, hvordan kroppen træder ind i billedkunsten: ”In a particular charged and dramatically sexualized and gendered way...” (Jones 1998:13). Med performancekunsten for øje beskriver Amelia Jones kroppen som en kunstpraksis i sig selv. Gennem body art bliver kunstnerens krop både materiale og værk, hvilket udfordrer traditionelle forestillinger om identitet og adskillelsen mellem kunstner, værk og betragter. Kroppen bruges aktivt til at undersøge subjektivitet, og performancekunsten åbner for empowerment ved at lade kunstneren tage kontrol over sin egen kropslige og identitetsmæssige fremstilling. Det kommer til udtryk hos de tre fremhævede queer kunstnere, hvis praksisser i tråd med begrebet body art anvender kroppen som både redskab og tegn til udtrykke sig og forskyde grænserne for køn.

Udover kropsligheden fremhæver Jalving fire nøglebegreber hun argumenterer for, kendetegner performancegenren: *nærvær, subversion, relationalitet og præsentation* (Jalving 2011:33). De fire nøglebegreber beskrives af flere teoretikere samt fra Jalvings perspektiv og er igennem artiklen en undersøgelse af: Hvorfor performancekunstnerne agerer, som de gør? I performancekunsten skabes nærværet for øjnene af et publikum i realtid og som kulturteoretikeren Elin Diamond forklarer, er det en proces mellem nutid og fortid, tilblivelse og forsvinden. Begrebet subversion forklares af performanceteoretikeren Jon McKenzie, hvor performance skal forstås som et overgangsritual, der griber fat i en problematik, der står på tærsklen til en ny transformation. Relationaliteten skal forstås som inddragelsen af beskuerens deltagelse i selve værket, hvor performancekunsten som værk ofte etablerer en bestemt teatralisk relation til beskueren (Ibid: 33-35). Det gør performance ikke bare til et øjeblik men nærmere interaktionens og handlingens kunstform bundet til beskueren.

De fire nøglebegreber kan, når performance fremføres, gå under tre definerende betingelser: 1. Det kræver et publikum 2. Der skal være et overbevisende handlingsforløb 3. Performancen fungerer uden for hverdagens forløb og indenfor egne præmisser (Ibid: 42-43)

Kroppen anvendes i performancekunsten som et eksperimentelt felt, hvor performeren bringer sine egne kropslige grænser i spil for at udfordre de konventionelle opfattelser af køn og seksualitet (Hansen 2023). Performancekunsten som eksperimentelt felt, som jeg her fremhæver, dykker ned i identitetsspørgsmålet i relation til køn, der i nutidens performancekunst udforskes i grænserne mellem det private og offentlige rum. De rumlige grænser mellem det private og offentlige påvirkes af medierne og er medaktører i at forme vores opfattelse af krop, køn og

seksualitet (Hansen 2023). Medierne formidler både stereotype kønsnormer og udfordrer dem ved at give plads til forskellige kønsidentiteter. De har derfor en dobbeltrolle, hvor de både fastholder gamle normer og skaber rum for forandring. Medierne gør kunstneriske udtryk tilgængelige, hvilket giver mulighed for at udfordre og genfortolke kønsidentiteter gennem performancekunsten. Det er her i grænsefeltet, hvor performancekunstnere formidler kritiske perspektiver for at undersøge, hvor publikums grænser går i deres forståelse af køn og seksualitet.

Judith Butlers kønsteori

Spørgsmålet om, hvordan køn konstrueres, har været centralt i kønsstudier siden Judith Butler introducerede idéen om køn som performativt. Siden da har teoretikere som Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, Sara Ahmed, Jasbir Puar, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Eve Sedgwick og Amelia Jones m.fl. udvidet feltet med fokus på teknologi, materialitet, affekt, intersektionalitet, race og magtstrukturer. Artiklen undersøger, hvordan køn formes og forhandles i samtiden med afsæt i butlers teori.

Den amerikanske filosof og sociolog Judith Butler præsenterer i udgivelserne *Gender trouble* (1990) og *Bodies that matter* (1993) begrebet kønsperformativitet. Kernen i Butlers teori er, at køn, både det socialt og biologiske bestemte med de engelske betegnelser *sex* og *gender*, ikke er noget vi fødes med, men noget der konstrueres og materialiserer sig gennem en performativ gentagelsespraksis af kulturelle kodede kodekser (Butler 1993:2). Det sociale køn *gender* er ikke noget, der skal ses som ovenpå det givne biologiske *sex*, men som to udtryk for forståelser af de diskursive praksisser, der opfattes indenfor de normative rammer. Ifølge Butler ligger vores kønsopfattelse i det som de formulerer i *Bodies that matter*:

”...an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.” (Butler 1993:2)

Butler diskuterer med citatet, at der ikke er noget på forhånd givet ”jeg” der performer, men et ”jeg” der bliver til gennem gentagelsen og normen. Kønsperformance er altså ikke fuldstændig fri men underlagt ubevidste og faste repræsentationer af køn, der skaber gentagelsespraksissen. Ifølge Butler kan køn stivne i heteronormative køns kategorier, men forhandling af køn kan også åbne for forskydninger og sprækker i gentagelsen, hvorved afvigelser kan yde modstand mod

kategoriseringerne (Butler 1993: 6). Butler beskriver den handlende modstand med begrebet *agency* som i danske termer oversættes handlekraft (Butler 1990:22)

I analysen vil jeg bruge Butlers teori som en linse til at forstå, hvordan køn konstrueres og gentages for at sætte fokus på de forskydninger og sprækker, der opstår når kønsidentiteter yder modstand mod binære forståelser af køn.

Stigmatisering af køn i performancekunsten

Hvad karakteriserer en performance, når selve performancen manifesterer sig som en foranderlig handling, der udfolder sig i interaktionen med betragteren? Det der viser sin virkning på et bestemt tidspunkt og sted er ikke nødvendigvis effektivt et andet sted. Styrken her ligger performance evne til at resonere med den aktuelle tidsperiode som en universelt gældende samtid. Dog kan man diskutere, hvorvidt performancen er gældende på verdensplan. Det er her afgørende at huske, at adgangen til at udtrykke ens ønskede kønsidentitet gennem performance kun er tilgængelig i en snæver eksklusiv del af verden i visse kunstneriske kredse. Jeg påpeger derfor, at der på globalt plan ikke kun i kunstens kredse fortsat er mange steder, hvor det ikke er muligt at manifestere sin kønsidentitet, seksualitet og hvor individer oplever stigmatisering.

De tre queer kunstnere: Justin Shoulder

I fraværet af rettigheder og forståelser af at være en minoritet udspiller nattelivet sig som et af de rum, hvor flere af Shoulders værker udspringer fra (Serrano 2017). I sine værker inddrager Justin Shoulder androgyne kostumer og sin erfaring indenfor den queer-politiske kunstscene under pseudonymet PHASMAHAMMER (Shoulder 2024). Transformation er nøgleordet for Shoulders kunst, hvor de skaber performede muterede væsner, der kæmper imod deres egen aktualisering i verden inden de transformerer sig til endnu en version af sig selv. De muterede væsner udforsker queer, migrant, spirituelle og interkulturelle motiver og får publikum til at spekulere over måden, kønnet kan transcendere gennem tid (Arrouas 2018). I denne artikel argumenterer jeg for intentionen om at transformationen af diskurser og opfattelser af kønnet finder sted i performancekunstens evne til at skabe nærvær for et publikum, hvor både nutiden og fortiden bliver synlige og en integreret del af nye fremtidige måder at tænke på. Intensionen om transformation kan forstærkes af Shoulder i deres brug af kønsudtryk, der bryder med de gængse forestillinger om, hvordan køn bør udtrykkes. Det får værket til at skubbe til de diskursive

rammer, der former og fastholder bestemte kønsidentiteter som “naturlige” eller ønskværdige. Shoulder beskriver det som de forestillinger og:

”... begivenheder der er meget forbundet med lange aktivistiske historier, kravet om identitet, sådan som det forbindes i nye former for fortælling i klubben, teatret så går det ud i verden.” (Shoulder citeret i ,Lengkeek m.fl. 2022)

Yderligere kan der argumenteres for, at Shoulders performancekunst skal ses i den transformation, som Butler forklarer ligger hos den enkelte mellem det biologiske *sex* og det sociale køn *gender* sidestillende til den heteronormative kønskategori. Dog skal kontrasten mellem kategorierne ikke forstås som en indikation af, at opfattelsen af det heteronormative er ukorrekt. Fokus skal i stedet rettes mod den måde, hvorpå minoritetsgrupper omtales, respekteres og forstås:

”Der er stadig nogle helt basale rettigheder, vi ikke har, og det er nødt til at ændre sig. Indtil da kommer kunst og politik om de her emner til at hænge sammen...” (Shoulder citeret i, Arrouas 2018)

I Shoulders værk *Carrión*, undersøges skriftende identiteter gennem et muteret væsen, der kæmper med sin udvikling og overlevelse. Værket blander natur, teknologi i en fortælling om at være fanget mellem menneske og monstrum (Shoulder 2024). Queerheden i værket *Carrión* ses ikke kun i måden de binære forestillinger er forankret i myter og forståelser af mennesket, men også i den kreative proces, der opstår i grænserne mellem Shoulders personlige og professionelle liv (Arrouas 2018). Med udgangspunkt i Shoulders personlige erfaringer, som en del af LGBTQ+ miljøet, påpeger de, at selvom kunsten har sin egen stemme, er det uundgåeligt at kunstnere ikke engagerer sig i den politiske samtale om LGBTQ+ scenen og dens betingelser:

”Det kan godt være vi er kommet langt de sidste år, men der er stadig enorme problemer med ligestilling mellem kønnene og manglende forståelse for homoseksualitet og flydende køn” (Shoulder citeret i, Arrouas 2018)

Shoulders nonbinære kønsudtryk optræder i deres performances og trækker tråde til performancekunstens historie, hvor kroppen er et scenisk grundelement. Kroppen i Shoulders kunst skaber forbindelser mellem queer og interkulturelle grupper. Shoulders kropslige performances, kan jeg argumentere for, er med til at åbne op for sprækkerne i forhandlingen af køn idet, de eksempelvis bryder med stereotyperne indenfor kønnet beklædning, når de performer i androgyne kostumer. Brydningen af sprækkerne kan sammenkobles til Butler, hvor kønspositionerne ikke skal ses som stabile enheder men derimod som foranderlige, hvorigennem

det performede jeg kan skabe sig selv. Her ligger der i Butlers performativitetets begreb et potentiale for forandringen gennem det, Butler kalder *agency*. Med begrebet *agency* kan jeg argumentere for, at Shoulders måde at performe queerness ikke er en gentagelse af normer men derimod en drivkraft for kunsten. Dog kan der i andre sammenhænge være genslagskraft i at gentage normer, der kan være en drivkraft for kunsten idet publikum reflektere over normernes betydning, afsløre deres absurde sider eller kan skabe genkendelse i fællesskaber. Men det er ikke tilfældet her, hvor kunsten drives af at udfordre normerne.

De tre queer kunstnere: Orchid Domain og Ess Beck

I Lydkunst Podcast #51 introduceres Kristoffer Raasted, der står bag projektet Orchid Domain og Stine Kloster, der performer under aliaset Ess Beck (Neimann Clement mfl. 2019). Begge lydkunstnere identificerer sig som nonbinære, og deres lydværker udfordrer forholdet mellem køn, krop og stemme. For at udfordre kønsstereotyperne eksperimenterer Orchid Domain med lydbilledet ved at tage fat på subtile forskydninger i opfattelsen af køn. Kønnen performs improvisatorisk gennem kunstnerens egen filtrede stemme, der gennem aliaset Orchid Domain er:

”Et sted hvor jeg kan gå hen i mine følelser hvor det er lidt mere et åbent sted, nu hvor jeg hverken identificerer mig som mand eller kvinde, men jeg tænker meget mig selv som jeg er i transformation og i kontinuerlig udvikling...” (Orchid Domain citeret i, Neimann Clement mfl. 2019, 9:44)

Orchid Domains transformation og kontinuerlige udforskning af køn kan analyseres gennem Jon Mckenzie's begreb subversion til at belyse, hvordan samfundets strukturelle køns kategorisering kan udfordres. Subversion betegner her en liminal tilstand, hvor individer i overgang fratager sig normative forventninger. Dette perspektiv kan styrkes af Judith Butlers teori om, hvordan gentagelsens sprækker i performative kønsudtryk kan skabe rum for en nonbinær forståelse af køn, som performancekunsten både tydeliggøre og legitimerer.

Samfundets strukturelle køns kategorisering, kan jeg argumentere for knytter sig til Butlers pointe om, at de diskurser der konstruerer kønnen, efterhånden stivner i de kønnede udtryk som individet og dets omgivelser finder naturligt. Dog mener Butler, at denne virkelighed ikke lever op til normernes diskurser, fordi ingen altid opfører sig ”korrekt” kønnen, og at det er med at starte dialoger som Orchid Domain pointerer:

”... Man er jo ret kønnet som menneske, man bliver placeret i nogle kasser inden for køn og desto mere vigtigt synes jeg at der er nogle rum og situationer hvor det kan være mere åbent for den tænkning omkring køn som det udspiller sig...” (Orchid Domain citeret i, Neimann Clement mfl. 2019, 31:14)

Butlers idé om, at køn stivner gennem gentagne kønsudtryk, belyser Orchid Domains pointe om, hvordan queer dialog åbner et rum, hvor køn kan opleves og forstås på nye måder. Orchid Domain beretter yderligere i podcasten, at deres lyd-performede universer skal være projekter, der faciliterer rum, hvor der er plads til at udvikle dialoger om diskursen af køn.

Det karakteristiske i Orchid Domain og Ess Becks kunst udspringer af deres anvendelse af lyd (Neimann Clement mfl. 2019). I betragtning af performancekunstens historiske fokus på iscenesættelsen af den fysiske krop udfordrer de denne norm ved at eksperimentere med lyd, der redefinerer vores opfattelse af mandlige og kvindelige stemmer inden for deres kunstneriske praksis. De fremfører soniske værker, der udgør en unik stimulans for høresansen snare end synssansen. Det skyldes, at værkerne opererer på måder, der adskiller sig fra performancegenrens tidligere fire nævnte nøglebegreber, ved at redefinere vores måde at opleve på i en ikke-fysisk kropslig kontekst (Jalving 2011:33). Her bevæger værkerne sig væk fra performancekunstens oprindelige form og følger med teknologien, der opleves via medierne. Gennem medierne skabes et privat lydunivers for det enkelte individ, der fastholder aktiveringen af værket og kunstnerens stemme i den flydende forståelse af køn. Når individet gentagende gange kan vende tilbage til værket.

Det rejser spørgsmålet om, hvorvidt kunstneren er nærværende selv hvis, der ikke udføres fysisk kropslige handlinger foran publikum? Argumentet kan forbindes til Butlers påstand om, at der ikke er et forudbestemt "jeg", der performer, men et "jeg", der formes gennem gentagelse og normen. I denne sammenhæng refererer 'jeg'et til kunstneren, da det performative jeg i lydmediet skaber en følelse af et menneske på den anden side. Lydmediet understøtter denne idé, idet gentagelsen og forholdet til flydende køn åbner op for en udvidet forståelse af "jeg'et", selvom kunstneren ikke er fysisk til stede. Lydens gentagelse og manipulation bryder med klassisk performance og skaber et evigt værk, der afspejler køns og identitets konstante forandring.

Ess Beck performer gennem digital teknologi, hvor Ess Beck transcenderer narrativerne i en performance over forskellige medier som MR – teknologien samt AI- assisteret re-mediering i det fysiske rum (Neimann Clement mfl. 2019). Det belyser teknologiens rolle i vores oplevelse af

lydkunst og den kønnede lyd. I sin lydkunst manipulerer Ess Beck kvindestemmen ved at anvende den som det hyper feminine og samtidig fragmentere og forvrænge stemmen for at ændre narrativet:” ... Det giver nogle muligheder for at træde ind i en helt anden fortællingsramme, bruge historien og larmen til at ødelægge udtrykket...” (Ess Beck citeret i, Neimann Clement mfl. 2019, 26:23).

Fortællingen om kønsforståelse er for Ess Beck:

”... Når jeg lukker øjnene og spørger hvad for et køn jeg er, er der bare et stort blankt nul. Jeg kan ikke sige noget om at være kvinde, men jeg kan anerkende de strukturelle forskelle...” (Ess Beck citeret i, Neimann Clement mfl. 2019, 3:19)

Jeg kan argumentere for, at Ess Beck gennem digitale værker, hvor skrevne tekster kodificeres og gengives, af teknologien med forvrængede stemmer bidrager til at udviske de skarpt definerede grænser mellem kønsidentiteterne. Argumentet er derfor, at performativitet ikke kun handler om at virkeligheden ligner teater gennem sprog og handling, men også om, at performativitet er med til at skabe og forme virkeligheden aktivt.

Queer perspektiver i performance, performativitet af køn

Konceptet queer er spredt rundt i verden og bliver ofte brugt af kunstnere, performere og forskere globalt som en identifikation knyttet til køn og seksualitet enten som potentielt flydende eller et sted for politisk energi med henblik på et modsvar til den normative kultur (Heede, Graugaard 2024). Queer teori og queer aktivisme var modsætningsfyldte fra det øjeblik, de begyndte at udfolde sig omkring 1990 paradoksalt normative i mange af deres grundlæggende antagelser samtidigt med, at de radikalt mobiliserede sig mod nye måder at forestille sig, hvordan køn og seksualitet optræder som subjekter og kulturelle udtryk: “*Queer is meant to be confrontational—opposed to gay assimilationists and straight oppressors while inclusive of people who have been marginalized by anyone in power*” (Jones 2020:186)

I værket *In Between Subjects A Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (2020) af den amerikanske kunsthistoriker Amelia Jones, taler hun om kompleksiteten indenfor seksualitet og performance. Jones beskæftiger sig indgående med udviklingen af queer begrebet inden for performance, hvor hun i femte kapitel kaldet *Queer* inddrager Judith Butler og Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick for at se

nærmere på, hvilke diskurser der forbinder sig med queer, når det ses i sammenhæng til teorier om performance og performativitet.

I følge Jones synes diskussionen af begrebet performativitet primært at være knyttet til ideen om teatralisk præsentation (Jones 2020:59). Performativitet forklarer Jones samles i to helt forskellige diskurser nemlig teater og talehandlingsteori (Ibid: 112-114). Diskurserne kan undersøges i spændingen mellem kunstneren og omverdenen gennem de forskellige fortolkninger af performativitet. Jeg kan i forbindelse med diskurserne argumentere for, at Judith Butler introducerer ideen om køn som en performancemæssig handling, hvor gentagne handlinger konstituerer identitet, og der i gentagelsen ligger potentialet for en gentagelse med en forskel. I første omgang skal performativitet forstås, ikke som en enkeltstående eller bevidst 'handling', men som den gentagende og citerende praksis, hvormed diskurs skaber de effekter den navngiver. Jeg finder her ideen om mening interessant, når det afhænger af performancens gentagelighed som gentages for at være genkendelig. Et andet perspektiv på diskurserne påpeger Sedgwick er gentagelsen, der er afgørende for dannelsen af LGBTQ+ identiteter, da den performative gentagelse hjælper med at genvinde og transformere den skam, som hun argumenterer for er en central følelse for queer personer. Skam, som ofte pålægges dem, når de bliver gjort til at føle skam over deres begær og identiteter.

De tre performancekunstnere i artiklen bruger performance som en måde at skabe et rum, hvor de kan gentage og iscenesætte det "jeg", de ønsker at udtrykke, hvilket relaterer sig til Butlers ideer om, at identitet konstitueres gennem gentagne handlinger. Ess Beck og Orchid Domain udvider dette ved at åbne et rum for performancekunsten online, hvor de udfordrer strukturelle forestillinger om køn gennem lydmediet. Dette rejser spørgsmålet: Kan performance af kønsidentitet udenfor en fysisk scene stadig betragtes som performancekunst? Eller kræver det en fysisk ramme for at udfordre normer aktivistisk? Disse spørgsmål kobles til Jones' diskurser om performativitet som både teater og talehandling, og kan relateres til Sedgwicks syn på, performancekunsten som et kraftfuldt virkemiddel, der kan bidrage til at udfordre opfattelser af seksualitet. Performancen bliver dermed et opgør med de diskurser, der gennemsyrrer sproget og samfundet, og som kan finde sted både i det fysiske og digitale rum.

I sammenhæng til forrige afsnit kan jeg argumentere for, at der i dag er en problematik i, at begrebet performativitet ofte bruges om handlinger, der opfattes som overfladiske og 'uægte'. Men at reducere performativitet til noget overfladisk overser netop det transformative potentiale, hvor

identiteter ikke blot bliver "spillet" men aktivt skabt og forhandlet. Jeg kan argumentere for, at de tre queer kunstnere udtrykker deres lyst og queerness ved at eksperimentere med kønnet som noget, der flyder frem og tilbage. Deres forhold til kønsidentitet kan derfor bidrage til at frigøre sig fra de uigenkendelige afspejlinger og forventninger, der opstår som følge af de strukturelle og binære forståelser af køn, der kan opstå med gentagelsen.

En anden dimension kan findes i Sedgwick og Butlers syn på politisk aktivisme. Butler knytter sin teori til politiske bevægelser og kritiserer normative strukturer i samfundet. Den binære opfattelse af køn og seksualitet muliggør politisk handlekraft. I denne kontekst fungerer offentlige udsagn om queerness som performative handlinger. Ifølge Butlers begreb om "citationalitet" er formålet at omdefinere afvisningen af homoseksualitet og skabe legitimitet på trods af denne afvisning. (Ibid: 200). Sedgwick er også engageret i politiske implikationer, men fokuserer mere på individets skamfulde oplevelser og identitetsformning, hvilket skal ses gennem Sedwicks tilgang til politik. Sedgwick påpeger, at skam er knyttet til stigmatisering en forbindelse, der kan relateres til Shoulder, der mener, at indtil grundlæggende queer-rettigheder opnås, vil kunst og politik forblive sammenflettede. Sedgwick argumenterer for:

"... "Shame interests me politically, then, because it generates and legitimates the place of identity—the question of identity—at the origin of the impulse of the performative, but it does so without giving that identity space the standing of an essence. It constitutes it as to-be-constituted." (Jones 2020: 223)

Sedgwick mener, at skam spiller en rolle i at skabe og validere identitet og de tilknyttede spørgsmål omkring identitet, der opstår i det performative. Hun fastholder dog, at dette ikke indebærer at tildele identitet en fast position som en essens. I stedet ser hun skam som en kraft, der konstituerer identiteten i en konstant proces med at blive dannet eller konstitueret. Ved at bruge udtrykket "as to-be constituted" antyder hun, at identiteten er dynamisk og foranderlig påvirket af kulturelle og politiske kræfter.

Konklusion

Denne artikel har udlagt, hvordan performancekunsten markerede en ny æra, hvor kunstnere fokuserede på kroppen som centralt materiale og introducerede nøglebegreber som nærvær, subversion, relationalitet og præsentation. Nærvær i realtid blev afgørende, da det opstod gennem

interaktionen mellem kunstner og publikum, og subversion blev betragtet som et overgangsritual, der adresserede transformationens tærskel. Performancekunstens udforskning af køn, kønsidentitet og seksualitet har været særligt bemærkelsesværdig, hvor udfordringen af kroppens grænser og normer har været i fokus.

De etnologiske indsigter viser, at performancekunst er et redskab til kulturel forandring. Ved at udfordre normer omkring køn og identitet bidrager det til transformation og nye perspektiver. Kunstnernes arbejde med kroppen og kønsidentitet fungerer som et spejl for politiske og sociale bevægelser, hvilket viser, hvordan kunst kan være en platform for kritisk refleksion og forandring i samfundet. Performancekunsten, gennem queer kunstnerne Justin Shoulder, Kristoffer Raasted (Orchid Domain) og Stine Kloster (Ess Beck), adresserer og kritiserer eksisterende kønsnormer. Deres fokus på transformation og kønnets transcendens gennem tid understreger performancekunstens potentiale som en drivkraft for kunsten i konfrontation med normerne.

Performancekunsten som en foranderlig handling i interaktion med betragteren rejser komplekse spørgsmål om global relevans og dens rolle i queer-teori og politik. Selvom evnen til at skabe nærvær og resonere med tiden er afgørende, er adgangen til at udtrykke kønsidentitet globalt begrænset nogle steder. Queer som identifikation knyttet til køn og seksualitet udforskes gennem to perspektiver repræsenteret af Judith Butler og Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Butler knytter sin teori til bredere politiske bevægelser og kritiserer normative strukturer, mens Sedgwick fokuserer på individets skamfulde oplevelser og personlige politik. Den komplekse dynamik i forskningen, værkerne og i vores individuelle forståelse skaber en spænding mellem håbet om forandring og gentagelsens potentielle fastholdelse af normer. Butler understreger gentagelsens potentiale for subversion, mens Sedgwick ser skam som en konstituerende kraft i identitetsformning uden at tildele identitet en fast position.

Artiklens undersøgelse af performancekunsten som kontemporær kunst kan bidrage til den etnologiske forskning gennem forståelsen af de komplekse, ofte skiftende, sociale og kulturelle realiteter, der præger vores tid. Det er spørgsmål som: Hvilke perspektiver på menneskelig eksistens kan kunstværker give os? Hvordan afspejler kunst de kulturelle kontekster, som den er skabt i? Her kan etnologien bruge performancekunsten som medium mellem kunstnerens virkelige liv og den producerede kunst samt få os til at reflektere over, hvordan kunst fra forskellige perioder afspejler de tidsmæssige og historiske kontekster, det blev skabt i, og hvordan disse kontekster stadig påvirker vores nutidige liv.

I forbindelse med udarbejdelsen af denne artikel har jeg været opmærksom på min egen position som cis-kvinde og bestræbt mig på ikke at indplacere nogen i faste kategorier, men har forsøgt at forholde mig åbent og respektfuldt til de muligheder og perspektiver, queer kunstnerne præsenterer. Mit mål har været at anerkende deres kompleksitet og mangfoldighed uden at reducere dem til forudbestemte rammer.



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KONSTRUKTIONEN AF LGBT+- PERSONERS TRIVSEL PÅ ARBEJDSMARKEDET

En undersøgelse af modsætningsforholdene i Als Research og LGBT+
Danmarks & Boston Consulting Groups rapporter om LGBT+-personers
trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to explore how different stakeholders construct and interpret studies on the well-being of LGBT+-individuals in the labor market. By outlining, comparing and analyzing two studies of the workplace well-being of LGBT+-individuals through a range of methodological and theoretical lenses, the article highlights the ways in which researchers' question formulations and selection biases can influence study outcomes. The article argues for more rigorous research practices and encourages readers to adopt a critical and reflective approach when engaging with studies on the well-being of LGBT+- individuals in the labor market as well as a general critical stance towards stakeholders' presentation and construction of statistical material.

NØGLEORD: LGBT+, arbejdsmarkedstrivsel, datafortolkning, socialkonstruktivisme, metodisk refleksivitet.



Introduktion

Vi ser ofte i medierne, at diverse medieredaktioner pryder deres forsider med fængende overskrifter, der når det kommer til stykket, ikke altid stemmer overens med den pågældende artikels indhold. Medieforskeren Preben Sepstrup påpeger, at det både kan være journalister, der mangler kompetencer eller ligeledes redaktionschefer, der er ude efter spektakulære nyheder. Men han påpeger tillige, at det bliver mere og mere almindeligt, at magtfulde aktører som interesseorganisationer og virksomheder bruger deres undersøgelser til at sætte en dagsorden i medierne. Dette er problematisk, da det er med til at svække historiernes troværdighed, og dermed forårsager fejlinformationer til modtagerne (Andersen 2007: 1).

LGBT+ Danmark udgav i 2023 i samarbejde med konsulenthuset Boston Consulting Group (BCG) en rapport om LGBT+-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet. I deres undersøgelse hævder de, at størstedelen af LGBT+-personer oplever diskrimination på deres arbejdsplads, og at arbejdspladsen ikke gør nok i deres inkludering af LGBT+-personer. Dog viser en rapport fra Als Research, at det gennemsnitlige trivselsniveau for LGBT-personer ligger lidt lavere end trivselsniveauet for den generelle danske befolkning. Hertil viser deres data, at der ikke ses en synlig sammenhæng mellem inkluderingsprogrammer på arbejdspladsen og LGBT-personers trivsel (Følner 2019). Men hvorfor hævder de to rapporter til dels modsigende udsagn, når de har undersøgt det samme?

Jeg vil i indeværende artikel undersøge, hvordan organisationerne LGBT+ Danmark og Als Research præsenterer og fremstiller LGBT, LGBT+ og LGBTI-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet i deres rapporter, samt i hvilken grad organisationerne er med til at forme udfaldet af undersøgelserne. Artiklen vil først give en indsigt i hovedkonklusionerne af de to organisationers undersøgelser, hvorefter de vil blive sammenlignet og analyseret med udgangspunkt i den norske sociolog Ottar Helleviks teorier om meningsmålinger. Afslutningsvis vil de analytiske perspektiver bunde ud i en diskuterende del, der har til formål at reflektere over, hvordan forskning bør tilrettelægges og udføres for at sikre metodisk robusthed og transparens.

Gennem undersøgelsen af de to rapporter gives der en indsigt i, hvordan køns- og seksualitetsidentitet udspiller sig på det danske arbejdsmarked, og hvordan forskellige aktører forsøger at påvirke denne debat. Ved at anvende en etnologisk tilgang til dette emne, søger jeg ikke blot at påpege forskelle i datafortolkning, men også at forstå de bredere kulturelle, sociale og

politiske kontekster og aktører, der påvirker, hvordan information om LGBT+ personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet produceres, formidles og fortolkes i det danske samfund. Undersøgelsen kan yderligere være med til at synliggøre, hvordan viden og påstande om sociale grupper er socialt konstrueret gennem måden, de undersøges og formidles på, hvorpå der bidrages til en bredere forståelse af, hvordan vi som samfund bør forholde os kritisk til præsentationen af statistisk materiale.

LGBT+ Danmarks og BCG's hovedkonklusioner

For at undersøge hvordan og i hvilken grad de følgende rapporter: *'LGBT-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet'* og *'Danish Companies Miss the Mark on LGBT+ Inclusion'* er med til at influere udfaldet af deres undersøgelser, vil jeg først undersøge rapporternes hovedkonklusioner. Der vil i løbet af denne opgave skiftevis blive benyttet tre forskellige betegnelser om LGBT(I+) -personer, da rapporterne har benyttet forskellige betegnelser i deres undersøgelser. Als Research har undersøgt LGBT-personers samt en mindre gruppe LGBTI-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet, hvorimod Boston Consulting Group (BCG) og LGBT+ Danmark har undersøgt LGBT+-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet. Artiklens sprogbrug vil derfor differentiere mellem: 'LGBT-personer', 'LGBT+-personer' og 'LGBTI-personer' alt efter hvilke rapporter, artiklen udleder pointer fra. Med det differentieret sprogbrug i mente, er det hertil vigtigt at pointere, at de forskellige rapporternes informantgrundlag og undersøgelse derfor heller ikke kan sammenlignes fuldstændig ens. Det er derfor vigtigt at have i mente, at dette kan påvirke og afspejle nogle af forskellene mellem rapporternes hovedkonklusioner og resultater.

Boston Consulting Group (BCG) og LGBT+ Danmark er gået sammen om at undersøge LGBT+ inklusion i Danske virksomheder med udgangspunkt i en række andre rapporters undersøgelser af LGBT+-personers trivsel på det danske arbejdsmarked, heriblandt Als rapport. Jeg vil i løbet af denne opgave betegne rapporten som 'LGBT+ Danmarks rapport'.

LGBT+ Danmark har i deres rapport undersøgt inklusionen af LGBT+-personer ud fra en række stikprøver bestående af kvantitative og kvalitative data foretaget fra d. 24. november til 4. december 2022. Informanterne har reflekteret over deres trivsel på arbejdspladsen inden for de sidste to år. Undersøgelsen trak resultater fra 1000 repræsentative respondenter i Danmark, hvoraf 500 af dem udgjorde LGBT+-personer og 500 udgjorde ikke-LGBT+-personer (Laerkholm & Reichhardt 2023: 3).

Allerede ved titlen på rapporten fremfører de, at deres undersøgelse viser, at danske virksomheder ikke lever op til målet om LGBT+-inklusion. Rapporten uddyber dog ikke, hvad dette mål indbefatter. Herudover fremfører de 5 hovedpointer, der lyder på, at 81 % af LGBT+-respondenterne har været udsat for eller været vidne til diskriminerende situationer på arbejdet. Hertil oplever både 'LGBT+-personerne' og 'ikke-LGBT+-personerne' fra undersøgelsen, at dette har en negativ påvirkning på trivsel. Heraf er den mest presserende hindring for inklusion de nedsættende kommentarer, hvilket 75% af LGBT+-personerne har været udsat for eller været vidne til. Derfor mener de, at virksomheder har meget at arbejde på for at fremme inklusion af LGBT+-ansatte. Til dette mener de, at virksomhederne skal fokusere på deres politik, ledelse, drift og mennesker for at sikre inklusion af LGBT+-personer. Hertil afslutter de deres femte pointe ved at påpege, at alle har en rolle i at støtte LGBT+-kollegaer (Laerkholm & Reichhardt 2023:1).

Als Researchs hovedkonklusioner

Als Research undersøgte sammen med en ekspertgruppe, bestående af en række fagfolk inden for LGBT-miljøet, LGBT-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet i perioden september 2018 til april 2019. Informanterne har skulle svare på spørgsmålene med udgangspunkt i trivslen på deres nuværende arbejdsplads. Trivslen blev undersøgt ved at belyse grader af åbenhed, oplevelser med diskrimination og initiativer målrettet inklusion af LGBT-personer på det danske arbejdsmarked mv. (Følner 2019: 3)

Als Research har de undersøgt ovenstående ved hjælp af fire repræsentative empiriske datasæt, heraf to spørgeskemaundersøgelser blandt LGBTI-personer (betegnet som banner- og omnibus-survey). Derudover har de foretaget en spørgeskemaundersøgelse blandt ledere og HR-medarbejdere på danske arbejdspladser og afslutningsvis, har de foretaget en række kvalitative dybdeinterview med henholdsvis LGBTI-personer samt med ledere og HR-medarbejdere. Spørgeskemaundersøgelserne bygger på svar fra 1.655 LGBTI-personer samt 200 ledere og HR-medarbejdere. De kvalitative dybdeinterviews består af svar fra 24 LGBTI-personer og 8 HR-medarbejdere. Selvom rapporten har fremført undersøgelsen blandt LGBTI-personer, så belyser undersøgelsen først og fremmest LGBT-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet, da meget få intetkønnede (betegnet som 'I'et' i LGBTI-betegnelsen) personer har besvaret spørgeskemaerne og dybdeinterviewsene (ibid.).

Rapporten starter med at fremføre deres hovedkonklusioner fra kvantitative data. 69% af alle respondenterne i de to surveys er åbne om deres seksuelle orientering, og ligeledes føler 69%, at de 'i høj

grad' eller 'i meget høj grad' kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering på deres nuværende arbejdsplads. I modsætning til dette føler 27%, at de i nogen grad, i ringe grad eller slet ikke kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering. Heraf viser undersøgelsen, at 8 % har oplevet diskrimination på grund af deres seksuelle orientering på deres arbejdsplads. Sammenlignet med andre LGBT-personer har de 8% en markant større risiko for mistrivsel i form af depression og langvarig stressbelastning. Yderligere påpeger de, at 78% af homo- og biseksuelle samt transpersoner trives på deres arbejdsplads og derfor har lav risiko for mistrivsel. Herefter uddyber og understøtter de følgende udsagn med en række citater fra deres kvalitative data (Følner 2019: 14-16).

Als Research påpeger på baggrund af deres undersøgelse, at der ikke ses en sammenhæng i trivsel i relation til, hvorvidt arbejdspladsen har indført en personalepolitik, der indeholder emner vedrørende seksuel orientering eller ej. Størstedelen (87%) af deres adspurgte LGBT-personer, som er på arbejdspladser, hvor personalepolitikken inkluderer emner om seksuel orientering mener, at de enten 'i høj grad' eller 'i meget høj grad' føler, at de kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering. Til sammenligning gælder dette 67% af de respondenter, der arbejder på en arbejdsplads uden en personalepolitik, og 68% af de respondenter, der arbejder på en arbejdsplads, hvor personalepolitikken ikke inkluderer emner vedrørende seksuel orientering (Følner 2019: 21). Det er dog værd at påpege, at der trods alt er en forskel på 20 procentpoint imellem LGBT-personernes følelse af åbenhed om seksuel orientering baseret på om personalepolitikken inkluderer emner vedrørende seksuel orientering. Så selvom Als Research konkluderer, at der ikke ses en sammenhæng, kan man dog argumentere imod denne påstand og konkluderer, at der i nogen grad er sammenhæng, da der trods alt er en forskel på 20 procentpoint.

Fejltolkning af meningsmålinger

Ud fra redegørelsen af Als Researchs resultater tegner der sig samlet set et nogenlunde positivt billede af LGBT-personers trivsel på det danske arbejdsmarked. De fleste LGBT-personer føler, at de kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering på arbejdspladsen, men det er her også vigtigt at have i mente, at ikke alle ønsker at være åbne – selvom de føler, at de godt kunne være det. Faktisk viser tal, at 17 % aktivt fravælger åbenhed, selv om de oplever, at de har mulighed for det. Det er derudover også vigtigt at bemærke, at 27 % af LGBT-personerne føler, at de i nogen grad, i ringe grad eller slet ikke kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering.

Als Researchs undersøgelse viste yderligere, at kun 8% har oplevet diskrimination på grund af deres seksuelle orientering på deres arbejdsplads. Så hvordan kan det være, at LGBT+ Danmarks rapport viste, at 81% af deres adspurgte LGBT+-respondenter - herunder både LGBT+-personer og ikke- LGBT+-personer - har været udsat for eller været vidne til diskriminerende situationer på arbejdet?

Den norske statskundskabssociolog Ovar Hellevik pointerer i hans bog: *Mål og mening om feiltolkning av meningsmålinger*, at der kan være mange faktorer, der spiller en rolle i forskelle mellem meningsmålinger. Én af forklaringerne på modsætningsforhold mellem to meningsmålinger kan skyldes *udvalgsskævheder* og en anden *spørgsmaalsformulering* (Hellevik 2011: 40). Jeg vil derfor i første omgang undersøge, om de to rapporter er sammenlignelige ved at analysere deres spørgsmaalsformuleringer og informantudvalg, da dette vil lede mig nærmere til et svar på, om rapporterne rent faktisk har undersøgt det samme og ligeledes, hvorfor deres resultater i så fald afviger fra hinanden.

Modsætningsforholdet mellem de to undersøgelser med fokus på spørgsmaalsformuleringen

Hvis man ser nærmere på spørgsmaalsformuleringen mellem de to undersøgelser, vil jeg først se, om de spørgsmål, der er stillet i de to forskellige undersøgelser, faktisk er sammenlignelige i henhold til deres formulering. Als Research har i deres undersøgelse stillet følgende spørgsmål:

“Har du følt dig diskrimineret eller chikaneret på baggrund af din seksuelle orientering på din nuværende arbejdsplads?”

Herefter har Als Research stillet uddybende spørgsmål i form af:

“Har du følt dig diskrimineret eller chikaneret på baggrund af din kønsidentitet på din nuværende arbejdsplads?”

Til sidst har de adspurgte:

“Hvordan har du følt dig diskrimineret/ chikaneret?” (flere svar mulige)” (Følner 2019: 73-74).

Hvis man sammenligner dette med LGBT+ Danmarks spørgsmaalsformulering er det ikke lige så tydeligt, hvad denne har lydt i spørgeskemaundersøgelsen, men deres hovedkonklusion lyder, at 81 % af deres LGBT+-respondenter har været udsat for eller været vidne til diskriminerende situationer.

Ser man nærmere på Als Researchs rapport's hovedkonklusion lyder den på, at 8% har oplevet diskrimination på grund af deres seksuelle orientering, hvorimod LGBT+ Danmarks og BCG's rapport viser, at 81 % af deres LGBT+-respondenter har været udsat for eller været vidne til diskriminerende

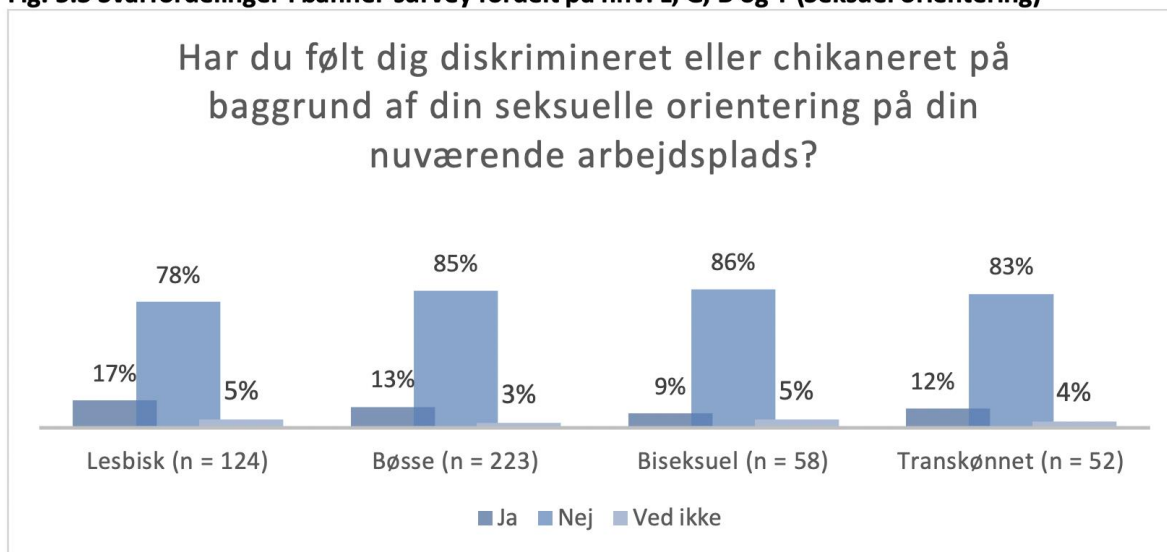
situationer. Så de adskiller sig ved, at der i de 81% i LGBT+ Danmarks udsagn indgår personer, der har været vidne til det, hvilket der ikke gør i Als Researchs udsagn. Ved nærmere gennemgang af deres diagrammer (figur 1 og 2) for ovenstående udsagn, viser det sig, at det ikke drejer sig om 81%, som de først fremfører, men faktisk 72% af 500 LGBT+-personer og 32% af 280 ikke-LGBT+-personer. På trods af dette er der stadig stor forskel mellem, at 72% LGBT+-personer har oplevet eller været vidne til diskrimination ifølge LGBT+ Danmarks undersøgelse kontra de 8% i Als Researchs undersøgelse. Ud af de 72% uddyber LGBT+ Danmark ikke, hvordan respondenterne er fordelt ud fra deres seksuelle orientering, hvorimod Als Research også viser, at de 8% fordelt på deres seksuelle orientering: L, G, B og T. Derudover har de også foretaget en undersøgelse af diskrimination af transpersoners kønsidentitet. Heraf viser det sig, at 25% ud af 934 respondenter har oplevet diskrimination på arbejdspladsen relateret til deres kønsidentitet (Følner 2019: 15). Igen viser fordelingen her heller ikke noget tæt på de 72%, som LGBT+ Danmark opnåede.

Exhibit 1: 81% of LGBT+ respondents have been exposed to or witnessed discriminatory situations at work; both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ individuals report a negative impact on well-being

% of respondents that have been exposed to or witnessed at least one discriminatory situation against LGBT+ individuals at a workplace within the last two years



Figur 1: (Laerkholm & Reichhardt 2023: 3)

Fig. 5.3 Svarfordelinger i banner-survey fordelt på hhv. L, G, B og T (Seksuel orientering)

P-værdi: 0,412. Note: Under 1% har svaret, at de ikke ønsker at besvare spørgsmålet, og under 5% har svaret 'ved ikke'. Derfor er disse svarkategori ikke vist i søjlediagrammet. Søjlediagrammet viser besvarelser fra LGBT-personer i banner-surveyen, som er i arbejde.

Figur 2: (Følner 2019: 72)

Ligeledes er det værd at påpege, at der også ligger en forskel mellem de to rapporters definition af diskrimination eller chikane. Als Research har foretaget undersøgelsen af diskrimination på baggrund af informanternes seksuelle orientering og yderligere også transpersoners kønsidentitet, hvorimod LGBT+ Danmark ikke har angivet, hvorvidt det er på baggrund af seksualitet eller kønsidentitet. Dog undersøger begge rapporter typerne af diskrimination, hvoraf begge deres undersøgelser peger på, at ubehagelige kommentarer og negativt sprogbrug er den mest hyppige form for diskrimination (Følner 2019: 74; Lærkholm & Reichhardt 2023: 4).

Grunden til at de to rapporters resultater er afvigende fra hinanden, kan til dels skyldes spørgsmålsformuleringen. Jeg vil argumentere for, at Als Researchs rapport er mere dybdegående i deres undersøgelse, da de har benyttet sig af flere spørgsmål i deres undersøgelser og flere kategorier inden for diskrimination både baseret på typen af diskrimination - heraf seksualitet eller kønsidentitet -, dem der oplever diskrimination, typen af diskrimination mm. Herimod bygger LGBT+ Danmarks resultater ikke på nogen opdeling i, hvilke personer inden for LGBT+ har oplevet det og har yderligere slået deres undersøgelse sammen med undersøgelsen, om deres respondenter ved diskrimination mistrives. Det at stille to spørgsmål i ét kan have indflydelse på udfaldet af svaret, da det kan være svært at skelne mellem, hvad respondenterne svarer på (Metodeguiden AU, n.d). I dette tilfælde kan det være svært at skelne

mellem, om respondenterne i LGBT+ Danmarks undersøgelse svarer på, om de har oplevet diskriminerende situationer eller om de mistrives. Det er klart, at der kan ses en sammenhæng mellem de to ting, men det kan være svært at skelne mellem, hvad de svarer på. Men på trods af en forskel i spørgsmålsformuleringen og mængden af spørgsmål, så minder deres undersøgelser stadig om hinanden, hvorfor jeg også vil undersøge, om der ligger nogle udvalgsskævheder, der resulterer i modsætningsforhold mellem de to undersøgelser.

Modsætningsforholdet mellem de to undersøgelser med fokus på udvalgsskævheder

Ved udvalgsskævheder kan man blandt andet se på repræsentativiteten blandt informanterne. En undersøgelse vil ved korrekt repræsentativitet fremgå valid og modsat invalid ved selektionsbias. Selektionsbias er den skævhed, der kan opstå i valget af informanter. For at undgå selektionsbias skal undersøgelsen være repræsentativ, og der må derfor ikke være under- eller overrepræsentation af en bestemt gruppe (Metodeguiden AU, n.d.).

Ser man nærmere på repræsentativiteten i de to undersøgelser fremstår de som værende repræsentative, idet der er over 1000 informanter, der er fordelt nogenlunde ligeligt på kønsidentitet, seksualitet, alder, job, uddannelse, alder mm. (Laerkholm & Reichhardt 2023: 11; Følner 2019: 23-30; Hansen 2008). Dog er det værd at påpege, at der i LGBT+ Danmarks undersøgelse er lidt underrepræsentation af ikke-LGBT+-personer i alderen 18-34 år, hvilket kan have en betydning for udfaldet af svarene, da en yngre aldersgruppe måske forholder sig anderledes til LGBT+-miljøet, men dette er ikke noget, der endeligt kan bevises. På den måde ligger modsætningsforholdet overordnet set heller ikke i udvalgsskævheder blandt de to rapporter.

I henhold til informantgruppen påpeger Hellevik, at man i nogle undersøgelser udtager en mindre gruppe ud fra en større gruppe og generalisere noget om denne gruppe, hvorfor man kan komme til at glemme den anden del af gruppen (Hellevik 2011: 36-37). Denne pointe kan ses i henhold til rekrutteringen af LGBT-personer og LGBT+-personer. Als Research påpeger i deres rapport, at det kan være svært at give et universelt repræsentativt billede af LGBTI-personer i en given befolkning, idet emner vedrørende seksualitet og kønsidentitet opleves som følsomme, svære og/eller tabubelagte emner. Ligeledes er der også grupper af LGBTI-personer, der ”lever i skabet” og ikke ønsker at dele deres seksuelle orientering og/eller kønsidentitet over for omverdenen af personlige årsager. Als Research påpeger i henhold til

denne point, at de har forsøgt minimere ovenstående problemer ved at indsamle deres data via to typer surveys med fokus på repræsentativitet fordelt på forskellige typer arbejdspladser og landsdele (Følner 2019: 21). LGBT+ Danmark har ikke angivet nogle refleksioner eller overvejelser over potentielle bias ved informantrekruttering. De har indsamlet deres data via sociale medier, hvilket kan have haft en betydning for udfaldet af deres undersøgelse. Som Als Research påpeger i deres rapport, så kan det være udfordrende at nå ud til de LGBTI-personer, der ”lever i skabet”, fordi de ikke nødvendigvis indgår i forskellige dele af LGBT-miljøet, hvorfor det kan være svært at nå gennem til dem via surveys, der distribueres gennem LGBTI-relaterede foreninger og netværk (Følner 2019: 23). Resultatet af at LGBT+ Danmark har indsamlet deres data via sociale medier kan have påvirket udfaldet af deres data, fordi man kan formode, at de kun når ud til en gruppe af LGBT+-personer, der er mere politisk engageret i at sætte fokus på at kæmpe for lighed i LGBT+-miljøet og minimere diskriminationen blandt LGBT+-personer. Ligesom ved generel politisk engagement, kan holdningerne og dermed svarene være mindre præget af ønsket om at pege svarene i en bestemt retning. Set i henhold til LGBT+-personer, så er det sandsynligt, at de personer der i højere grad ”lever i skabet” eller ikke ønsker at tage del i denne politiske dagsorden, hvorfor deres svar måske ikke er præget af en politisk agenda eller lignende.

På den måde kan man argumentere for, at begge rapporter ikke kan siges at være universelt repræsentative, men at Als Research har reflekteret over deres repræsentativitet og haft intentionen om at reducere selektionsbias. Modsat har LGBT+ Danmark ikke påpeget nogle refleksioner herom, og har derudover har indsamlet deres data via deres egne sociale medier, hvorfor deres informantgruppe kan være influeret af en politisk dagsorden, hvilket i sidste ende svækker repræsentativiteten og dermed udfaldet af deres undersøgelse.

Yderligere kan Helleviks ovenstående pointe også ses i henhold til, at rapporterne udtager en mindre gruppe af befolkningen i form af LGBT+-personer fra den samlede befolkning. LGBT+ Danmark sammenligner ikke deres resultater med den generelle trivsel for ikke-LGBT+-personer, men tager blot udgangspunkt i deres adspurgte ikke-LGBT+-informanter. Omvendt sammenligner Als Research deres pointer ved at sammenligne deres resultater om trivsel med den generelle arbejdstrivsel på landsplan. De påpeger f.eks. at LGBT-personers trivsel varierer fra 3-13 procentpoint fra den generelle trivsel (Følner 2019: 16). Denne pointe ændrer ikke på, at de to rapporter stadig har procentmæssig forskel i deres resultater, men jeg vil mene, det er med til at understrege LGBT+ Danmark og BCG’s manglende refleksivitet i analysen af deres data. I næste afsnit vil jeg med afsæt i denne refleksion give et bud på,

hvordan forskning bør drives. Dette vil blive understøttet af Helleviks to hovedprincipper for, hvordan forskning bør drives.

Forskerens indflydelse på udfaldet af undersøgelserne

Mine to forhenstående analytiske afsnit har belyst, at forskellen i de to rapporters resultater i lav grad skyldes spørgsmålsformuleringen og udvalgsskævheder, hvorfor jeg nu vil diskutere Helleviks hovedprincipper for, hvordan forskning bør drives.

Forskning bør ifølge Hellevik drives ud fra to hovedprincipper. Forskeren skal huske såkaldt *forklaringsmangfold*, hvilket vil sige, at forskeren skal huske at sætte spørgsmålstejn ved det mønster, de har afdækket. Med dette menes, at forskeren skal finde flest mulige alternative forklaringer på forskningsfeltet. Hertil hører det næste begreb: *falsificere*, hvilket vil sige, at forskeren skal afkræfte alle de alternative forklaringer, da dette gør undersøgelsen mere troværdig. Forskeren skal i dette tilfælde for eksempel stille spørgsmålstejn til, hvordan den generelle trivsel på arbejdspladser ser ud samt hvilke faktorer, der kan have indflydelse på arbejdspladser. Er det "kun" de diskriminerende situationer, eller er der overordnet nogle normer, vilkår, regler eller lignende i vores samfund, der spiller en rolle. Kan de adspurgte informanter tale generelt for alle LGBT+-personer? Ved først at belyse alternative forklaringer på, hvorfor deres resultater viser, at LGBT+ personer oplever mistrivsel på arbejdsmarkedet for derefter at falsificere dem, vil dette resultere i en mere troværdig undersøgelse med substantielle forklaringer, der viser reelle sociale forhold og processer på mønstret i resultaterne (Hellevik 2011: 38-39)

I henhold til ovenstående analyser ses det, at Als Research i højere grad husker forklaringsmangfold og ligeledes at falsificere deres resultater ved at være reflektive omkring deres resultater. Dette ses ved, at de både stiller spørgsmålstejn til, om deres informanter er repræsentative og ligeledes forsøger at falsificere dem med forklaringen om, at ikke alle ønsker at deltage i disse undersøgelser, fordi de som tidligere nævnt kan opleve det som tabubelagte eller private emner. De påpeger på baggrund af dette, at man skal have dette i mente i henhold til rapportens resultater. Omvendt ses dette ikke i så høj grad i LGBT+ Danmarks undersøgelse, da de ikke benytter sig af forklaringsmangfold. De tager kun udgangspunkt i deres datas resultater og inddrager delvist ikke andre pointer eller refleksioner. Det kan dog påpeges, at begge undersøgelser ikke udelukkende benytter sig af LGBT+-personer men ligeledes også af ikke-LGBT+-personer, hvilket skaber nogle substantielle forklaringer på deres resultater og dermed gør dem mere valide (ibid.). Hertil kan det også at påpeges, at Als Researchs undersøgelse strækker sig over længere tid

i modsætning til LGBT+ Danmark, hvilket muligvis har givet dem muligheden for at prioritere og eller arbejde mere i dybden med forklaringsmangfold og falsificering.

Hellevik påpeger til dette, at forskningens resultater også kan påvirkes af, at organisationerne der undersøger et givent fænomen, kan have tendens til at vinkle undersøgelserne og resultaterne på eget ønsket vis for at influere resultaterne i en bestemt retning (Hellevik 2011: 19). Denne pointe gør sig også gældende i nogen grad i rapporternes udfald, idet de i høj grad fokuserer på, at der er en sammenhæng mellem mistrivsel på arbejdspladsen og personalepolitik. LGBT+ Danmark pointerer, at næsten halvdelen (46%) af ansatte LGBT+-personer i deres undersøgelse sagde "*nej*", da de blev spurgt, om deres virksomhed gjorde nok for LGBT+ inklusion og trivsel på arbejdspladsen (Laerkholm & Reichhardt 2023: 7). Herudover pointerer de også som tidligere nævnt, at sikring af reel indvirkning på inklusion af LGBT+-personer kræver fokus på virksomhedens politik, ledelse, drift og mennesker. De pointerer ydermere, at virksomheder har meget at vinde for at fremme inklusion af LGBT+-medarbejdere. Herimod konkluderer Als Research, at der ikke ses en sammenhæng mellem trivsel og personalepolitik. 87% af adspurgte medarbejdere på arbejdspladser med en personalepolitik, der inkluderer emner om seksuel orientering, har angivet, at de enten 'i høj grad' eller 'i meget høj grad' føler, at de kan være åbne om deres seksuelle orientering. Til sammenligning trives 67% af de respondenter, der arbejder på en arbejdsplads uden en personalepolitik og ligeledes trives 68% af de respondenter, der arbejder på en arbejdsplads, hvor personalepolitikken ikke inkluderer emner vedrørende seksuel orientering (Følner 2019: 21). Men som tidligere nævnt, så er der trods alt en forskel på 20 procentpoint imellem LGBT-personernes følelse af åbenhed om seksuel orientering baseret på om personalepolitikken inkluderer emner vedrørende seksuel orientering. Så selvom Als Research konkluderer, at der ikke ses en sammenhæng, kan man dog argumentere imod denne påstand og konkluderer, at der i nogen grad er sammenhæng, da der trods alt er en forskel på 20 procentpoint.

Denne forskel kan, som Hellevik påpeger, skyldes organisationernes vinkling og påvirkning af resultaterne. Forskellen mellem Als Research og LGBT+ Danmark som organisationer ligger i, at Als Research er en forsknings- og rådgivningsvirksomhed med speciale i integration, ligestilling, køn og seksualitet, social udsathed, børn og unge, friluftsliv og uddannelse (Als Research n.d.) Hvorimod LGBT+ Danmark er en politiske organisation for homoseksuelle, biseksuelle, transpersoner og andre, der bryder med normerne for køn og seksualitet. De kæmper for, at enhver kan leve sit liv i fuld overensstemmelse med sin identitet gennem rettigheder, trykke fællesskaber og social forandring - lokalt, nationalt og globalt (LGBT+ Danmark n.d.). Deres politiske orientering og mærkesager mod LGBT+-personers rettigheder kan måske have en indvirkning på deres præsentation af deres resultater. Dermed

ikke sagt, at deres resultater eller pointer ikke er korrekte, men at vinklen af dem til dels præges af, hvilken organisation LGBT+ Danmark er. Dog skal det her også påpeges, at Als Research har udarbejdet deres rapport i samarbejde med en ekspertgruppe bestående af en række kønsforskere og for-personer i diverse LGBT-organisationer, såsom Vidensbanken om kønsidentitet og tidligere for-person i LGBT+ Danmark, så deres rapport vil i nogen grad også bære præg af deres ekspertgruppe. Men deres politiske orientering peger ikke i lige så høj grad mod køns- og seksualitets rettigheder (Følner 2019: 3).

Konklusion

Det kan være vanskeligt at påpege, hvad der konkret udgør forskellen på de to rapporters resultater, såsom procentforskellen i deres undersøgelser af andelen af LGBT+-personer, der har oplevet diskrimination og yderligere ledt dem til mistvivl på deres arbejdsplads. På baggrund af min undersøgelse af spørgsmålsformuleringen blandt de to rapporters måder at formulere deres udsagn og ligeledes deres spørgsmålsformuleringer i deres spørgeskemaer, ses der i nogen grad en forskel i, hvordan de præsenterer deres resultater. Dette kommer blandt andet til udtryk i, at 'ikke-LGBT+-personer' indgår i statistikkerne samt den manglende synliggørelse af, hvem der indgår i "været vidne til" diskriminerende situationer. Men efter min vurdering er forskellen i spørgsmålsformuleringen ikke så høj, at den vil kunne skabe en forskel i deres resultater på henholdsvis 8% og 72%. Ligeledes har begge rapporter udvalgt et forholdsvist repræsentativt informantgrundlag i form af køn, alder, erhverv mm. Dog kan man have det i mente, at Als Research har foretaget undersøgelsen over længere tid end LGBT+ Danmark og ligeledes udarbejdet en længere og mere detaljeret rapport. Det kan være svært at sige, om det har haft en indflydelse på deres data, men det har i en grad indflydelse på deres analyser og udsagn, idet de har benyttet mere plads til refleksioner og substantielle forklaringer.

Forskellen mellem de to undersøgelser afspejler sig ud fra min analyse mest af alt på baggrund af personerne, der har foretaget dem. Dette ses i form af, at Als Research undersøger andre fænomener uden for LGBT-miljøet, mens LGBT+ Danmark er forkæmpere for LGBT+-personers rettigheder. Dette afspejler sig potentielt i rekrutteringen af informanter, vinklen af deres forskningsresultater og ligeledes i graden af deres refleksivitet baseret på deres brug af forklaringsmangfold og falsificering af alternative udfald og forklaringer. Ved at anvende en etnologisk tilgang til dette emne, har jeg ikke blot påpeget forskelle i datafortolkning, men også forsøgt at forstå de bredere kulturelle, sociale og politiske kontekster, der påvirker, hvordan information om LGBT-personers, LGBTI-personers og LGBT+-personers trivsel på arbejdsmarkedet produceres, formidles og fortolkes i det danske samfund såsom organisationers mærkesager, interesser og pejlemærker.

På baggrund af dette vil jeg argumentere for, at rapporterne i rimelig grad er med til at influere udfaldet af deres undersøgelser. Ved sammenligningen af Als Research og LGBT+ Danmark & BCG's rapporter kom det til udtryk, at begge rapporter benyttede sig af nogenlunde samme spørgsmålsformuleringer, begge med afsæt i informanternes oplevelser på deres nuværende arbejdsplads, samt et delvist repræsentativt informantgrundlag – taget LGBT+ Danmarks dataindsamling i mente -, men på trods af dette stadig havde forskellige udfald af deres undersøgelser. Det er svært at specificere, hvad der konkret udgør forskellen i resultaterne, men på baggrund af min undersøgelse vil jeg argumentere for, at rapporterne er med til at bestemme vinklen af deres resultater i form af formuleringer, rekruttering af informanter og ligeledes graden af refleksivitet i form af inddragelse af alternativer til udfaldet af deres resultater.



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SPACE AND QUEER IDENTITY

Vela Gay Bar in Copenhagen as an Example of the Significance of Female-Oriented Space and Queer Community

By:
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History



ABSTRACT: This article examines the critical role of queer spaces in shaping queer identity formations, charting a historical progression from essentialist conceptions to more pluralistic understandings. Focusing on how and why queer women claim and engage with space, the analysis draws on a series of ethnographic studies and a semi-structured interview with the owner of Copenhagen's sole female-oriented venue, *Vela Gay Bar*. The findings underscore the cultural significance of nighttime leisure spaces in fostering visibility and solidarity. However, contemporary queer women increasingly locate community across broader queer or even within heteronormative spaces, presenting new challenges for maintaining individual identity constructions while expanding community over the borders of queer subgroups.

KEY WORDS: Space, Queer, Lesbian, Identity, Queer Community, Queer Nightlife.



Introduction

The creation of queer space is “a necessary part of gaining political and social power as well as vital in creating various spaces to meet the needs of the community and help individuals develop their identity” (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684).

Every kind of community requires places to congregate. The queer community, having been historically excluded from hegemonic community centers, has a heightened need for such places which have evolved and transformed over the decades. The article explores this development through a collection of ethnographic studies, namely research concerned with cultural and social geography. The geographical diversity of the source material precludes the creation of a grand narrative but permits the identification of certain parallels. The aim of this paper is not to create a false sense of unity or even a global narrative, but rather to highlight common trajectories or a “shared sense of historical and political connection” (Megarry et al. 2022: 54). The initial motivation for this research project was the recognition that female-centered nighttime leisure spaces in Copenhagen were only marginally represented. An example of this is *Vela Gay Bar*, which is the only bar that primarily accommodates, though does not exclusively cater to, queer women. The academic field offers a variety of divergent analytical frameworks which partially explain this underrepresentation. This research project addresses a research gap that applies to Copenhagen’s female-oriented queer spaces, foregrounding an insider perspective of the queer community.

The central question of the article is: What is the significance of space regarding the formation and consolidation of queer identity and community? To answer this question the structure proceeds as follows: I will begin with the emergence of lesbian and gay bars in the mid-20th century, then discuss the establishment of the umbrella term LGBTQ+ and its various expansions; subsequently, I will examine *Vela Gay Bar* as an example of a queer community space followed by an interrogation of the ways in which diverse queer identities are articulated today. The paper is concluded by an evaluation of the spatial practices, namely how contemporary queer women engage with space in the queer community and how related identity constructions are constantly evolving. This segment addresses intersectionality, diversity, and fluidity to reflect increasingly varied and flexible articulations of gender identity and sexual orientation. The intention of this narrative is not to establish a linear developmental trajectory but to depict the diversity of queer people and the social processes through which identity is constructed.

The relevance of this research links to visibility and how it is closely tied with identity articulation. Visibility refers to the degree of sociopolitical influence a particular (sub-)group has in the larger societal context, namely whether their voices are acknowledged, their needs are addressed, and their rights are defended. Asserting spatial entitlement is integral to the development of collective identity and consequently, to the creation of visibility. Maxine Wolfe states that “people are active creators of their own identities and environments rather than mere bearers of dominant social relations or passive absorbers of dominant ideology” (1992: 138). Hence, a spatial analysis proves to be informative about the identity constructions of the people within it. The significance of ethnographic studies on queer nighttime leisure spaces stems from this recognition. The qualitative dimensions of the created environment influence people’s awareness of their own identities and their group identity in relation to society (cf. Fobear 2012: 724). Such processes create a sense of community through the establishment of spatial boundaries, namely the creation of a space only being accessible to a specific group of people.

Both space and community exhibit a dual function as “geographic” (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684) and “institutionalized” (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3) or as “imagined” and metaphorical (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684; cf. Esterberg 1994: 427 cit. after cf. di Leonardo 1984: 133). Hence, space exceeds the significance of a physical meeting place and acquires a symbolic quality, capable of holding conceptions of identity. Therefore, these spaces serve as sites of identity inscription and community formation and places where shared culture may be articulated, hence, space can be conceived as “an *experience* rather than just a place” (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 684) further underlining its significance. The concept of “locational ‘inter-identity’” (Lo & Healy 2000: 33) relates to community formation that is partially decoupled from geographical location and follows identity demarcation lines. However, space – apart from its symbolic quality – actually possesses tangible spatial implications in the political struggle of feminists, lesbians, and queer people in general.

The focus of this article on nighttime leisure spaces draws upon Wolfe’s conceptualization of (queer) bars as “significant sociophysical environment[s]” (1992: 142). Bars serve as crucial sites of congregation where people can find community and foster a shared cultural identity. They have served as a place to recognize and be recognized by peers as like-minded. Therefore, I highlight *Vela Gay Bar* as an example of a female-centered lesbian¹ bar in Copenhagen which is operationalized through a semi-structured interview with the owner of said venue. The choice is predicated on the fact that female-oriented

¹ Defined in the context of this article as a venue that is predominantly run by lesbians and has a significant female, lesbian clientele.

nighttime leisure spaces are historically underrepresented in gay nightlife. Furthermore, these spaces have undergone numerous reconfigurations in relation to identity politics. My proposed explanation for the marginal visibility of female-oriented nighttime leisure spaces is that the need for exclusive and identity specific spaces has decreased in the broader societal context. This shift is partly due to attenuation of societal stigma as well as evolving identity formations (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 1-3). Instead, many establishments in the queer community cater to a variety of gender and sexual orientations. These inclusive practices have engendered hybrid spaces where everyone is included yet not necessarily affirmed in their particular identity.

The paper focuses on female-oriented queer spaces which include, but are not limited to, lesbian women. The terminological scope is not intended to be exclusionary, but rather to include a spectrum of identities. However, such a broad interpretation may result in the obfuscation of identity delineations, resulting in an ambiguous or diffuse demographic focus. Nevertheless, it is my contention that the different female, queer subgroups tend to navigate lesbian-oriented environments in comparable ways and can therefore be thematically consolidated for analytical clarity. The intention is not to erase identity differences but rather to promote an identity category that is inclusive of a variety of identities and experiences. Hence, the word 'queer' is used in this article referring to its reclaimed meaning within post-structuralist discourse (see e.g., Jagose 1996: 78) referring to a life experience that challenges hegemonic and normative socio-cultural paradigms.

Historical Context

The three different waves of feminism and how they shaped and informed today's feminism(s) and queer activism constitute a point of departure for the historical contextualization of my research. This pertains to shifts in identity, community, and visibility in the context of queer (night-)life and activism grounded in identity politics. These changes are linked to the articulation of a collective struggle and the emergence of a unified queer identity notably during the AIDS crisis. Furthermore, they are also correlated with the reconfiguration of lesbian bar culture.

Following the historical framework proposed by Charlotte Kroløkke and Anne Scott Sørensen I begin my historical scaffolding at the turn of the 20th century with the first wave of feminism. Its proponents' primary objectives were equal rights and opportunities for women while contesting some aspects of prevailing gender norms. The suffragettes were emblematic of this wave. In the mid- to late 20th century,

second-wave feminists expanded on these demands to emphasize collective empowerment. They critically interrogated the structural subjugation of women and critiqued patriarchal systems. The third wave and its version of queer feminism(s), centered on intersectionality, diversity, multiplicity, and fluidity. This aims to deconstruct hegemonic discourses about women and femininity, irrespective of their origin. All of these waves have had varying approaches to the questions: *What is a woman?* and *What is a lesbian?* However, modern feminisms have increasingly destabilized categorical boundaries.

Women-centered spaces or primarily women-only spaces were revived² in the activism of the 1960s and 1970s, cultivating communal cohesion and solidarity within the lesbian community (cf. Wolfe 1992: 144). The exclusivity of lesbian-only bars was a subversion of hegemonic power dynamics and “freedom from heterosexual norms” (Megarry et al. 2022: 60), as well as protesting the heteropatriarchy. For (lesbian) women, asserting spatial presence and establishing their own rules and boundaries was essential for amplifying their voices and liberating them from restrictive and essentialized gender frameworks. There was a need for exclusive spaces for women to be able to assert power in self-determined areas (cf. Podmore 2006: 612). This practice not only imbued those places with the capacity for identity articulation and affirmation, but further established them as literal safe spaces, where sociality, collective identity and cultural practices could be negotiated and cultivated. Julie A. Podmore notes that “these bars were embedded in a lesbian-feminist culture that was committed to increasing lesbian visibility by building ‘women’s’ culture” (2006: 612). “[L]esbian tradition was often framed in terms of a history of resistance and struggle” (Megarry et al. 2022: 59). These collective elements were thereby foundational to a sense of lesbian identity and community that was safeguarded both ideologically and materially.

With the advent of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s, the previously relatively divergent lived experiences of gay men and lesbian women coalesced around a common struggle (cf. Wolfe 1992: 154). The formation of direct-action groups such as *ACT UP* saw the mobilization of individuals across diverse sexual and gender identities to protest their shared sociopolitical marginalization. According to Anna-Maria Jagose activism during the AIDS epidemic reconceptualized “identity in terms of affinity rather than essence” (1996: 94), progressing toward a collective activism based on similar experiences and a common struggle. The term ‘queer’ as a “potent and enabling term” (Jagose 1996: 94) was reclaimed in this context because it allowed for a coalition predicated on shared marginalization. Discrimination that was specific to certain sexual orientations or gender expression was synthesized into the collective

² The first lesbian bars existed already in the U.S around 1920s’ (see cf. Wolfe 1992:144).

experience of the oppression of queer people. The transformation of the lesbian community entailed a paradigmatic shift from the “radical lesbian feminism of the 20th century to the LGBTQ and trans revolution” (Ben Hagai 2023: 1).

Considering the historical context, the establishment of queer spaces is inherently political. Beverly Skeggs notes: “The claim over space is a claim over political recognition” (1999: 227), which is why these spaces were often fiercely protected. In many studies, there seems to be a consensus on a narrative of decline concerning lesbian bars from 1980 onwards (e.g., Lützen 1998; Forstie 2020) which is correlated with a shift in queer identity politics within the lesbian community (e.g., Fobear 2012; Ben Hagai 2023). Hence, identity constructions prompted lesbian bars to evolve into female-oriented, or mixed bars, or to discontinue operations. The narrative of dispossession refers not only to the pursuit of sociopolitical recognition in society as a whole but also in the queer community in particular. Lesbian issues and needs are frequently marginalized, and their voices seem to fall on deaf ears. The construction of a common struggle and the subsumption of many different gender identities and sexualities under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella engendered the erasure of identity-specific concerns. Megarry et al. mention “competing political interests” (2022: 60) inside of the queer community as a counter-narrative to the proposed unity under the queer umbrella. Proponents of this view interpreted the collective term ‘queer’ as a presupposition of homogeneity which would obfuscate the multifaceted realities of LGBTQIA+ people (cf. *ibid.* 60). The problems arising from this framing are the formulation of a reductive narrative and a false dichotomy between lesbian women, gay men, and other members of the queer community. Such framing leads to a narrative of a zero-sum game, namely a competitive framework of visibility politics in which the visibility of one group engenders the invisibility of another.

The limitation inherent in the queer politics of the 1990s and the unifying movement of the LGBTQIA+ community is that it persists in adversely affecting lesbian visibility today (cf. Podmore 2006: 598). As queer politics were foregrounded, the acknowledgement of lesbian issues seemed to recede from the discourse. While political engagement to cultivate and protect collective queer spaces is valuable, it fails to adequately address the specificities of queer subgroups. One example is that the issue of lesbian visibility remains insufficiently problematized within queer discourses. Despite the unifying umbrella terminology, the queer community resembles a “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot” (Easterbrook et al. 2014: 682). While there are some shared experiences and agendas, individuals tend to form social affiliations within their identity-specific groups. In particular, when it comes to finding community,

people orient themselves toward those with congruent sexual identities as opposed to forming solidarity based solely on a generalized queer identity (cf. Easterbrook et al. 2014: 689).

Vela Gay Bar as an Example of the Significance of Queer Space in Copenhagen

Space is a platform to create new social identities, an opportunity to exhibit group identities to the rest of society, as well as a method for creating social boundaries, exclusion of certain groups, or fostering the visibility or invisibility of certain members of society (Fobear 2012: 723).

Beverly Skeggs associates space with “the performance of sexual identities and the way they are inscribed on the body *and* the landscape” (Skeggs 1999: 214) highlighting the link between identity and space. To assert spatial presence, then, is to claim an identity. When a person’s identity is not manifested within public spaces, they become marginalized in the public sphere. Therefore, to constitute space is to assert visibility, both for the individual and for a collective identity. Conversely, advocating for visibility inherently entails advocating for the acknowledgment of identity (cf. Skeggs 1999: 220). The political activism of lesbian feminists and the establishment of lesbian community spaces embody this principle. Similarly, the foundation of *Vela Gay Bar* aimed at enhancing visibility of the needs of queer women.

The interview I conducted with the owner of *Vela*, Isabel Laier³, centers on the conceptualization and establishment of the bar, as well as its transformation throughout its operational history. Isabel was born in 1971 and self-identifies as a lesbian. She is the owner of *Vela Gay Bar* and is further engaged in the queer community through event planning. The focus of the interview was to chart ideological and cultural shifts in the queer community – as evidenced in *Vela’s* policies and clientele – over the years. Key discussions included the reasons for the founding of the bar and its ideological framework. I follow Kathrine Fobear’s pivotal inquiry into “what meanings are attached to lesbian social spaces and how these meanings are connected to queer women’s sense of identity, visibility, and social position” (2012: 724).

When asked about the primary reasons for opening *Vela*, the owner replied that she was motivated by a desire for active engagement in the queer community and to work in opposition to perceived “unfairness

³ The interview was conducted by me via video call on December the 13th of 2023. The video call was recorded and later transcribed and edited for the purpose of this paper. The recording and transcription are not publicly available.

against lesbians” (Laier 2023: 2:00-2:04) within the community. This unfairness revolved around lesbian women often being disregarded or treated as an afterthought at prominent LGBTQIA+ events such as the Copenhagen Pride at the end of the 20th century (cf. *ibid.* 5:07-5:47). This is a situation that, Isabel contends, remains largely unchanged in numerous contexts globally (cf. *ibid.* 10:34-10:39) to the present day (cf. *ibid.* 3:50-4:00). The owner recognized the necessity for women to have a designated space, or at least a space where their needs were paramount. “They needed some space like mine [*Vela*]” (*ibid.* 23:34-23:37). This realization was coupled with an empowering sentiment of: “Why don’t we just do it ourselves?” (*ibid.* 6:47-6:50). Thus, the “women parties” were inaugurated and quickly gained popularity. However, even these first almost counter-protest female-oriented parties operated under the principle of: “Everybody was [and is] welcome” (*ibid.* 10:10-10:12).

From the beginning *Vela* was conceived to be a “mixed bar” (cf. *ibid.* 10:49-11:00). *Vela* was established in alignment with the owner’s personal philosophy: “You are who you are, and that is acceptable” (*ibid.* 14:03-14:07). Isabel affirmed that one does not need to adhere to a specific sexual orientation or gender identity to be welcomed as a friend at *Vela* (cf. *ibid.* 13:47-14:26). The decision encountered apprehension from several women who feared that men might appropriate the space (cf. *ibid.* 14:29-14:36). “A lot of women are afraid that if you say: ‘everybody is welcome’, [...] they [...] are losing something” (*ibid.* 14:51-15:00). It could refer to the potential erosion of a safe space or community that these women felt would come with broadening the accessibility of the space. When asked about particular inclusionary policies the owner responded: “It’s not like I started *Vela* wanting it to be a straight or a mixed place, no. [...] [I]t’s called: *Vela Gay⁴ Club* – [...]. That was the beginning. [...] [People say] now I’ve changed it [but] I haven’t changed [it]” (*ibid.* 23:59-24:20). As a result of the bar’s origins and philosophy, *Vela*’s customers are predominantly women, many of whom self-identify as lesbian.

The characteristic of *Vela* that sets it apart from other queer nighttime leisure spaces in Copenhagen is that it is conceptualized as a lesbian-centric, female-oriented space. This does not imply exclusivity or exclusion of other sexualities and gender expressions, but rather that it is primarily structured and managed as a lesbian establishment. It signifies a female-centered environment that welcomes all people who identify as female in some capacity, women who love women in particular, and allies wishing to offer solidarity. As the owner of *Vela* succinctly put it: “For me *Vela* is a lesbian place, because I am a

⁴ In this instance the word gay refers to queer women.

lesbian owner”⁵ (Laier 2023: 15:00-15:05). Thus, Isabel thinks of *Vela* as a lesbian bar but one that is inclusive of all individuals (cf. *ibid.* 25:38-25:47) as long as they are respectful of the queer community in general and queer women in particular.

Re-Framing Lesbian Identity: Towards a Queer Identity

Therefore, while both younger and older generations can agree that space does matter, they disagree over what this space should be, who should be allowed in, and the significance attached to it (Fobear 2012: 743).

An interpretation of some of the reviewed studies suggests a generational divide regarding the significance of lesbian spaces in terms of community and visibility (cf. Lo & Healy 2000: 33; cf. Megarry et al. 2022: 54; cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3; Fobear 2012: 743). Clare Forstie characterizes this as a split between “lesbian feminist longtimers’ and ‘postidentity-politics [sic] newcomers’” (Megarry et al. 2022: 54 cit. after Forstie 2020: 1769). Lesbian women’s internalized perceptions of their sexuality have evolved from being perceived as deviant to being recognized as a radical force (a core identity) into an intersectional identity. (cf. Lützen 1998: 236). Thus, for many lesbians growing up during the height of the feminist movement self-identifying as lesbian was intrinsically a political statement (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 2). Katherine Fobear identifies a shift in the relevance of this type of political activism in queer social institutions, towards a more lifestyle-oriented focus in contemporary queer bars (cf. 2012: 729) resulting from evolving ideas on sexuality and identity. Previously political spaces are increasingly becoming mixed and leisure-oriented as the demand for activism diminishes. Podmore contends that the “deterritorialization” (2006: 618) and decline of exclusively lesbian-only spaces can be attributed to the “disidentification with the essentialism of identity and space represented by the women-only lesbian bars of the 1980s” (*ibid.* 618). Ella Ben Hagai observes that differing constructions of identity are accompanied by “fractures in a sense of community among lesbians” (2023: 1). Hence, various approaches to female-oriented spaces are established, and the inclusion criteria are subject to ongoing debate. As a result, established lesbian bars must either revise their self-conception or their door policies or risk alienating future clientele.

Queer women themselves identify in a variety of different ways and inscribe different meanings in the category of ‘lesbian’ (cf. Fobear 2012: 731). Ben Hagai cites a “post-gay understanding of their sexual

⁵ While the gender and sexuality of the owner of an establishment does not have to be a distinguishing factor it is, nevertheless, interesting to note that lesbian, female ownership is very rare when it comes to queer bars and clubs.

identity” (2023: 3) as constitutive of younger generations of queer people. Therefore, a queer identity is becoming less central in the construction of identity and community resulting in more flexible identity categories (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 3). Ben Hagai theorizes an “emerging paradigm of fluid sexuality” (2023: 1) which restructures lesbian communities referring to an ideological divide between people ascribing to a lesbian identity and those who are veering towards the term queer. Julie Podmore refers to this process as a “transformation and multiplication of lesbian identities” (2006: 618). Consequently, contemporary lesbians are more attuned to “identity as a ‘mythological’ construction” (Jagose 1996: 78) which entails the recognition of the plasticity of identity formation and the abolition of essentialized notions of identity. This new configuration emphasizes a certain maneuvering room for a person to claim (or not claim) an identity, resulting in an increased freedom for an individual to associate with one or many groups of their choice. Ben Hagai frames this as a paradigm shift under the heading “[c]hoice vs. born this way” (2023: 2). Choice, in this context, refers to being more inclined towards one identity formation rather than the other.

As identity has become less of a unifying factor, there is a greater freedom to socialize beyond narrow identity circles and to more fully integrate into the broader societal context (cf. Fobear 2012: 733). This refers to mixed venues and events as well as the partial integration into heterosexual society. Younger generations of women who are attracted to women feel more comfortable going out to straight or mixed nightlife venues than previous generations (cf. *ibid.* 722). Thus, they do not necessarily foreground their lesbian identity, instead comprehending it as one of many contributing factors to their identity. Additionally, they are less interested in finding their societal niche, preferring instead to integrate into the larger societal context. That tendency entails a different perception of gendered “space, identity and being integrated or accepted in [the] mainstream” (*ibid.* 722-723). The decreased prevalence of homophobic sentiments, namely the greater recognition of diverse sexual and gender expressions in society, has allowed for the queer identity to emerge as one of many identity markers (cf. Ben Hagai 2023: 2). As the stigmatization of queer individuals decreases the need for unification under a singular identity also diminishes (cf. Easterbrook et al. 2014: 697). The reduced expectation of persecution in ‘mainstream’ spaces renders their claim to them more natural, which is congruent with the transformation of gender-exclusive venues into more inclusive sites that welcome other queer people as well as heterosexual allies (cf. Fobear 729).

The “fiction” of a “stable identity” (Jagose 1996: 96) not only delimits but actively dispossesses those who ascribe to it (cf. *ibid.* 96). Since exclusively lesbian spaces often promote notions of an essentialized,

singular and fixed identity (cf. Fobear 2012: 745) the opening of these spaces to a more mixed clientele has the potential to fundamentally reshape our understanding of identity in general, thus dismantling the “homo-hetero binary” (Jagose 1996: 99) as well as the “monolithic identities ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’” (*ibid.* 99). As a non-category, ‘queer’ thus subverts all notions of binarism and uniformity. Ultimately, this paves the way for new conceptualizations of identity and a celebration of intersectionality⁶, diversity, and fluidity – namely a construction of gender that need not adhere to a binary, and a sexual orientation capable of evolving over time. Conversely, this constructs a new interpretation of community that no longer relies on “unity and homogeneity” (Valentine 2000: 6) to feel like a collective, resulting in a community with more diverse needs and desires that need to be accommodated.

Visibility is frequently expressed to be essential to identity formation and, consequently, necessary for the recognition of a particular group. Skeggs argues that “[c]laims for recognition rely on an investment in a future belief of knowing where one’s place should be and making claims for that space” (1999: 220). However, queer women today do not confront the same struggle for recognition as previous generations did, nor do they need to claim space in the same manner. This is an attitude made viable by the decades of political activism that have shaped contemporary society. Undoubtedly, there exists a tension between “‘queer’ as an umbrella term and the political aims of lesbian feminism” (Megarry et al. 2022: 55); however, one is not diametrically opposed to the goals of the other. Pushing identity boundaries is subversive in its own right; yet it can inadvertently result in decreased visibility within the broader societal context and greater assimilation into the ‘hetero-mainstream’. Karin Lützen notes: “The radical potential of homosexuality as a manifestation of the variety of lifestyles should not be jettisoned in the name of assimilation” (1998: 233). Hence, the subversive nature of a queer identity should be preserved while simultaneously diminishing the significance of rigid identity distinctions.

Conclusion

In the present article, I discussed the significance of queer space in terms of identity formation and consolidation. My analysis included an exploration of the meaning of visibility and community in spatial contexts. I characterized female-oriented spaces within the queer community via the example of *Vela Gay Bar*. The inclusion of the interview with Isabel Laier aimed to provide a perspective from within

⁶ The term was first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 article titled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. The concept highlights the overlapping systems of marginalization based on different identity facets like race and gender.

Copenhagen's queer community. Isabel's point of view allowed for an in-depth analysis of the significance and motivation behind the establishment of female-centered nighttime leisure spaces. The bar as the main object of study allowed for the illustration of the position of queer women in queer contexts as well as their changing identity constructions. The foundation of my research was that the establishment of space creates visibility, forms identity, and thus, results in the building of community. Hence, nighttime leisure spaces are of cultural importance to their patrons and the queer community as a whole.

In terms of identity, the category of lesbian has undergone a significant shift towards a queer conception, which entails that queer women today do not exclusively identify with the singular identity marker 'lesbian', but rather embrace a more flexible identity that can be subject to change. As a result, political activism aimed at visibility and acceptance via claims to a distinct identity has decreased. The need to advocate for visibility in a broader societal context has become less relevant because of greater tolerance for queer identities. The struggle for visibility within the queer community, however, has remained constant. The generational divide of queer women choosing a more essentialized identity construction versus one based on choice may be navigated with a more accepting approach toward diverse identity constructions.

In contemporary society interpersonal interaction and community are not confined to exclusively lesbian spaces but are increasingly found within the broader queer sphere and, in some cases, even within heterosexual spaces. The prevalence of mixed identity queer spaces offers evidence of this shift. Similarly, while *Vela Gay Bar* – though described by its owner as a lesbian bar – accommodates a range of identities; however, such an inclusive approach does not inherently increase the risk of assimilationist tendencies or contribute to the marginalization or erasure of lesbian identities. While the broader development of more inclusive spaces and the decreased need for identity distinctions is generally a favorable one, the focus should be on celebrating diversity while maintaining queer identity and specifically lesbian visibility. Nonetheless, this maintenance should not be an argument to constrain people's identity expressions.

Further exploration in the field of queer identity studies could involve examining movements trying to preserve individual identity constructions while simultaneously broadening community beyond the confines of certain queer subgroups. The non-category queer does not necessarily have to challenge more fixed identity constructions, but it undeniably has the potential to do so. In fact, all the other identity labels, e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, are still in common usage. Current developments appear to be moving

beyond those designations in favor of the inclusion of more fluid ones. For some members of the LGBTQIA+ community, the traditional labels appear to still be necessary because they signify a political identity. For others within the queer sphere, they seem outdated because they do not experience the same discrimination as the queer people that came before them. This represents a positive trend, as it reflects societal progress toward greater acceptance. While the oppression of queer identity remains a significant issue, structuring one's entire identity in opposition to it is no longer a necessity.



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THE GENDER BINARY WITHIN DANISH DIGITAL CITIZEN IDENTITY

An analysis of official websites and MitID

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ABSTRACT: In this article, I examine the gender binary present in Danish digital citizen identity through a content analysis of official websites pertaining to the CPR number, Gender reassignment, Name change, and the MitID app. My own experience with MitID app was also used as a data collection method. These forms of categorising Danish citizens in the digital sphere play into the existing gender binary whilst also allowing for its subversion to a certain extent. The analysed texts point to Denmark allowing for a considerable degree of fluidity between genders/sexes, whilst however still enforcing a binary opposition of male and female.

KEYWORDS: Digital citizen identity, e-government, gender binary, CPR number, transgender.



Introduction

In the digital sphere, citizen identity becomes data. Tracked, collected, quantified, and categorized in e-government platforms, it lacks nuance and fluidity. Governments thus form and codify citizens' (digital) identities – and these may greatly differ from reality. Responsibility, care, and insight is paramount, especially with digital, and emerging AI, classification technologies permeating the public sector.

As existing studies suggest, gender is often understood just as a binary variable in e-government research (Dhungel 2022: 1313). Similarly, Henry et al. (2021: 1) speak of “limited scholarly attention” to gender power relations in digital citizenship, highlighting its exclusionary practices and calling for its feminist rethinking. McNutt (2007: 22) offers a similar critique yet believes a committed integration of gendered analysis could help e-governments promote gender equality.

In Denmark, these are important questions as Danish citizens are often conceived as “digital by default” (Schou & Hjelholt 2018: 514) by the government. In this paper focused on the Danish e-government, I explore my research question (RQ): “How does the Danish digital citizen identity codify gender/sex of its citizens, according to official websites and the MitID app?” by conducting a content analysis of relevant Denmark's official websites and the MitID app.

Guided by my RQ, I aim to view (gender) identity predominantly as a *regulatory fiction*, i.e. enforcing the gender binary of male/female especially on non-conforming identities. However, I also aim to examine the potential empowerment provided by digital citizen identity.

First, I chart a queer theory introduction and compare the emancipatory ideals of early cyberfeminist and glitch feminist theorists with the contemporary regulatory reality of how digital identities can be used for commercial, surveillance, and normative means. The subsequent chapters illustrate how dealing with digital identity should be a delicate and responsible matter, even more so for governments. I then examine this in a case study of the categorisation of citizen digital identity in Denmark related to the CPR number, Gender reassignment, Name change, and the MitID app.

Identity as a regulatory fiction: The subversion of, or subscription to, power regimes

In the first chapter, I describe identity categories as a *regulatory fiction* using the work of the prominent feminist and queer studies scholar Judith Butler (2006: 44), to later serve me as a theoretical framework

for my analysis. My aim is to both showcase the limiting nature of subscribing to such categories, as well as Butler's (2006: xxvi) own later discussions around the potential use of their power for their own subversion. The aim of this chapter is to provide the background for viewing identity as a contested and constructed category that can serve both as an instrument of binary and regulatory oppression, as well as allow for the existence of "unreal" bodies which can perhaps function as a vital instability in the system of identity categories.

To show how classifying people according to limiting categories of identity can be oppressive, I borrow Butler's (2006: 44) notions of gender and sexual identity as a *regulatory fiction*. Butler considers the "univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender" to be "regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression." These naturalised power regimes and the resulting oppression are then the target of Butler's (2006: 44) subversion.

This subversion, however, is not done by moving to a certain "utopian beyond" where these categories immediately subsist, but instead by gradual confusion and proliferation of their *regulatory fiction*, i.e. challenging their position as immovable, foundational, and reified.

This approach could also be understood as using the power bestowed upon these regulating categories (of "man/woman", "male/female", "trans", or any other) in ways that fight against them. Butler (2006: xxvi) suggests that whilst claiming a (marginalised) identity can potentially make it into "an instrument of power one opposes", such identity can also wield this influence to instead revert its very own power. Speaking for example of transgender or intersex people and sexual minorities, who are deemed "unreal" by the limiting system of identity categories, Butler (2006: xxvi) calls this mode of existing a "vital instability" and a "performative surprise" that can produce agency for change.

This contrasts Butler's (1993: 308) earlier claims, which portrayed identity categories only as instruments of regulatory regimes and called out their false promises of being "rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" – essentially questioning the political effectiveness of claiming these (marginalised) identities.

I raise these discussions to show the back-and-forth ideations around identities (be it traditional, non-binary or other) within the social hierarchy and power structures. These uncertainties further illustrate the need for delicacy. I argue that these questions amplify the position of identity categories as a *regulatory*

fiction – by potentially placing upon (marginalised) bodies the need to consistently wrestle with these issues and in doing so engage with the existing oppressions described by Butler (2006: 44).

In the following chapter, I elaborate on this view of identity categories as instruments (or subversions) of regulatory regimes in the context of the digital sphere and cyber- and glitch- feminist theories.

The promises and limits of digital identity: Emancipation(?) through the digital self

The onset of information technologies in the 1990s sparked discussions of a “revolution” brought by technology and digital culture in certain feminist circles regarding (gender) identity – as documented by Paasonen’s (2010: 71). As the author argues, paraphrasing Sadie Plant who coined the term “cyberfeminism” (Consalvo 2012: 1), “In Plant’s work, information networks are seen as emancipatory in themselves, subversive in terms of gender structures and gendered power relations.” (Paasonen 2010: 71). These ideas generally circled around “moving beyond biology” and breaking traditional gender roles, relations, and divisions through technological means (Paasonen 2010: 72).

The idea of “moving beyond” categories via digital technologies however contrasts with the cited views of Butler – who preferred a proliferation and confusion of categories instead. A prominent strand of cyberfeminist thinking, closer to Butler’s notions, has been Donna Haraway’s (1987: 16–17) idea of the cyborg – an entity moving across, not beyond, the hierarchical categories of artificial and natural, Man and Woman, organic and technological.

A more recent development of this line of thinking was proposed by Legacy Russel (2020: 15) in the book *Glitch Feminism: a manifesto*. Here, the author signals “a refusal” of the binary system imposed on human bodies through something called “the glitch” – a body “indecipherable within binary assignments” and refusing to perform according to rules and definitions, reminiscent of Butler’s (2006: xxvi) term “vital instability”. These ideas of “glitching between binaries” or “existing before a final concretized identity”, borrowing the words of Sundén (2015), can also be partly seen as a continuation of Haraway’s (1987: 16–17) cyborg.

Sundén (2015), however, goes on to problematize this notion of emancipatory glitching, asking: “Who or what gets to glitch between man and woman, and how?”, pointing out the privilege needed to become a “glitch subject”, as not everyone is able to perform such glitching, as well as its often-present associations with having a female-identifying body.

Still, the concept of glitch feminism is meant as an opening towards trans-inclusivity within feminism but without establishing “trans” as yet another fixed category. Its goal lies in modifying notions of sex, gender, and self-naming in general in ways that more resemble the self as being unfinished, ever-changing – i.e. a set of “liminal variations” (Russel 2013).

This idea of identity categories being limiting is crucial for understanding their function in e-government, how gender/sex can be ascribed to people within digital interfaces, as well as the social hierarchies and divisions involved in their presence. As Curran-Troop and Prins (2022: 1) summarize in their review of Glitch Feminism: “online feminists seem to agree that the digital realm offers new possibilities as well as familiar oppressions.” This potential enforcement of limiting categories will be further examined in the following chapters on digital platforms.

Gender and sex as data

Within digital platforms, the categories of gender/sex identity are intensified through the platforms’ ability to quantify, categorise, track, and capitalise on digital identities which function here as data – as highlighted by José van Dijck (2014; van Dijck et al. 2018) across her works in the field of platform studies.

Of particular interest to my paper are van Dijck’s (2014: 198) contributions to the concepts of *datafication* – “the transformation of social action into quantified data”, and *dataveillance* (data surveillance) – “a form of continuous surveillance through the use of (meta)data”, both serving within an overall data-usage-normalising ideology of *dataism*.

Van Dijck’s focus lies both on private companies such as those operating social media platforms, as well as public and academic bodies and agencies who are using data from these platforms on a large scale to track human behaviour (van Dijck 2014: 198). The idea of digital (gender) identity being emancipatory gets further complicated when gender is treated as data by both public and private bodies. Related issues include data safety and privacy concerns, the strict categorisation of gender, or even its involuntary ascription to users.

Regarding the first point – data safety and privacy – van Dijck (2014: 198) raises the issue of *dataveillance*. She illustrates this concept via an example of the American-Russian whistleblower Edward Snowden’s leak of documents from the US National Security Agency, which highlighted the failure of the institutions to handle citizens’ (meta)data in an accountable and legal way, despite the people’s trust. As van Dijck

(2014: 198) claims: "...the Snowden files have further opened people's eyes to the interlocking practices of government intelligence, businesses, and academia in the adaptation of dataism's ideological premises."

Facebook and the gender binary

To briefly illustrate the second and third points – categorisation, or even involuntary ascription of gender categories – I will present an example of Facebook's approach to the *datafication* of gender. This is relevant to my paper due to the fact, as van Dijck (2014: 200) shows, that government, police, and intelligence services often already benefit from social media data for citizen monitoring, prediction, and other use cases.

As Facebook faced critique for its binary options for users' gender and sexual orientation, it broadened these categories in 2014 and also allowed users to choose no gender category at all (van Dijck et al. 2018: 11). Later, Facebook replaced the gender column with an open text-field for users' free expression (D'Ignazio & Klein 2020: 100). However inclusive this change may seem, van Dijck et al. (2018: 11) comment that such decisions made economic sense in gathering more specific consumer information. They however concede that it also broadened the social norms around the gender binary.

The questions of whether to proliferate identity categories, or reject them, raised in the first chapter of this paper, were thus resolved at Facebook by allowing users to do both (although with, arguably, ulterior commercial motives).

Van Dijck's et al. (2018: 11) concession about expanding the binary and social norms, however, falls short in light of the evidence presented by Bivens' (2017: 1) study of Facebook's programming. Bivens (2017: 1) shows that Facebook's internal user profiling algorithms still classified users only as "male" or "female" despite the number of gender options available. D'Ignazio and Klein (2020: 100) then argue that: "Evidently, this decision was made so that Facebook could allow its primary clients—advertisers—to more easily market to one gender or the other. Put another way, even if you can choose the gender that you show to your Facebook friends, you can't change the gender that Facebook provides to its paying customers."

I am raising these interwoven examples of *dataveillance*, *datafication* and *dataism* to highlight the issues of power within digital platforms' tracking and ascription of its users' (or citizens') gender. The questions of power and control, and their potential wrongful use, should be key areas of interest when looking at

state forms of digital identity – where more than “just” a person’s social media profile may be at stake. I will cover this area of interest in the following chapters, and in more detail in my analysis and discussion.

Legal gender recognition

Digital citizen identity closely relates to the legal framework regarding gender recognition in a given state. This connection is illustrated by Holzer’s (2022: 166) analysis of the means of changing one’s gender and name, as well as the impacts of state-imposed gender labels, within EU countries; with a focus on “certain trans and intersex persons, notably those who have a gender marker and/or a name on their identity documents that do not reflect their gender identity, gender expression and/or physical characteristics in a normative manner”. As Holzer (2022: 167) points out, all Council of Europe countries have laws distinguishing citizens based on their (legal) gender – e. g. laws on marriage and legal partnership, military conscription, retirement ages or gender-specific laws aiming for gender equality, such as quotas for women or equal-pay legislation.

According to Holzer (2022: 168), an incorrect legal gender identification can bear many negative effects on individuals (especially those in positions more scrutinised by the government), whilst the ability to easily correct this discrepancy (for example by changing one’s legal gender) has been shown to have positive effects, mainly on mental health, self-confidence, and access to certain services (trans-specific health care or marriage) as well as the individuals’ overall position and interactions within society with lesser risk of misgendering (referring to people using the wrong gender) and discrimination based on an incongruent ID. As documents from The European Commission (2020: 14) show, however, these benefits are present mainly if the person “passes” in the eyes of others (is accepted as their identified gender) regardless of their ID documentation’s congruency.

People who’d prefer not to be identified within the binary of male or female (such as some intersex or non-binary identifying people) face their own issues. Non-binary legal recognition is present in just a few EU countries – for example in Germany, Malta, Iceland or in Austria (only for intersex people) (Council of Europe 2022: 35) – in Australia and New Zealand, most of Canada’s provinces, and some US states – for example in Oregon, Washington DC, or California (Maier 2020: 209). However, presenting a gender-neutral marker in official documents (such as “X”) is also associated with the fear of increased discrimination and stigmatization as opposed to presenting a document with an “M” or “F” (NEK CNE 2020: 24–25;28). The additional heightened border surveillance of gender non-conforming individuals

then further contributes to turning such markers into “biopolitical instruments of regulation” (Quinan & Hunt 2023: 382).

The ways of ascribing this legal gender status within digital citizen identity will be discussed in the following chapter.

The forms and risks of e-government

According to Lips (2013: 1), information and communication technologies open new ways of managing citizen identity and interactions with the state via the concept of e-government. This gives governments the opportunity to improve their effectiveness, prevent frauds or increase public safety through digital management. According to Lips (2013: 1), it also potentially raises the risk of discriminatory surveillance or judgement based on obtained personal information – exacerbated also by automatic and algorithmic discrimination of already underprivileged groups (Jørgensen 2023: 124).

The right management of citizens’ digital identity is key for a successful e-government, as it allows citizens to identify themselves to public offices and other institutions or services: banks, car rental offices, paying taxes, looking for a job, accessing insurance or health-related services etc. (Průša 2015: 8). This is why trustworthiness of such systems is essential (Průša 2015: 9).

Electronic identity is a two-part system. First is the ID document available to the citizen – e.g. electronic identity credentials, personal citizen number, ID card with a chip, SIM card implementation etc. (Průša 2015: 3–4), and then the backend, unavailable to the citizens, meaning the population register database storing citizen information (Průša 2015: 1–2).

Looking at the case study of Denmark, Jørgensen (2023: 125) argues that the practices of e-government are at a risk of following the logic of “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff 2019) stemming from the private sector, only here renamed as “smart governance”, and that without proper moral, critical, and rights-based approach, “the digital welfare state may disempower citizens and advance a digital technocracy that treats its citizens as data points suited for calculation and prediction.”

Jørgensen (2023: 126-127) raises the issues of “data politics” and looks at the power discrepancies present in acquiring and handling data, the impacts of automated decisions on (re)producing discriminatory practices towards marginalised citizens and obscuring new approaches to data, and describes citizens’ attempts to contest these social categories and data regimes in regards to race, ethnicity, and gender: “For

instance, long battles have been fought over who gets counted or measured, when, how, by whom, for what purpose, etc.” (Jørgensen 2023: 127).

Despite all the potential risks of e-government, Denmark’s public sector is highly digitalised with 76% of Danes having confidence in public authorities’ handling of their personal information, according to Statistics Denmark (2019).

Denmark additionally allows a change of legal gender according to self-identification, requiring a 6-month evaluation period, but without the need for sex reassignment surgery (or any treatment in the case of adults) since 2014 (Hilden et al. 2021: 1801). However, it still classifies its citizens in a gender-binary system through the CPR number, which indicates person’s legal gender according to the last digit (even = female, odd = male) (Hilden et al. 2021: 1801). According to a study of the Danish population’s sexual/gender identity by the project SEXUS (Frisch et al. 2019: 92), 6.3% of people assigned as female at birth and 3.2% of people assigned as male at birth indicated a different or unclarified gender identity.

In the following chapters of this paper, I will focus on Denmark’s e-government and analyse its approach to categorising its citizens’ gender identities according to the presented theory and data.

Methodology, theoretical, and analytical framework

Through a *qualitative content analysis* of materials provided by the Danish government regarding its forms of digital citizen identity, and of the MitID app used for this sake, I will apply the theoretical concepts of *regulatory fiction*, *datafication*, and *legal gender recognition* to an e-government case study. I will focus on digital identity as both a *regulatory fiction* in the context of gender binaries, as well as on its benefits for citizens.

Qualitative content analysis, as defined by Mayring (2000: 2), lies in a methodical analysis of texts within their context of communication. Texts may be any type of communication or content of media. I will divide my analysed content into categories as per Mayring’s (2000: 3–4) method of *inductive category development*, with my selection of material being guided by my theoretical framework and research question. The inferences of my analysis will be focused on the present texts, whilst considering their political and cultural context of communication.

My aim will be to report my findings and analyse them through the presented theoretical lens, and answer my research question: “How does the Danish digital citizen identity codify gender/sex of its citizens, according to official websites and the MitID app?”

I will focus my analysis on official online documents provided by the Danish government regarding its forms of digital citizen identity, as well on the MitID app, through which citizens interact with their digital (gender) identity. I will collect my data from Danish government websites discovered within my preliminary research, including www.cpr.dk; www.mitid.dk; sst.dk; international.kk.dk; and www.personregistrering.dk; and from my personal interactions with the Danish digital ID app MitID.

All mentioned webpages are included below the List of literature with a specific link to the analysed content. In text, they are also cited through their full hyperlinked URL.

Analysis and Discussion:

Danish digital identity and codifying gender – CPR number

Denmark's categorization and codification of its citizens' gender/sex varies in intensity and depends on the area of e-government and the text being analysed. [Cpr.dk](http://cpr.dk) for example tells citizens that the 10th position of the CPR number indicates gender, but does not explain how – potentially assuming that the reader knows a priori between which genders the indication occurs, and how they correspond to numbers.¹ Through the CPR number, quantification of (binary) gender identity, and its *datafication*, thus occur in the first steps of becoming a Danish citizen not only on a factual level, but also on the symbolic one, with gender identity being represented via a number.

The website international.kk.dk provides further information. Everyone residing in Denmark requires a CPR number and it is needed to “open a bank account, access your health insurance, borrow books from the library, pay tax, receive a salary and so on.”² The prevalence and importance of the CPR number through its connection to vital public services highlights a near constant exchange of data between citizens and public bodies as well as the virtual impossibility of existing outside the gender binary in the state's eyes.

As further information on cpr.dk however shows, this part of Danish digital (gender) identity is open to legal, voluntary, and accessible change of what could be described as “glitching between binaries”. The

¹ CPR n.d.: “Opbygning af CPR-nummeret”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://cpr.dk/cpr-systemet/opbygning-af-cpr-nummeret>

² City of Copenhagen n.d.: “CPR number”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://international.kk.dk/live/cpr-registration-and-documents/cpr-number>

website itself uses the terms “errors” (“fejl”), “incorrect indication of gender” (“forkert angivelse af køn”) or “misuse” (“misbrug”) of identity in which cases a correction of CPR number is possible.³

Transgender people’s ability to change their CPR number is then mentioned separately from these cases – indicating that incorrect indication of gender, errors, or misuse of identity aren’t necessarily connected to transgender persons’ need to change their CPR number. This could be seen as an inclusive formulation, avoiding associating negative language with transgender people’s identity. On the contrary, a glitch feminist lens could see errors as positive and the need to “correct errors” to “fit into a system” as being in opposition to the idea of “glitching”, or to being, in Butler’s later terms, a “vital instability”, as I describe in the first two chapters of this paper.

Ultimately however, changing one’s CPR number means a change in the corresponding databases, effectively changing one’s legal gender. The page dedicated to the change of CPR number for transgender people at cpr.dk contains documents about this for persons both over and under 18 years of age. The latter need to have been undergoing a form of “gender-modifying treatment” (for example gender-affirming hormone therapy), require custodial consent, and their case will be weighed individually. Noteworthy is the language used about gender change – it is described as experiencing the “opposite gender” or “the other gender”, reflecting the existence of gender binary within Danish system.⁴

All the more interesting is then the mention of a possible application to “get the gender designation X in your passport” (Indenrigs- og Sundhedsministeriet 2014). There seems to be (or have been before September 1, 2014, when the rules for CPR change came into effect), at least according to the website, an option to avoid this omnipresent gender binary via an “X” marker in one’s passport, as mentioned also by Quinan and Hunt (2023: 381).

Changing one’s legal gender according to self-image, but also to “fit the system”, may go against the idea of “glitching” or may subscribe to ideas of a *regulatory fiction*. However that may be true in theory, “correcting” one’s legal gender is proven to lead to positive effects (mentioned also in this paper) and this codification of a *regulatory fiction* might allow someone to have their preferred gender identity officially confirmed, at least in the eyes of the state. The *regulatory fiction* then might be reassuring – and the

³ CPR n.d.: “Kan jeg få nyt personnummer”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://cpr.dk/borgere/kan-jeg-faa-et-nyt-personnummer>

⁴ CPR n.d.: “Juridisk kønsskifte (transkønnede)”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://cpr.dk/borgere/kan-jeg-faa-et-nyt-personnummer/juridisk-koensskifte-transkoennede>

subscription to the gender binary can be a way to better identify with the “other gender”, effectively aiding the person in embodying the gender they feel to be.

Gender reassignment

To further aid in embodying the correct gender, an official website regarding “gender-modifying treatment” (“Kønsmodificerende behandling”) exists at sst.dk.⁵ Additionally, the Copenhagen Municipality also has official information and courses on voice training, available at csv.kk.dk, although this does not relate as much to e-government.⁶

Sst.dk also offers key information about the discrepancy between a gender-reassigned CPR number and the gender assigned at birth. This site shows that regardless of one’s gender being legally “corrected” via CPR, one’s new legal gender can still pose as an instability in the system.⁷ This occurs for example when interacting with the health service, as some laboratory tests or examinations are interpreted based on the present CPR-registered gender and will provide incorrect results.⁸ The healthcare professional thus must be, in certain circumstances, informed about the gender assigned at birth.

Sst.dk further informs that a person with a gender-reassigned CPR number will not be automatically called in for screenings for gender-related diseases such as breast or cervical cancer and must arrange these screenings themselves.⁹ These discrepancies show how official government systems may struggle with discerning between person’s organs and their gender identity – causing one to “fall outside” the system. However liberating, anti-regulatory, or “glitching” that may be, it can put an individual at risk or force them into unpleasant situations in which they may be asked to debate their sex and gender with the healthcare and other public systems that use the CPR number.

Name change

⁵ Sundhedsstyrelsen n.d.: “Kønsmodificerende behandling”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.sst.dk/da/Borger/Seksuel-sundhed-seksualitet-og-koensidentitet/Koensidentitet/Koensmodificerende-behandling>

⁶ CSV n.d.: “Stemmetransformation”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://csv.kk.dk/for-borgere/stemme/stemmetransformation>

⁷ Sundhedsstyrelsen n.d.: “Ændring af CPR-nummer”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.sst.dk/da/Borger/Seksuel-sundhed-seksualitet-og-koensidentitet/Koensidentitet/AEndring-af-CPR-nummer>

⁸ This paper was written before the recent changes (Hinsby 2025). Sst.dk however still provides the mentioned information.

⁹ Sundhedsstyrelsen n.d.: “Ændring af CPR-nummer”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.sst.dk/da/Borger/Seksuel-sundhed-seksualitet-og-koensidentitet/Koensidentitet/AEndring-af-CPR-nummer>

Personregistrering.dk mentions “male”, “female”, as well as “unisex” names.¹⁰ A male cannot have a female name and vice versa – there is however a long list of approved unisex names, albeit it is much shorter than the male or female ones.¹¹ Such a position of being in between the gender binary does not seem to be possible for patronymic surnames – those ending either in “-søn” or “-datter” meaning either the “son of” or “daughter of”.

Allowing unisex names may not necessarily be in opposition to the gender binary as it may simply mean that a name has both a male- and a female-identified version which happen to be identical, or just that it applies to “either of the two” genders. The gender binary is also encouraged through not allowing males to carry female names and vice versa. It is however interesting to note, that whereas people may not be “unisex” in themselves, their names can be.

Nevertheless, Copenhagen’s Municipality website kk.dk informs of a youth profiling survey that allowed respondents to, for the first time, indicate their gender as “non-binary” – thus officially indicating their gender identity towards the state (or the city municipality) as existing outside the official gender binary for the study’s purposes.¹²

MitID

The areas of how the Danish government may look at gender and sex as data come together in the MitID digital identity service (Digitaliseringsstyrelsen 2023). Asking for a CPR change,¹³ booking a doctor’s appointment for a “gender-modification treatment” referral or accessing medical records at sundhed.dk,¹⁴ and applying for a name-change can all be done through or with the help of the MitID system.¹⁵ It also allows access to the bank, Digital post, and a variety of public self-services and websites.¹⁶

¹⁰ By-, Land- og Kirkeministeriet n.d.: “Naming rules – Changing your name”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.personregistrering.dk/hc/en-gb/articles/360021861879-Naming-rules-Changing-your-name->

¹¹ Familieretshuset n.d.: “Godkendte fornavne”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://familieretshuset.dk/navne/navne/godkendte-fornavne>

¹² Københavns Kommune n.d.: “Orientering om Ungeprofilundersøgelsen – København 2023/23”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.kk.dk/dagsordener-og-referater/Sundheds-%20og%20Omsorgsudvalget/m%C3%B8de-04052023/referat/punkt-6>

¹³ CPR n.d.: “Juridisk kønsskifte (transkønnede)”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://cpr.dk/borgere/kan-jeg-faa-et-nyt-personnummer/juridisk-koensskifte-transkoennede>

¹⁴ City of Copenhagen n.d.: “Going to a doctor”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://international.kk.dk/live/healthcare/going-to-a-doctor/going-to-a-doctor>; Københavns Kommune n.d.: “Bestil tid til Borgerservice”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.kk.dk/bestiltid>

¹⁵ By-, Land- og Kirkeministeriet n.d.: “Naming rules – Changing your name”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.personregistrering.dk/hc/en-gb/articles/360021861879-Naming-rules-Changing-your-name->

¹⁶ MitID n.d.: “About MitID”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.mitid.dk/en-gb/about-mitid/>

I will focus on data collected whilst personally registering for MitID through the MitID app. The registration requires, among other things, a Danish CPR number and a passport or an ID card with an electronic chip. Upon scanning my passport, the app required a scan of my face to match the passport photo. I repeatedly received an error stating that “The photo in your passport/ID card does not match your facial scanning” and a list of recommendations on how to avoid this issue. I could not resolve the issue and upon physical visit to the Citizen Service Centre to prove my identity, there was not enough of my data in the citizen registry, so I was not able to receive access to MitID, barring my access to its services. My passport photo is just one year old, and my appearance has not significantly changed.

Possible reasons for the app not recognizing my appearance are given on the MitID website – wearing glasses, bad lighting, or a change in appearance since taking the passport photo.¹⁷ Despite me not being transgender, a change of appearance from one’s passport is arguably something that likely affects transgender people more as they’re undergoing transition.

This introduces another form of gender-incongruent ID (Scheim et al. 2020: 196–197), this time visually and algorithmically enforced via the use of image scanning and visual recognition software. This potentially bars these citizens from public services such as Digital post or borger.dk and makes them prove their identity in person – likely leading to more cases of debating one’s identity and confronting a disparity between physical reality and their recorded digital identity.

The invisibility of trans and non-binary people in the eyes of computer vision and facial recognition systems is a problem beyond the scope of this paper. In closing, I want to only briefly mention Schiebinger’s (2021: 10) study, finding that “transgender faces may pose challenges for facial recognition systems” because of gender-affirming hormone therapy changing the shape and texture of one’s face. Schiebinger (2021: 10) thus recommends a revision of algorithmic parameters to focus for example more on the person’s eyes.

These issues are further documented by Keyes (2018: 88:11), finding that such software “is particularly likely to misclassify (and so discriminate against) trans people”, whilst the absence of trans or non-binary faces in machine learning datasets (Keyes 2018, 88:13) and the presumption of gender being binary “additionally harms non-binary people, who by definition cannot be accurately classified” (Keyes 2018:

¹⁷ MitID n.d.: “Cannot get the passport and face scan to work?”. Accessed 9 December 2023 from <https://www.mitid.dk/en-gb/get-started-with-mitid/get-mitid-with-passport/cannot-get-the-passport-and-face-scan-to-work/>

88:11). All resulting in what Butler (2006, xxvi) might call “unreal” identities (discussed also in the first chapter of this paper).

Conclusion

I have analysed Danish government websites related to the construction of digital citizen identity, and the MitID app, through a theoretical lens of *regulatory fiction*, *datafication*, and *legal gender recognition*, with focus on my RQ: “*How does the Danish digital citizen identity codify gender/sex of its citizens, according to official websites and the MitID app?*”

My qualitative content analysis shows that Denmark views gender/sex identity as binary. This manifested itself via a) language – using formulations “the opposite sex” and “the other gender”, b) the symbolic level – using a numerical representation to quantify gender as data, c) the systems themselves – CPR number’s classification of gender as only male or female.

However, a level of openness to “glitch between binaries” was also present within the analysed texts, mainly the ability to change one’s legal gender and CPR number to “the other gender” based just on self-identification for people above 18 years old (and thus use the *regulatory fiction* in a gender-affirming way), and to change one’s name including unisex options. Partial evidence was found that Denmark allows (or allowed) for “X” gender-marker in passports in certain circumstances.

Issues were also present, specifically the systems’ inability to distinguish between citizens’ organs and gender identity upon a change in CPR number – resulting in citizens “falling outside” the system of certain health screenings or potentially getting wrong test results, as CPR number is here taken to correspond to both one’s gender and one’s biology. These issues were however officially admitted by the texts.

A second issue was found with access to Danish digital identity via MitID’s facial scanning feature. In being unable to match my face to my passport, I could not register for MitID, even upon personal meeting with the Citizen Service Centre as not enough data on my identity existed. This issue is likely to be more prevalent with transgender individuals whose appearance changes due to transition. The visual and algorithmic facial recognition embedded in the MitID app introduces yet another form of gender incongruity within official forms of ID documents for trans people and adds onto the body of existing problems trans and non-binary people face while dealing with machine-learning classification software and the government.



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HONOURABLE SLAVES?

The socioeconomic aspects of enslaved wet-nurses in Classical Athens

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ABSTRACT: In the huge collection of ancient Greek grave steles we find a number of inscriptions dedicated to wet nurses of the rich, elite citizenry of Classical Athens. This is a quite peculiar and noteworthy appearance, both keeping in mind that these wet nurses are enslaved people, and therefore ‘socially dead’, as well as being females in ancient Athens – a situation without any form of political, legal or social rights. This article sets out to explore why these honours came to be, and what they essentially means for the wet nurses in question, in terms of social status and socioeconomic opportunities. Throughout, it will be argued that these nurses display a dichotomous position in the ancient Greek household, due to their privileged and problematic knowledge of the most intimate aspects of the citizen’s private life.

KEYWORDS: wet nurse, ancient Greece, Classical Athens, Greek slaves, enslaved females.



Introduction¹

In recent years the subjects of ancient Greek slavery have been greatly revised. Much scholarly attention has recently been on what defines this group, as well as their social status and how to interpret different examples of ‘slaves’ socio-economic opportunities (e.g. Lewis 2018; Vlassopoulos 2023; Cartledge 2024). Moreover, scholars argue for a more nuanced and in-depth study of the social implications and socio-economic contexts of slaves (*ibid.*; Finley 1980; Patterson 1982). In this article, I aim towards conducting a study of the socio-economic implications of slaves.

The ancient *poleis* (city-states) of the Eastern Mediterranean were furthermore subject of high mobility, namely among the enslaved, who were migrants or descendants of migrants being owned by high and middle-class citizens. As non-citizens and outsiders, enslaved individuals would find it challenging to improve their living conditions or to rise within the social hierarchy (Vadan 2022). As scholars of ancient mobility has shown, the Greek *poleis* were characterised by exclusion of resident aliens from political and legal spheres, and newcomers to the society of the *polis* were thus stripped of all networks and social relations to help bettering their well-being (*ibid.*; Demetriou 2012; Møller 2023). Did these enslaved aliens have no conditions or possibilities for establishing social relations, then?

Obviously, the answer to such question cannot give a definitive account of enslaved people as a whole, since they are not a homogenous group. I will therefore examine a specific case in which I see possibilities of enslaved people bettering their conditions via social relations. The case in question is focussed on the household slaves (*oiketes*)², specifically the wet-nurses, since they have close contact with wealthy citizens on a day-to-day basis. As will be clear from the following, this creates a curious context for the nurse, which both achieves venerable (one might even term it honourable) praise as well as stigmatisation. This article therefore seeks to study this paradoxical construction of the slave as both honourable and stigmatised. Under which historical contexts and cultural prerequisites does this manifest, and what constitutes the differences in portrayals?

¹ I thank my academic advisor Emil Skaarup, who not only supervised the BA-thesis that preceded this article, but who also provided valuable advice on rewriting it. All remaining errors are mine.

² From Greek οἱ οἰεῖτες, meaning ‘household-slave’, from οἶκος meaning household.

Historiographical remarks

As mentioned above, there exist different schools of thought concerning ancient Greek slavery. Throughout this article, I follow D. Lewis and K. Vlassopoulos in their understanding of slavery as defined by legal ownership and in terms of their local contexts (Lewis 2018; Vlassopoulos 2023; cf. Patterson 1982). Lewis and Vlassopoulos argue, albeit through different means, that ancient slavery should be viewed according to their own, local historical and social contexts (*ibid.*). As such, the circumstances we might find concerning slaves should not be seen in comparison to other *poleis*, but in accordance with internal, small-scale contexts. This is highly important for my approach to the sources of the wet-nurses, since their circumstances of dichotomous portrayal should be viewed *vis-à-vis* their social relations within the household.

The subject of nurses' well-being, status and relations is not an unexplored phenomenon. G. Pedrucci (2020) gives an overview of the wet nurse both in Greek and Roman contexts, by analysing the nurses' functions and social conditions. She, too, examines this dichotomous and paradoxical portrayal of the wet-nurse, as well as the prostitutes. Although exclusively through Roman Imperial evidence, she concludes that relations between the aristocratic citizen and their wet-nurse were highly ambivalent and differing (*ibid.*, 138). While her views are intriguing, several problems occur: first of all, due to the paucity of evidence in the Greek context, her study focuses mainly on the Roman side, while assuming Roman sources quantifiably account of the Greek nurses. Secondly, there is a general lack of citation which makes it challenging to confirm her arguments; her only Greek primary source cited is a Demosthenes speech, all else is secondary literature. Lastly, while I find her comparisons between nurses and prostitutes possibly believable, she fails to acknowledge the anachronistic nature of her perception of ancient Greek prostitutes' status as well as nurses'.

On matters of inclusion and exclusion of resident aliens in the social and political spheres, we have scholars like D. Demetriou and M. Møller, in their respective works *Negotiating Identity in the Ancient Mediterranean* and *Balancing Integration*. Both conclude (with different outset, source material and population group) that resident aliens experienced different degrees of inclusion in social and political spheres, and that the determining of this often relied on their personal ties with citizens (Møller 2023; Demetriou 2012; 2023; cf. Vadan 2022: 386-92). This argument will be vital for the coming analysis; their focus, however, is exclusively on the resident aliens who are known as *metoikoi*, while not taking into account the aliens who were enslaved. Part of the social standing of the slave

is due to their integration into the household. Therefore, Denetriou and Møller are of much importance to quantify whether these different experiences of integration also apply to enslaved, alienated people.

An important scholar in the well-being and social ties of poor, labouring inhabitants of Classical Athens is C. Taylor, who in her monography *Poverty, Wealth, and Well-Being* asserts (among many other things) that nurses could establish a special relationship with the people whom they worked for. This is possible due to a relationship of mutual need – which complements scholar's arguments that enslaved people fulfilled a specific need for the citizens (Finley 1980). Elsewhere, Taylor argues that social networks highly affect the possibilities of (especially) alienated, as well as their quality of life. Although seminal, Taylor's analysis deals with impoverished Athenian inhabitants in general, while not exclusively focusing on slaves or nurses. In fact, nurses play a relatively small role in her study and are only dealt with sporadically and with a clear focus in mind. Her conclusions and arguments will thus be central to the coming analysis, while also complementing the relatively small role she grants nurses in her research.

Definition and structure

One thing scholars generally agree on is that the nurses of Classical Athens are far from a homogenous group. This is supported by the sources attributing different levels of status and disagreeing on which duties they should have. It is clear, however, that the wet-nurse had more responsibility than just breastfeeding and caring for the new-born children. They often functioned also as caregivers throughout childhood, far into adulthood (and sometimes the nurse's dotage). This explains the disharmony with *tittbes* and *trophos*³ (which often are roughly translated to wet nurses and governess, respectively) sometimes being used synonymously in Greek sources. There seems to be no discernible difference between the two, although some patterns of distinction could be argued for (Rühfel 1988: 43; Kosmopolou 2001: 285).⁴ My assumption is that the roles of the servants of *oikos* were more ambiguous. Nurses should be viewed as both governesses and/or nursemaids, since there is no clear-cut distinction, and the roles are on both sides interchangeable.

³ Greek: *τίτθης* and *τροφός*.

⁴ For example, Kosmopolou argues that *tittbes* is primarily used by actual breastfeeding nurses, probably when the child is infant, and could thereafter become (more as a social construct than an actual title) *trophos*, governess (i.e. also the child's guardian as it grows older). The evidence is, however, too scarce to make any definitive conclusion or generalisation (Kosmopolou 2001: 285).

The sources for these nurses are sparse, and those few available are highly biased in origins. The theatres are although of a more complex character, since they (ideally) mirror perceptions of social groups, as seen by the population as a whole. Specifically, the comedies by Menander are a unique source depicting everyday life within the household - but should still be dealt with close attention to elite bias. The primary sources material in question are epigraphy and juridical orations. Although they display bias as well, they give a unique insight in the nurses' place in the *oikos*. The epigraphical material in question, consisting of epitaphs for nurses, are signs of 'occasions for public recognition' of the deceased's (supposed) virtues (Skaarup 2023: 43). These types of source material are embedded in elitist viewpoints, but since this paper focuses on the relations between citizens and their slaves, such bias comes to our advantage by displaying the elite's depictions of (and therefore sensation of social tie to) their slaves. The viewpoint of the enslaved, however, can hardly be qualitatively asserted.

Bearing all this in mind, the present paper does not aim at an examination of all nurses' possibilities, well-beings and social statuses, but rather displays cases in which some could accomplish such social improvements. Being a heterogeneous group, those cases could hardly be argued as representative of all nurses, and the conclusion should therefore be viewed as such. Firstly, I will examine cases in which nurses are depicted as honourable, trustworthy characters of the *oikos*, primarily by looking at epigraphical and juridical sources. Secondly, I will present counterarguments, examining cases in which nurses are hardly being shown as honourable characters. Here I will focus on theatrical plays as well as archaeological remains, since they plausibly display the discourses and perceptions of the elites of Athens. Lastly, I will discuss this dichotomous quality, in order to examine what factors constitute this difference of perception and recognition.

Honouring the household wet nurse

In Euripides' tragedy *Medea*, we meet the protagonist's nurse (a *trophos*), who develops into a devoted trustee of her owner. Throughout the play she appears as Medea's trustee—at least trying to advise her against her brutal acts—and periodically acts as storyteller to the audience (Eur., *Med.*: 184-204; 1-45). Furthermore, she becomes Medea's companion through her quest for revenge over Jason. Bearing in mind a nurse ought to be of lower standing, why is she devoted such importance in a play? Is this a notion that plays display a poor sense of reality, or rather that nurses are a more complicated and ambiguous matter?

Similarly, in Euripides' *Hippolytus* we meet a nurse of Queen Phaidra who is vital to the plot of the

play. After Aphrodite makes Phaidra fall in love with her stepson Hippolytus, the queen becomes distraughtly afraid of diminishing the reputation of her husband (Hippolytus' father). She confides her distraught to her nurse, who takes the matter in her own hands to persuade Hippolytus to give in to Phaidra's lust. After this proves unsuccessful, Phaidra –in realising Hippolytus gained awareness of her desire– hangs herself to the great regret and demise of her nurse and Hippolytus; thus the tragedy of the play (Eur., *Hipp.*: 170-265, 309-61, 602-700). This displays the privileged and intimate knowledge that the nurses might have possessed about their citizen families. Therefore, the nurses must, in some aspects, have been part of the innermost, private spheres of the citizen family and also been somehow entrusted this intimate information. As argued below, this is possible because the citizens are dependent upon their nurses' care and work. The role of the nurses in Euripides' plays displays the discourses and perceptions of the relations between the rich elite and their nurses, as seen through the elites themselves. It is highly plausible that Euripides mirrored the audience's life or social norms through the relations of Phaidra and Medea with their own nurses, so that the viewers could relate to the characters in the plays. Still, it is a dubious and one-sided source for the social status of the nurse and her relationship with the people in her *oikos*. Therefore, we shall turn towards the epigraphical and juridical material.

The epigraphical sources in question here are a number of grave steles found, erected and dedicated to the *oikos*' nurse. This is interesting – bearing in mind that such dedications are special occasions for recognition of virtues. Unlike other ancient sources such as theatrical or philosophical, epigraphical steles often present people of different statuses and classes. One such inscription reads (IG II² 7873, trans. R. Pitt):⁵

Here the earth covers over the worthy nurse of Hippostrate; and now she longs for you. As long as you were alive, I loved you, nurse, and now I still honour you, though you are below the earth, and I will honour you as long as I live. I know that even below the earth, if there is in fact a reward for the worthy ones, the first and foremost honours, nurse, are yours, next to Persephone and Pluto.

This nurse is therefore honoured not only by the erection of a grave stele (an honour only few slaves met) but also by her virtue of being “worthy” (*chrēstē*) and with honour (*timē*). Hippostrate, who we presume paid for the stele, is undoubtedly displaying the nurse as an honoured and respected member of her *oikos*, especially given the comparison to Pluto and Persephone with wishes of

⁵ From Greek: ἔνθα δὲ τῇν χρηστῇν τί τῇν κατὰ γαῖα καλύπτει | ἡ προστάτης καὶ νῦν ποθεῖ σε. | καὶ ζῶσαν σ' ἐφίλουν, τί τῇ, καὶ νῦν σ' ἔτι τιμῶ | οὖσαν καὶ κατὰ γῆς καὶ τιμήσω σε ἄχρ' ἂν ζῷ | οἷ δα δὲ σοὶ ὅτι καὶ κατὰ γῆς, εἴ περ χρηστοῖς γέρας ἐστί ν, | πρῶται σοὶ τιμαί, τί τῇ, παρὰ Φερσεφόνι Πλούτωνι τε κεῖνται.

reward in the afterlife. The inscription displays both honouring and almost loving devotion to the former nurse, which is likely due to the fact that this was the nurse of Hippostrate, when she was a child. Such inscriptions always mention the direct receivers of her care (see below), and since Hippostrate is presumably adult when erecting this stele, we can assume that she indeed was the ‘child’ of the nurse’s care.

There is, however, a clear interest in erecting such stone for one’s nurse, besides mere devotion and honouring. By erecting such grave stele, Hippostrate shows the public that she indeed can afford stone inscriptions, even for her slaves. It should therefore also be viewed as a display of own wealth, as much as a devotion to her slave. Contrarily, it is unlikely that citizens like Hippostrate would honour their nurses, if they were not in some way respected within *oikos*, or rather Hippostrate would not honour her nurse if she found her dishonourable. Nor does it disprove it being a public recognition of an enslaved woman.

Numerous other grave monuments display the same types of honouring (SEG 21:1064; IG II² 12559, 11647, 12387; Kosmopoulou 2001, N9), though one in particular exemplifies a specific point (IG II² 9112 = Kosmopoulou 2001: N4):⁶

Here the earth holds the nurse of the children of Diogeiton from the Peloponnese. This just woman,
Malicha from Kythera.

This Malicha, who - as we are informed - was a resident alien from Kythera, is referenced only through the children of the (presumed) benefactor of the honouring. This portrayal of the nurses through the children whom they provide care for are numerous in epigraphic evidences and constitutive of how and why these slaves were honoured (Taylor 2017: 139). Similarly, in the theatrics of e.g. Euripides, they are portrayed as emotionally connected to the children (cf. e.g. Men. *Sam.*: 235-48; Eur. *Hipp.* 170-265; Taylor 2017: 135-40). Therefore, we see a clear relation between the caregiving slave and the children in their care.

Various other steles of more simple inscriptions plainly state “nurse” or “[our] just nurse” (IG II² 12813 (Kosmopoulou 2001: N5); Kosmopoulou 2001: N9; IG II² 13065). One reason for this could be that they were erected on the family or *oikos* grave, and therefore they did not need clarification as to who should get credit of erecting it. Another reason is that these short descriptions often supplemented a relief of the nurse, either depicting her sitting or in some sort of action with the

⁶ From Greek: [ἔ]νθα δ[ε] γῆ κατέχει τί τὴν παῖ δὼν Διογεί το | ἔκ Πελοποννήσου τῇ νδε δικαιοτάτην. | Μαλίχα
Κυθηρία.

members of her *oikos*. Hence, this should not be asserted as an alienation of the nurse but rather proves further the strong relation between her and the people in *oikos*.

Such relation between the nurse and the citizen in their care can be seen manifested in the juridical sources as well. In a pseudo-Demosthenes' speech, an unknown prosecutor defends his own dignity and grandeur by this colourful tale of his former nurse ([Dem.] 47.55, trans. A. T. Murray):

More than this, men of the jury, my wife happened to be lunching with the children in the court and with her was an elderly woman who had been my [wet-]nurse, a devoted soul and a faithful, who had been set free by my father. After she had been given her freedom she lived with her husband, but after his death, when she herself was an old woman and there was nobody to care for her, she came back to me. I could not suffer my old nurse, or the slave who attended me as a boy, to live in want; at the same time, I was about to sail as trierarch, and it was my wife's wish that I should leave such a person to live in the house with her.

Here, the relation has proved an advantage for the nurse, since she is taken back by her former family and owners - now into their care. We are also informed that she has been freed, on account of her devotedness and faithfulness, whereafter she lived a better life than the norm of most slaves. Obviously, the prosecutor has interest in creating a perception of him as a virtuous and morally good character, by exemplifying how good he took care of his nurse who took care of him. It is, yet, a public display of affection towards a nurse. The speaker would not publicly express his devotion to his nurse as such, unless it was virtuous in some form. Therefore, the passage should be seen as a result of strong ties between the nurse and the citizen in her care, as well as how this might result in an advantage to the nurse herself.

Drawing upon the previous points, we see a clear way these nurses are being honoured by virtue of their care towards the children and citizens of the *polis*. The nurses were, however, far from consistently portrayed as virtuous and honourable figures of the *oikos*; on the contrary, they were often depicted in a very different light. The following section provides an examination of this contesting view, in order to explore what can be learned from this dichotomous portrayal.

The dishonourable, old house-nurse

In the comedies of Menander, the nurse is a recurring character with differing influence to the plot. Many of these plays feature the nurse as an old woman within the household (Men. *Sam.* 236-7); this is mirrored in a number of terracotta figurines (e.g. fig. 1), where the nurse is depicted as an old maid either breastfeeding or carrying children. She appears as a worn out lady, crooked and peculiar. We do not know how contemporaries perceived this, but in most cases reliefs on graves and statues depicted women as youthful and more neutral. This displays a curious difference in depictions of the wet nurse: as we have seen above, the nurse were clearly being depicted as honourable characters of the *oikos*; but was this necessarily the case with all nurses?

Firstly, we need to assert why these nurses were depicted as old maids. It would be naturally impossible for a wet nurse to breastfeed in old age, especially since it is only possible by having just given birth. What these figurines thus represent is not necessarily breastfeeding nurses (although they at one point could have been) but rather a nurse with the role and status of a nursemaid or governess. As mentioned above, this is supported by nurses being continuously attached to their 'child' even far into adulthood (as with the nurse of Queen Phaidra). However, this does not explain the stigmatised display of the nurse, which undeniably can be seen on the figurines.



Figure 1: Wet nurse terracotta figurine holding a child. The nurse is clearly being displayed as an old maid. © The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Furthermore, the nurses' role in comedies and tragedies is often problematic. If we examine again the Euripides' tragedy *Hippolytos*, the nurse of Phaidra is the one to make matters worse. Similarly, in Menander's comedy *Samia*, the protagonist, Demeas, overhears the nurse talking to herself stating that the child whom she nurses is that of Moschion and Chrysis. This proves to Demeas that Moschion had an affair with Chrysis, who is the mistress of Demeas (Men. *Sam.* 236-270). Once again, the nurse is being displayed as a character who complicates matters further, due to her privileged and problematic knowledge of the most intimate aspects of a citizen's life. It is exactly this intimate knowledge what creates a dichotomous role of the nurse. The nurse becomes a

confidant for the citizen but, due to this social relationship, she is also granted access to the citizen's most intimate and personal sphere; hence, she is also a problematic character in the household, because of this intimate connection with the citizen.

Another explanation of the nurses' dichotomous portrayals can be discerned from their heterogeneous character as a distinct group. As earlier mentioned, wet nurses were described as both *tittthes* and *trophos*, which could both refer to actual wet nurses, governesses, nursemaids or pedagogues. They could also be women of different ages, and would sometimes be in service of a household from their early adulthood until old age (Pedrucci 2020; Taylor 2017: 226-33). It is suspected that the vast and heterogeneous group that is wet nurses would experience different varieties of depictions, then.

This also illuminates a much bigger discussion: if wet nurses are depicted in various ways due to their internal differences, then their experiences of slave-citizen relationships must also have varied accordingly. Even though we have seen examples of wet nurses being honoured, it is important to remember that the source material is highly fragmented, and that we are only left with the sources which the richer, privileged citizens have left for us. Thus, we are left with half a picture, and what these figurines and less flattering depictions might show is exactly this missing (textual) representation.

Thus, to sum up, we must contend that different nurses experienced different levels of honouring as well as being associated with different social statuses. Some nurses might have experienced great levels of honouring (e.g. in death, by flattering gravestones), whereas some might have been –as the figurines might be a representation of– just hardworking slaves until old age. It is of course expected that different slaveowners treated their slaves differently. However, this does not mean that care plays no role in this difference; as will be clear by the following, the caring of citizens becomes vital to whether the nurse is depicted honourably or otherwise.

Caring begets caring

If these wet nurses are to be believed as internally different, what distinguishes them from each other? In other words, what makes the elite slave owners honour some wet nurses, and some not? To answer such questions, we would need statements from the elite owners on their nurses' virtuousness, which –incidentally– is possible via their implicit voice in the elite-made sources. Here the bias of ancient sources is to our advantage. If we take a closer look at the pseudo-Demosthenes' oration mentioned above, we may notice how the nurse has been emancipated on account of being

“a devoted soul and a faithful” (Dem. 47.55, trans. A. T. Murray). It is, therefore, the nurse’s faithfulness and devotion to the *oikos* that are highlighted. Furthermore, the speaker emphasises: “I could not suffer my old nurse, or the slave who attended me as a boy, to live in want”, which obviously refer to the care she provided for him during his childhood and supposedly early adulthood as well (*ibid.*). Hence, her devotion must refer to her caring for the citizen children in the household.

If we look carefully at these grave inscriptions, we notice the word *chrēsten*⁷ describing virtually every wet nurse and which roughly translates to good, useful or serviceable (SEG 21.325; IG II² 12559; 11647; 7873; Kosmopoulou 2001: N9; IG II² 12387; 12815). Those are to be interpreted as virtuous qualities for a nurse, since they are connected to her services towards the citizens in her care. The central aspect is the nurse’s function as a caregiver and her ability to look after the children properly. Therefore, being a good nurse, worthy of honourable dedications, means to be a useful and serviceable nurse - i.e. providing good care for children. It might seem obvious that a nurse’s good ability comes from her nursing, but what is central is how this evolves into an honouring of her; the nurse’s caring for the children alone enables this honouring.

To understand why this becomes so essential, it is important to look at the relation this care creates between the nurse and ‘her children’. Scholars argue children would often be more connected to the nurse than their actual mothers, due to the nurse’s *de facto* motherly role (Pedrucci 2020; Kosmopoulos 2001; Emery 2010). Therefore, we see a unique and close relation between enslaved and citizen. We noted this with the nurses in Euripides’ *Hippolytos* and *Medea* already, as the characters, even though they are adults, are still very closely connected to their nurses. Then, being a nurse meant, among other things, having a close connection to their children, which could mean a lifelong relation to them.

Taylor argues that the closeness between nurse and citizen is due to an interdependent relationship between the two: both in terms of the nurses being dependent on the ‘work’ the owners and their children provide, as well as the citizens being dependent on the nurse’s services to endure. The children are dependent on nursing, caring, etc., while the adult citizens are dependent on the nurse to provide these services, allowing them to maintain their political, social, and labor obligations (Taylor 2017: 140). Generally, Taylor asserts that female enslaved, despite their slave-status, were able to form social relationships both within and outside the household (*ibid.*: 230). The close bond

⁷ Greek: χρῆσθην.

that is formed due to the motherly role of the nurse, therefore, results in an interdependent relationship, where the nurse's possibilities for being honoured are greatly expanded.

What the connection between individuals means for the status of the nurses highly depends on the individual nurse who is in question. If we are to believe that the nurses could form social ties with the citizens of their *oikos*, we are at the same time opposing any notion that slaves were 'socially dead' people - in the sense of having no social ties whatsoever. What this study has shown, however, is that female slaves in their function as wet nurses were capable of some form of socioeconomic mobility, which ultimately denies any notion of being 'socially dead' (Patterson 1982). But it does not necessarily apply to all nurses, and especially not all slaves. Are we then to believe nurses to be completely different from what we understand as ancient slaves? As Lewis has shrewdly observed, if we look beyond just classical Athens, there are numerous examples of enslaved having social possibilities. In Sparta, for example, the enslaved *belots* are known to birth children; in the city-state of Gortyn on Crete the *woikeis* (possibly household slaves) are known to marry both other enslaved as well as non-slaves (although not citizens: cf. Lewis 2018: 1-22; 125-46; 147-66; Lewis 2013; cf. Vlassopoulos 2023). These differences are partly made possible by local circumstances, which sometimes necessitated alternative approaches or proved advantageous to slaveowners. Such is the case of the nurses: the circumstances surrounding the nurse's functions enables this close personal relation by the continuous care (physical and personal). A social relation must also have been advantageous to the owners, both in terms of the 'motherly role' of the nurse and, practically speaking, in terms of them being a part of the household for life (unless emancipated).

However, at the same time there is a curious distinction between being portrayed as honourable and stigmatised. What constitutes this difference? It is exactly the caring, that makes the wet-nurse both honourable and stigmatised. Clearly, the citizens are dependent on the nurse for the tasks and work they cannot or do not want to do: the nurses are providing the 'dirty' work, of child caring, breastfeeding, raising the children, etc. This work, which is incidentally the lowest type of work for a citizen, makes the nurse a highly nuanced character in the *oikos*. The citizens are both obliged to her services as well as appalled by her type of work. This ultimately creates a paradoxical and dichotomous perception of the nurses as both needful and socially different to the citizens.

The case of the wet nurse exemplifies how the differences in the opportunities and socioeconomic conditions of enslaved individuals are not solely determined by geographical or local factors (as might be argued in the cases of Sparta and Gortyn), but they also vary depending on the enslaved person's capacity for social relations. Arguing that slaves generally were more heterogeneous or

against any notion of ‘social death’ is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, the aim of the present paper has been to open up the discussion of the nurse’s place within the spectrum of status (Canevaro 2018: 22-3; Vlassopoulos 2023), as well as to opt for a more nuanced look at different types of slaves’ opportunities for social mobility, despite their enslaved constraints.

Conclusion

The nurses of ancient Greek households were clearly a heterogeneous group. In this study, I have examined the different depictions and cases involving caregivers within the household and can thus conclude that they were ambiguous in character. Some sources, like the epigraphic ones and to some extend the theatrical and oratorical, give the impression that nurses were honoured and respected within the citizens’ households, forming strong social relations with the citizens in their care. However, the nurse is also being depicted as an old, worn-down maid and a problematic character. I have argued that this ambiguity and difference is rooted in an understanding of the ‘good nurse’ as defined by her caring for the citizens of the *oikos*. Thus, this caring constitutes a social relationship with the citizen, which in turn laments her position as a respected character in the household; at the same time, caregiving becomes the reason why nurses are being honoured on gravestones, emancipated, or taken back in the care of the household at old age. At the same time, the care becomes a stigmatiser, in that the nurses provide works the citizens do not want to do themselves. The caring work, then, constitutes a paradox: while citizens depend on these services, the work-position itself is highly stigmatised and low-class.

Furthermore, this certainly quantifies the debate on the social relations of slaves in ancient Greece: these nurses can hardly be said to be ‘socially dead’, and we must therefore understand that different slaves, nurses etc. had different preconditions and possibilities for socioeconomic mobility. Thus, like Møller and Demetriou has shown with alienated in the *polis* (Møller 2023; Demetriou 2012), different slaves experienced different levels of integration within the *oikos*.



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THE DE-SEXUALISATION OF THE HAREM

How Europe's female artists resisted and embraced the male gaze on the
harem

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ABSTRACT: In a discourse consumed by the paintings and writings produced by the male gaze, female reproductions of the Orient remain a largely undiscovered facet of colonial history and discourse. Female contributions to the European image of the Oriental are evidence of their active role in imperial power relations, establishing her firmly in an intersection between race, gender, and colonialism. Thus, as this article traces the female gaze on the harem, the inclusion of women in the masculine phenomenon of imperialism and colonialism will also be revealed. By analysing paintings produced from 1850 to 1900, the female creator becomes a focal point in Oriental history.

KEYWORDS: Orientalism, imperial project, female gaze, eroticism, de-sexualisation.



Introduction

“Only women should go to Turkey - what can a man see in this jealous country... For a woman, on the other hand, the odalisque opens itself, the harem has no more mysteries; those no doubt charming faces for which the bearded tourist searches in vain, she contemplates stripped of their veil” (Lewis 1993: 57).¹

Alongside the body of art produced by European men, which circulated colonial society, stood a small but significant body of work produced by their female counterparts. For these women, “the odalisque opens itself, [and] the harem has no more mysteries,” enabling her to capture the Orient as it existed, devoid of the fantasies and exoticism that fuelled the male imagination (Lewis 1993: 57). That is not to say that woman captured the Middle East as it was, but instead reconstructed a nuanced version of Europe’s perceived reality based on imperialist and colonialist ideologies. From 1850 to the turn of the twentieth century, female artists explored the undiscovered facets of the Orient and produced work responding to these sights. This paper will trace the work of artists Henriette Browne, Margaret Murray Cookesley, and Eliza Florence Bridell-Fox. The selection of these women was not arbitrary; they come from countries with strong colonial ties to the Middle East, namely Britain and France. Moreover, these women visited the region, allowing them direct access – or perceived access – to the harem. This analysis is not an attempt to contrast the male to the female gaze but rather to explore the nuances the female gaze may add to the conceptualisation of the harem. Moreover, I recognise the importance of male Orientalist artwork and do not attempt to deny its place within Orientalism.

By critically examining women’s reproductions of the Oriental harem, this paper aims to understand the female contribution to the imperial project. The imperial project is referred to as the construction of a national imperial identity that contrasts the ‘other’, or in this context, the Orient against the West (or the Occident). Through a gendered analysis of their work, I aim to discern how women add to or challenge the male-dominated Orientalist discourse. First, I will explore the social context of these female artists to understand the intersection between imperialism, culture, and gender. In doing so, I want to dismantle the complexities, contradictions, and oppositions inherent within this relationship. I will analyse the paintings produced by both British and French artists to discern, across two colonial contexts, the resonances and dissonances in the female representation

¹ Original quote from Theophile Gautier but I have drawn on the translation by Reina Lewis in: Lewis, Reina. 1993. “‘Only Women should go to Turkey’ Henriette Browne and Women’s Orientalism.” *Third Text* 7 (22): 57. For original text see: Gautier, Theophile. 1861. *Abécédaire du Salon de 1861 / par Théophile Gautier*. E. Dentu: 72-73.

of the Orient. Thus, this paper hopes to establish where women sit within the relationship between imperialism, gender, and race through their influences on the Oriental discourse.

This paper will draw on the intersection between postcolonial and feminist theory as a critical lens which expands the historical understanding of colonialism and imperialism (Parashar 2016). The common association between postcolonial theory, which covers ideas of imperialism, race, and power, and masculinity, is directly challenged through this intersection with feminist theory (Lewis & Mills 2003). To converge such contrasting theories will “decentre the presumed privilege of a normative male subject” replacing him with the nuanced ways women contribute and are involved with colonialism (Lewis & Mills 2003: 2). This essay defines the *harem* as both a construction of Western fantasies and the “sociopolitical institution of the harem which serves as a rich site for investigating some of the complexities of female power” (Jarmakani 2011: 195). Finally, I will refer to the female subjects in the paintings as the artist’s ‘Oriental woman’. This demonstrates they are part of the Oriental imagination rather than depictions of real women.

Historiography

Orientalism is a well-documented and thoroughly researched facet of history. Edward Said conceptualised the term Orientalism, defining it “as a way of coming to terms with the Orient based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience,” in his 1979 seminal text *Orientalism* (Said 1979: 25-26). Said’s text distinguishes Orientalism as “a Western style for dominating, structuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1979: 26-27). In other words, Orientalism is a form of the imperial project. Interestingly, Said limits his scope to Britain and France, concluding that other European powers lack a significant colonial tie to the Middle East (Bohrer 1988). Said’s *Orientalism*, while attentive to questions of race and imperialism, avoids issues of gender. The Oriental woman is largely described in his work through the writings of Gustave Flaubert – and other *male* Orientalists – as “no more than a machine,” obsessed by her sexual temptations (Said 1979: 209-210). Said neglects to critically evaluate this erotic description, allowing it to sit unaccounted for.

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed several pioneering studies that responded to the gender issue in Said’s work. Rana Kabbani, Irvin Schick, and Reina Lewis are among the many researchers who shifted the trajectory of Orientalist studies (Kabbani 1986; Schick 1990; Lewis 1996). Kabbani explores the role of nineteenth-century British travel literature in establishing the image of an erotic

East (Kabbani 1986). In analysing the popularity of travel literature, Kabbani then assesses how travel literature was used as an imperial tool to distinguish the East from the West through the sexualised depiction of the Oriental woman (Kabbani 1986). Similarly, Schick utilises the frameworks of gender theory to understand how an intersection between art history and classical colonial history can strengthen understanding of the imperial, Oriental discourse (Schick 1990). He explores how the production of the Oriental woman captures the power relations between the Orient and the Occident (Schick 1990). Shifting away from the male gaze, Lewis draws attention to the lesser-known productions of Orientalism, analysing the contribution of Henriette Browne to the Oriental discourse (Lewis 1996). Her study was the first of its kind in analysing the specific contribution of women to the Oriental discourse. However, Lewis recognises its limitations as Browne's was only one "among a number of competing alternative discourse[s]" (Lewis 1996: 237).

The most recent scholarship on Orientalism has seen the studies expand further into the spheres of gender and art history. As seen through the writings of Ulrike Brisson, Filippo Carlà-Uhink and Anja Wieber, and Geoffrey Nash, the topics of gender and imperialism continues to hold poignancy in twenty first century society (Brisson 2013; Carlà-Uhink & Wieber 2020; Nash 2019). That said, this essay will continue the research undertaken by feminist theorists in the late twentieth century. Specifically, I will build on the work of Lewis who has demonstrated the existence of female Orientalist artists. The twenty-first century has brought with it an increased availability of important primary sources as the works of female Orientalist painters are rediscovered. Consequently, the discussions Kabbani, Schick, and Lewis began can now be expanded, considering the increasing availability of sources. As such, this paper will return to the arguments of these foundational texts, utilising them to propel the studies of gender, Orientalism, and colonialism further to understand the role of European women in the imperialist project.

Gender and orientalist art: The environment surrounding female artists

To truly understand and analyse the female contribution to the imperial discourse, it is necessary to appreciate the realm these female painters and writers were creating within. Orientalism, by the second half of the nineteenth century, was a well-known phenomenon and referred to (male) artists who engaged with the subject of the East (Benjamin 2003; Marino 2013). The painters frequently associated with the genre at the time include Jean-Léon Gérôme, Rudolf Ernest, and Jean Auguste

Dominique Ingres. Orientalist art thus became regarded mainly “as a male preserve” (Lewis 1993: 53).

Gérôme’s *Pool in a Harem* (1876) and Ernest’s *The Harem Bath* (n.d.) are both depictions of the female bathhouse, painting their Oriental women in hazy, seductive lights as she allows the viewer to inspect her semi-naked body. Ingres was fascinated by depicting the *odalisque*, painting her naked, reclining body in sensual detail in *Odalisque with Slave* (1839). Underlying all their paintings – and indeed many more male Orientalist artists – is the desire to sexualise and eroticise the Oriental woman. Their political significance and contribution to the establishment of colonial power relations are clear (Marino 2013).

The space women occupied within the art world was holy different, defined by the nineteenth-century material and ideological constraints placed on women. Only in the 1860s were women admitted to the Royal Academy in Britain (Bluett 2021). Thirty years later, in the 1890s, women were accepted into the Parisian École des Beaux-Arts (Royal Collection Trust n.d.). Both schools were considered the top art institutions of their time. For such prestigious schools to delay the admittance of women reveals the gender divides within European art. Consequently, opportunities were limited to women, and only those from the upper ranks of society could access these facilities and establish themselves among the hallmarks of male artists (Royal Collection Trust n.d.). As described by Reina Lewis, there existed a “critical tendency to read paintings in relation to the person of the artist [which] relentlessly tied the assessment of women’s work to their gender” (Lewis 1993: 54). Lewis captures the limited access female artists had to realms outside the “womanly, tender, delicate” spheres of art (Lewis 1993: 54). Orientalism was unique in that female artists could continue painting within the domestic narrative despite being far from the realm of European domesticity. As this paper will explore, their gender enabled them to produce harem paintings that became favoured over the male reproductions of the restricted site. Far from the realms of the domestic sphere, women could engage with the representation of colonial relations in the Middle East in a nuanced way. Orientalism showcases the unique intersection between gender, race, and imperialism. Due to their unique social context and gendered expectations, women’s Oriental art forms a distinct strand within the genre of Orientalism.

Europe’s female orientalist painters

Henriette Browne, a notable nineteenth-century French painter shifted the trajectory of her artwork after visiting the Orient. Browne is one of the few French female artists from the time whose paintings as well as their critical receptions, remain accessible today. Browne began her career by painting the domestic narrative (A. B. 1860). In the late 1850s, Browne accompanied her husband to the Orient as part of the “French diplomatic presence” (Lewis 1993: 53-56). Consequently, Browne had access to guides and valuable introductions allowing her entry to restricted spaces, including the harem (Lewis 1993). Upon her return to France, Browne’s artistic trajectory shifted. From her paintings of nuns and children’s portraiture, Browne exhibited two distinctly Orientalist paintings at the Paris Salon in 1861 (Lewis 1993). This paper will analyse *A Visit* and *A Flute Player*, both of which were painted in response to her recent journey to the East. Inconsistent with her early oeuvre, Browne’s Orientalist paintings stimulated conversation in the art world as their beloved “respectable lady artist” began to engage in the “morally contentious field of Orientalism” (Lewis 1996: 127).



Figure 1. Henriette Browne. *A Visit: A Harem Interior*, 1861. Oil on canvas, 29.5cm x 41cm.²

Perhaps Browne's most well-known Orientalist painting – and conceivably the most well-known painting across her entire oeuvre – *A Visit* captures the interior scene of a harem. The contrast between the women's vibrant dresses and the plain, modest interior of the harem draws the viewer's eyes. Neither are particularly extravagant nor lavish. The women's clothing is simple and contrasts the scantily dressed Oriental women in Ingres and Rosati's harem depictions.³ Consequently, Browne depicts her Oriental women as modest, respectable ladies. Moreover, she paints the women in different colours, suggesting their individuality. The harem as a physical space is minimalist and favours functionality over aesthetic value. The plain, unfurnished room functions as a backdrop to demonstrate the sociability of these women rather than reducing its subjects to a dehumanised detail within an exotic landscape. The incorporation of ideas of motherhood through the symbolism of the child provides an iconographic link between the Orient and the Occident as the space becomes emblematic of a Western domestic sphere. As Lewis summarises, Browne “sidesteps the myth and socialises rather than sexualises the harems petrified space” (Lewis 1993: 62). Imperial society received Browne's painting with both criticism and endorsement.

The perception of Browne's paintings largely depended on the belief that she visited a harem. Whether she attended these spaces remains uncertain. However, this perceived knowledge distinguishes Browne from her male counterparts as her access to these restricted spaces enabled her to paint beyond her usual domestic, European subjects. After the painting's showcase in the Paris Salon, critics swarmed to both endorse and denounce her bold “threat to long cherished fantasies” of the Oriental harem (Lewis 1993: 56). Hector de Callias reproaches “the artist for opposing herself to Decamps' encrusted and engraved walls,” criticising Browne's depiction of a minimalist interior as opposed to the lavish interiors painted by Alexandre-Gabriel Decamps (Callias 1861: 241-242)⁴. In contrast, Théophile Gautier claims that “*A Visit* finally shows us the inside of a harem by someone who has seen it, a rare and perhaps unique thing, because, although male painters often paint odalisques, none of them can boast of having worked from life” (Gautier 1861: 73-74)⁵. Gautier goes on to analyse her technical skill; however, it is his attention to her role as a

2 Sotheby's. n.d. “Henriette Browne | *A Visit: A Harem Interior*.” Accessed February 26, 2025.

<https://www.sothebys.com/en/buy/auction/2020/the-orientalist-sale/henriette-browne-a-visit-a-harem-interior>.

3 I refer here to Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres' *Odalisque with Slave*, 1839 and Giulio Rosati's *The Harem Dance*, date unknown.

4 Translation provided by Reina Lewis in her article “Only Women should go to Turkey,” from 1993, 57-58.

5 Translated from French to English via DeepL.

female Orientalist artist that is more telling. By contrasting her perceived intimacy with the harem against the fantasies of her male counterparts, Gautier presents *A Visit* as a visual report and accurate depiction of the space. Browne's 'objective' depiction of the harem positions it as a social space which imbues a sense of normalcy rather than exoticism because of her gendered interaction with the Orient. Moreover, the public fascination with a womanly depiction of a womanly space reiterates the intersection between gender, race, and imperialism that works to create a new, feminine genre of the Orientalist imperial discourse.



Figure 2: Henriette Browne. *A Flute Player*, 1861. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.⁶

A Flute Player similarly captures the sociability of the harem. Modestly dressed women gather around a female musician as she entertains them. Notably, the entertainer is also fully clothed, unlike other paintings of similar scenes by men.⁷ Unlike her other paintings, the Oriental clothes in *A Flute Player* are more pronounced with the addition of face coverings and simple turban head accessories. While Browne is consciously de-sexualising her Oriental women, she simultaneously distinguishes them from European society by signifying their exotic dress. Browne paints the harem as a social area where women can engage in entertainment and conversation. In doing so, Browne situates the

⁶ Image via Julia Kuehn's article "Exotic Harem Paintings: Gender, Documentation, and Imagination," from 2011, 38.

⁷ I refer here to Giulio Rosati's *The Harem Dance*, date unknown.

harem as a space where women lived their everyday lives, albeit in a different manner to European women. Moreover, the entertainer's presence contradicts the idea that Oriental women were secluded from the world (Lewis 1993). Interestingly, Browne's Oriental women seem bored and dejected. Consequently, Browne does not challenge the male narrative that depicts Oriental women as idle, unintelligent individuals. Browne clearly distinguishes her harem representation from the erotic, sexually charged male depictions. However, Browne's exoticisation of the harem reveals the influence of the Western gaze on her reproduction of the Orient.

A Flute Player received similar mixed criticism. Luc-Olivier Merson, a French academic and critic, rather than question her access to the harem, attempts to reduce the influence of her work by noting it was one among many Orientalist paintings (Merson 1861).

“Instead of diamond palaces and rejuvenated Alhambras, marble basins and gushing fountains, sumptuous rugs and naked odalisques rolling about in their pearled costumes, on piles of cushions or mosaics, we see a room that is austere and serious, without ornamentation, with colonnettes and white-washed walls, a mat unwinding on the flags, a divan dominating all around, and populated with silent women, bored, somnolently graceful, chaste in the muslin of their long robes which outline their fragile and languid bodies” (Merson 1861: 275-276).⁸

Merson's critique is explicit – she has broken the unspoken rules of Orientalist representation by which men had adhered before her. Browne's 'deviation' from Orientalist conventions is what critics frequently return to, as seen in comments on her minimalist interior. Merson concludes by “confess[ing] that these pictures disturb our Oriental dreams a little” (Merson 1861: 276).⁹ It becomes clear just how reluctant the male-dominated art world and imperial discourse were to give up their 'Oriental dream'. Female Orientalist artists were faced with a double-edged sword – not only were they encouraged by critics such as Gautier for their invaluable insight, but they were also resisted by others for their opposition to the everyday discourse. Browne's Orientalist paintings are evidence of one of the first female ventures into the male-dominated imperialist discourse (Kuehn 2011a). Her (perceived) access to and reproduction of a site forbidden to European men signifies an intervention in the imperial male Orientalist fantasy. Browne's success stems from her high status within the French art scene and her ability to continue painting within the domestic narrative. Browne's painting forced critics to recognise her ability as a woman to contribute uniquely to the

⁸ Translated from French to English via DeepL.

⁹ Translated from French to English via DeepL.

Oriental discourse. The mixed reception of her work demonstrates the conversation her painting produced regarding the role of women in a male-dominated landscape. Browne was not alone in painting the Oriental harem as seen through the works of Margaret Murray Cookesley.

British painter Margaret Murray Cookesley travelled to the Middle East at the end of the nineteenth century. Consequently, she produced an extensive oeuvre centred around Orientalism, challenging the conception that British Orientalist art was “lesser known” and “less prolific” (Kuehn 2011b: 169). Where Browne’s work found its way into art galleries, Cookesley’s extensive collection, as well as being exhibited in the Royal Academy, was intended for the mass market. With less pressure to conform to the expectations of the orthodox French art scene, Cookesley created a substantial oeuvre of Oriental women which challenged the male eroticised aesthetic.



Figure 3: Margaret Murray Cookesley. *Entertainment in the Harem*, 1894. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.¹⁰

¹⁰ Image via Julia Kuehn’s article “Visual Hybridity: Margaret Murray Cookesley’s Orientalist Aestheticism,” from 2011, 183.



Figure 4: Margaret Murray Cookesley. *Idle Moments*, 1894. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown.¹¹

Both *Entertainment in the Harem* and *Idle Moments* reveal something Browne's paintings never did. Cookesley was intent on capturing the emotions of the Oriental woman (Kuehn 2011b). Her aesthetic vision was to express ideas of contemplation, passion, sisterhood, and belonging (Kuehn 2011b). Both scenes exude a sense of humanity and platonic intimacy as the women converse and entertain one another. The result is a gendered, feminine development of the harem genre, which aims to humanise rather than eroticise its subject. Similarly to Browne, Cookesley depicts the harem as a simple, modest space that facilitates the social interaction of the women who reside within it. However, contemporary scholars including Reina Lewis, criticise her work for "reproduce[ing] the generic codes of Orientalism that were challenged by the work of other women artists like Browne" (Lewis 1996: 118). I would challenge this judgment. While the painting undoubtedly leans into Orientalist tropes – the women are handsome, and their skin remains exposed to the viewer – particularly in comparison to the modestly dressed women in Browne's paintings. However, situated within the domestic setting, which alludes to harmony, sisterhood, and community, the physical

¹¹ Image via Julia Kuehn's article "Visual Hybridity: Margaret Murray Cookesley's Orientalist Aestheticism," from 2011, 183.

representation of the Oriental woman lacks the same sexualisation and eroticisation of male reproductions. Cookesley simultaneously animates and humanises her Oriental women, providing an alternative to the passive, lifeless oriental woman.

The Art Journal recognised Cookesley's work for its intensely humanistic value, seen in the women's "swollen features, glazed eyes and a certain ecstatic insincerity" (Kuehn 2011b: 178).¹² While there is a condemnatory undertone to the response, the critic betrays their acknowledgement of Cookesley's artistic abilities to express emotion and thus humanise rather than sexualise the Oriental woman. Reina Lewis considers Cookesley's reception in the Royal Academy as "quietly received" (Lewis 1996: 118). However, Cookesley's paintings *did* find their presence firmly within the private buyer's market. Even today, Cookesley's paintings continue to make appearances in auction houses around Britain and France, revealing the continued recognition of her work since the nineteenth century.¹³ Thus, while Lewis harshly criticises her work, I would suggest Cookesley made a significant contribution to the British Orientalist narrative. Not only did she successfully restore a sense of humanity to the eroticised and mindless Oriental woman, but Cookesley's reimagined harem found its place within the buyer market, revealing its role in the imperialist discourse as a widely consumed, popular artefact of Orientalist expression.

Eliza Florence Bridell-Fox was an upper-class Englishwoman. As the daughter of an esquire and member of parliament, Fox had access to a good education and went on to study at Sass's School (Clayton 1876). The Royal Academy showcased her work, quickly establishing her name within the British art scene (Clayton 1876). Like Browne, Fox's early work was concerned with the domestic narrative. After her husband's death, Fox travelled to Algeria, a French colony, to study the "native Arab life" (Clayton 1876: 86). Only one of her paintings produced during her time in Algeria was showcased around London galleries, yet its influence on the primitive British female art scene remains significant. Unfortunately, of her vast oeuvre of Algerian portraits, few remain accessible. Consequently, this essay is limited to analysing only one of her paintings.

¹² The Art Journal as quoted in Kuehn's article "Visual Hybridity: Margaret Murray Cookesley's Orientalist Aestheticism," from 2011. Restricted access to original source therefore this indirect quotation is used.

¹³ See auction website: <https://www.invaluable.com/artist/cookesley-margaret-murray-yvkz0jr5kc/sold-at-auction-prices/?srsltid=AfmBOoqQbcSeXk3v0CE1A3DL6eHkLq208ngjdAc0OlpdFO83XRvDrRG3>. Provides records of Cookesley's paintings in circulation across auction houses including Christie's, Sotheby's and Tajan.



Figure 5: Eliza Florence Bridell-Fox. *Untitled*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 49.5 cm x 42 cm.¹⁴

As the painting was never titled, there are limitations to what can be presumed of this work. However, the painting was likely inspired by Fox's visit to Algeria, during which she painted many portraits of local Algerian women (Mayfair Gallery n.d.). Fox paints the woman within the seclusion of what appears to be a harem or *riad*, the garden courtyard typically associated with Moroccan and Algerian architecture (Oxford English Dictionary 2023). Again, the truth of the subject is not what matters – rather, Fox painted an Oriental woman as she lounged in her private, domestic sphere. The space is light as the sun filters in, and similarly to Browne and Cookesley, the walls are plain. The only decoration is the tapestry or rug beside the modestly dressed woman. The lack of idealisation makes the painting stand apart from other Oriental works. Interestingly, the colour palette parallels Browne's as the two artists paint their Oriental women in natural and un-exotic tones to avoid placing her within a fantasy realm. Unlike Browne and Cookesley's paintings, Fox has only one subject rather than a bustling scene of socialising Oriental women. Likely due to her skill in portraiture, Fox's choice to paint the singular Oriental woman is striking for two reasons

¹⁴ Mayfair Gallery. n.d. "Antique Orientalist Oil Painting By Bridell-Fox, 1865." Accessed December 30, 2025. <https://www.mayfairgallery.com/antique-orientalist-oil-painting-bridell-fox-1865>.

(Clayton 1876). Not many female artists, besides two paintings by French artist Louise Mercier, chose to paint their women alone, deciding instead to depict them in a social setting.¹⁵ Secondly, unlike most portraits of Oriental women, Fox's subject is neither in the nude nor reclining seductively (Syed 2021; Roberts & Thomas 2007). Instead, she sits in a natural pose, dressed in unassuming attire, and she is neither staring in seductive challenge nor in shy dejection. The subject appears natural, almost akin to European portraiture, minus the Oriental backdrop and clothing.

A publication in *The English Leader* notes the exhibition of Fox's and Madame Bodichon's "Algerian pictures" (*The English Leader* 1866: 346). The brief review commends the exhibition for the "Algerian and Kabylean scenery, and the manners of the people are rendered by these paintresses with power and truth" (*The English Leader* 1866: 346). The critic goes on to note the fundamental role of women in painting the Oriental woman as male "artists in the East who attempts to make a sketch of a person in the street, is in danger of being knocked down" and "[o]nly the tact of women could enable them to get possession of the interesting pictures to be found in this exhibition" (*The English Leader* 1866: 346). The critic implies that all male reproductions of Oriental women came from the imagination and only *female* artists could paint their likeness. This reaction to Fox's painting betrays a broader acknowledgement of the unique space female artists occupied within the imperial discourse. Unlike Browne and Cookesley, Fox was mainly known as a portrait artist rather than an explicitly Orientalist one. Despite this, the reception of her painting demonstrates the valued role she and other female artists had in the broader scope of Orientalism. Where male artists would devote their entire profession to painting the Orient, women such as Fox were valued for their singular contributions. Their ability to render the restricted site of the harem extended the boundaries of Orientalism to include the productions of 'amateur' female artists due to their unique gendered interaction with the Orient (Lewis 1996). Fox's contribution to the Orientalist narrative was discrete and yet possessed the ability to situate the importance of female Orientalist reproductions within the British imperial discourse in a single painting.

Conclusion

¹⁵ Paintings referenced are Louise Mercier's *Portrait d'une orientale de Tanger*, 1883 and *Le repos de l'odalisque*, 1880.

All three artists worked to shift the textual attitude of Orientalism away from the erotic image of the East. Due to their perceived access to the harem, these women were able to challenge the imperial male Orientalist fantasy. Consequently, Europe's Orientalist illusion could no longer function on the same models of mystery that had fuelled its construction. Moreover, through analysing the reception of their paintings, this essay has uncovered how gender became a point of discussion within the Oriental discourse. Female artists were not always homogenous in their depiction of the harem. As predicted by Lewis, "fragment[ation] and fray" existed at the ends of this "apparently neat counter-discourse" (Lewis 1996: 236). The diverse gendered response to the harem is captured through the unique paintings of Browne, Cookesley, and Fox.

This essay has revealed the diversity in the female Orientalist gaze, and how, just like men, women utilized their creative license to depict the Orient in response to their own experiences and views. Browne contributed to the French nationalist imperial identity, exhibiting her work in large galleries to nuance the national perception of the harem. Where Browne favoured a passive, almost muted depiction of the harem to explore its normalcy, Cookesley intended to capture the human emotions she found within its walls, including passion, curiosity, and compassion. Moreover, Cookesley found her strength in reimagining the popular Orientalist narrative through her significant contributions to the private market. Fox found her expression through portraiture, abandoning ideas of sociability to contemplate the more subtle ideas of humanity. In their unique ways, each artist has socialised rather than sexualised the harem, revealing the interplay between gender, race, and imperialism within the Orientalist narrative.

While their depictions may have differed, Browne, Cookesley, and Fox upheld their social credibility by continuing to paint within the domestic narrative. Interestingly, it was through their (perceived) unrestricted access to the harem that, because of their gender, women were almost required to paint what no man could. Consequently, the Orientalist narrative invites female reproductions of the harem, a unique gender space that, for once, favours the input of women over men. While they were physically far from the European domestic life, their paintings continued to depict the intimate, feminine, motherly scenes within the Oriental harem. As such, they were poised, above their male counterparts, to capture the most mysterious aspects of Orientalism.

Finally, this essay has revealed the undeniable role women play in imperial discourse. Regrettably, before I began this research, I idealised the capabilities of the Western woman, anticipating her work would not engage in the objectification of Oriental women. While these women were caught

within a unique gendered relationship with their subject (the harem), they were also part of a broader intersection between gender, race, and imperialism. Consequently, their Oriental reproductions cannot be separated from the respective French and British imperial interests. In varying degrees, the Victorian imperialist narrative can be found behind each artist's work, inextricably linking women to the colonialist discourse. Moreover, these female painters could not surrender the Western standard through which they viewed the harem. As such, the female Orientalist oeuvre this essay has analysed upholds ideas of imperialism, subjugation, and cultural superiority, *alongside* its successful de-sexualisation of the harem.

Thus, two things can be gleaned from this research: women were engaged in an active de-sexualisation of the harem *and*, in doing so, they established themselves in a relationship between gender, race, and empire. European women contributed to the imperial power relations by presenting their Oriental women as the 'other'. Consequently, while imperial society commissions European women to capture the truth of the harem, they simultaneously signposted the female culpability in upholding colonial power relations. The woman becomes a focal point in Oriental history as she sits at a crucial intersection between race, gender, and imperialism. These womanly depictions of womanly spaces thus become an important point through which history can reveal the involvement of women in the masculine phenomenon of imperialism and colonialism.



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